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Reading and Misreading:
The Social Life of Libraries and Colonial Control in Vietnam, 1865-1958

By

Cindy Anh Nguyen

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Peter Zinoman, Chair
Professor Penny Edwards
Professor Cathryn Carson

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by Cindy Anh Nguyen

Abstract

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This dissertation examines the cultural and political history of French colonial libraries and print control in Vietnam from 1865 to 1958. I analyze the changing mission of colonial libraries as a hybrid of state documentation and public space for self-directed education and social life. I also embed libraries within the multilayered landscape of print control—the politics of production, dissemination, and preservation of print matter. I follow the dynamic debates on print control among colonial and post-colonial government administrators, librarians, archivists, translators, publishers, and readers. These diverse actors investigated the content, language, and influence of ‘good reading’ and initiated projects to disseminate reading matter through translation, publishing, and libraries. Administrators also policed cases of ‘misreading,’ the violation of proper library decorum or consumption of politically subversive texts.

The chapters follow a historical and thematic chronology: the builders, the readers, print industry, print control, and decolonization. Focused primarily on the state-initiated Central Library in Hanoi and Saigon, this dissertation advances a two-part argument on the history of colonial libraries and print control in Indochina. First, to build libraries is to build the state. Libraries legitimized the authority of the state as infrastructures of symbolic modernity, print control, and documentary heritage. Second, library users shaped the everyday mission and social function of the library beyond the hegemonic aspirations of colonial and post-colonial states. As seen in the Hanoi and Saigon Central Library Reading Rooms in 1920s to 1950s, readers transformed the tranquil space intended for administrative research into a dynamic public space for study and social life. This two-part argument reveals the significance of the library as an institution of state-building, print control, and public reading culture.

This dissertation is the first comprehensive history of the library in French colonial Indochina during the long twentieth century. It offers the following contributions: (1) a critical investigation into the role of libraries as an institution of state documentation, popular education, and literacy in French or Vietnamese vernacular script, quốc ngữ (2) an analysis of the relationship between building the modern nation state and building libraries, (3) a cultural history of Vietnamese print market, reading practices, and urban public spaces, and (4) a study of the major cultural institution of libraries across colonial/post-colonial divides and through periods of war.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ii
<i>Dedication</i>	iii
<i>Introduction</i>	iv
Chapter 1	
Building the Colonial State, Building Libraries: The Documentation and Modernity Project of Indochina (1858-1939)	1
Chapter 2	
The Social Life of Reading: Collections, Readers, and Colonial Hierarchies of Access and Knowledge (1908-1941)	63
Chapter 3	
Cultural Economics of the Print Industry: The Translation Project of the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation and Alternative Reading Spaces (1908-1941)	123
Chapter 4	
Colonial Control of Print Media: State Publishing, Libraries, and the Politics of Information (1919-1945)	158
Chapter 5	
Decolonization of Libraries: Documentary Heritage and Building New States (1945-1957)	201
Epilogue	
Quantifying Culture: Books as Social Transformation and State Control	262
Archives, Libraries, Bibliography, and Appendices	266

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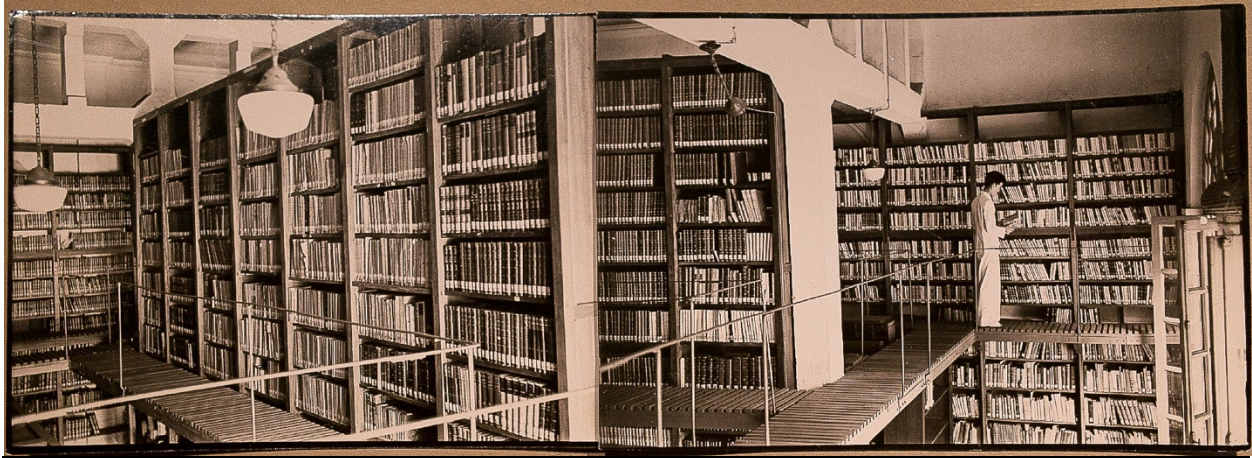
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Nhờ Mẹ...

By way of you, Mom

INTRODUCTION



A solitary man pulls a book from the library bookshelf. He is surrounded by a seemingly infinite number of books, meticulously organized and labeled across two floors. He is not a library patron, but a Vietnamese library clerk who fetched requested materials for eager readers at the Central Library Reading Room in Hanoi. Who was this clerk? What books did he retrieve? Who requested them and why? Why was this photograph taken?¹

This dissertation examines the cultural and political history of public, administrative, and association libraries in French colonial Vietnam from 1865 to 1958. Libraries illuminate the social, political, and cultural mechanisms of print circulation and control. The library is an essential institution of culture, education, and state-building. Library reading rooms facilitate social infrastructure—providing public space for study and access to valuable reading matter. The circulation of library reading matter reveals contemporary literary trends, linguistic preferences, and insight into the cosmopolitan print market. Administrators and librarians articulate changing practices of library science, modern bureaucracy, and documentary heritage through the organization of the library. State-funded libraries project state power and legitimacy—to collect and define authoritative knowledge, and to monitor print production and circulation.

Focused on the central libraries in Hanoi and Saigon, this dissertation advances a two-part argument on the history of colonial libraries and print control in Indochina. First, to build libraries is to build the state. Libraries functioned as crucial instruments of information-gathering on the state and society since the creation of the first administrative library in Saigon in 1865. By 1917 the Directorate of Archives and Libraries [Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques] was founded in order to centralize all documentation throughout Indochina. The Directorate sought to standardize archives procedures of official government documents and to build central library collections of reference matter (maps, histories, language primers) in Hanoi, Saigon, Phnom Penh, Hue, and Vientiane. By the 1920s and 1930s, the administrative libraries transformed into ‘public libraries’ and expanded its mission beyond only government documentation and reference resource for administrators. Libraries legitimized the authority of the colonial state as infrastructures of symbolic modernity—the physical buildings of libraries

¹ ANOM, PB 52, Folder “Photographies du service des archives et des bibliothèques à l’Indochine” c. 1930s.

embodied ‘storehouses of modern knowledge’, methodically organized by French concepts of library and information science. Furthermore, libraries also reflect state projects to control the circulation of print and subversive ideas among colonial subjects. Through specific decisions on library book and serial purchases, language and genre preferences, library administrators attempted to define popular reading tastes and literacy throughout Indochina. The decolonization and struggle over the patrimony of library collections and institutions in the post-colonial period confirms the critical importance of the library as a national, public, and modern symbol. In addition, the post-colonial Vietnamese states continued to use libraries as functional instruments of print control, popular education, and state documentation.

Second, library users shaped the everyday mission and social function of the library beyond the hegemonic aspirations of colonial and post-colonial states.² The builders of libraries—French and Vietnamese government administrators and librarians—envisioned the library as an intellectual and spiritual oasis for administrators and researchers to access ‘civilizing’ and modern reading matter. An ideological tension existed between colonial administrators and the everyday user of the library. Library builders selected the literary contents of the library collection and outlined practices of ‘good reading.’ Administrators also policed cases of ‘misreading’ characterized as the consumption of lowbrow literature, reading politically radicalizing texts, and improper behavior in reading rooms. The diverse users of libraries—French and Vietnamese educated elite, students, commercial workers, and low-level government employees—contested unfair library privileges and limited access. Readers also demanded library reform such as increased Vietnamese language collections, expanded library hours, and improved facilities. Furthermore, as seen in the Hanoi and Saigon Central Library Reading Rooms in 1920s to 1950s, readers transformed the tranquil space intended for administrative research into a dynamic public space for study and social life. The well-lit, open, and centrally located reading rooms offered opportunities for urban readers and Vietnamese students to engage in the practices of leisure reading and social exchange. The library reading room and lending section provided a valuable resource for self-directed learning and free access to global literature and news in Vietnamese quốc ngữ and French. In this way, the library became an important site to define and display modern Vietnamese urban life. This two-part argument reveals the significance of the library as an institution of state building, colonial control, and public reading culture.

Historiography of Libraries Scholarship: Between Library Science and Southeast Asian Area Studies

This dissertation is the first comprehensive history of the library in French colonial Vietnam during the long twentieth century. Studying the library is crucial to the history of Vietnam. The library reveals insight into the operations and visions of the colonial and post-

² Throughout the dissertation, I use the inclusive term ‘library user’ interchangeably with reader and patron. Library user incorporates a broader definition of visitors who come to the library not explicitly to read, but to study, socialize, or rest. Furthermore, library user includes librarian-clerks who checked out reading matter on a regular basis. My decision to refer to readers as ‘users’ also draws upon Michel de Certeau’s framing of actors as ‘users’ rather than as passive consumers of culture and systems created by those in power (‘producers of culture’). Michel de Certeau’s analysis of ‘producers of culture’ and the ‘tactics of ordinary people’ influences my framing of builders and users. In this way, I consider how users resist, challenge, and creatively make meaning of the library through their reading choices and use of the library space for socializing. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

colonial state and social world of reading and information access in Vietnam. The field of Vietnamese studies has not considered the important role of libraries in the history of colonial modernity, literacy, urbanism, and education. Furthermore, research on the Vietnamese library innovates the field of library studies. Southeast Asia and colonial contexts are absent from library scholarship which is currently dominated by studies on American and European libraries.³ This dissertation disrupts the current body of library scholarship and contributes new insight into the historical case of colonial Southeast Asian libraries. I uncover the distinctive characteristics of colonial libraries—a hybrid project of colonial state documentation and public space for self-directed education and social life.⁴ The Hanoi Central Library and Saigon Cochinchina Library have long histories with changing missions—as an administrative documentation library, research reference library, public library, educational textbook resource, lending section providing popular novels, and free space to consult periodicals and reference works from Indochina, France, and around the world. By the 1950s, the Hanoi Central Library was regarded as one of the most developed and largest library in all of Southeast Asia.⁵ In 1931, the Reading Room recorded over 51,000 annual book consultations and the Lending Section recorded over 60,000 loans, which ranked even comparatively more than many French libraries.⁶ In 1939, the Reading Room recorded a daily average of 300 reader visits with a peak of 590 visits in one day.⁷ In 1941, the Reading Room welcomed over 87,000 total visits by Vietnamese readers, compared to only 3,800 total French visits. Who were these readers? What did they read? How did they use the space? These fundamental questions have not been addressed in a colonial context. A detailed study of the colonial library in Indochina is long overdue.

Existing research on libraries comprises a few short institutional histories by librarians such as Judith Henchy and Christiane Pasquel Rageau.⁸ Vietnamese librarians and researchers Lê Thanh Huyền, Nguyễn Ngọc Mô, and Dương Bích Hằng have written on the institutional development of the library, its collections, services, and the librarian profession in Vietnam.⁹ For

³ The promising dissertations by Cécile Capot on the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) and by Fabienne Chamelot on the French colonial archives in Indochina and French West Africa will explore the organization, contents, and significance of these documentary institutions. Together with this forthcoming scholarship, my research contributes to understand the history of archives and libraries.

⁴ I position the history of colonial libraries within a longer historical context of print culture connected to local Buddhist, Confucian, and scholarly communities. However, I also show the distinct function of colonial libraries for state documentation and public education. The history of colonial libraries in Vietnam is inextricable from the history of urbanization, literacy, and education.

⁵ Juliane Heyman, "Libraries in Vietnam," in UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries, vol. 13, 10, 1959, 231–32.

⁶ After Paris, the most popular municipal French libraries recorded the following number of book consultations (books read on-site in the library Reading Room): Lyon (63,362), Rouen (30,545), and Marseille (25,000). Paul Boudet, *Gouvernement général de l'Indochine. Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1930-1931)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1931).

⁷ Rémi Bourgeois, *Gouvernement général de l'Indochine. Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1938-1939)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1939).

⁸ Judith Henchy, "The National Library of Vietnam," in *International Dictionary of Library Histories*, ed. David H. Stam, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Taylor & Francis, 2001), 598–601; Judith Henchy, "Preservation and Archives in Vietnam" (Council on Library and Information Resources, February 1998); Christiane Pasquel Rageau, "Les Bibliothèques de l'Indochine Française," in *Histoire Des Bibliothèques Françaises*, ed. Martine Poulain (Paris: Promodis-Ed. du Cercle de la librairie, 1988), 110–14; "Catalogue du Fonds Indochinois de La Bibliothèque Nationale," *Bibliothèque Nationale (France). Département Des Entrées.*, v. 1. Livres Vietnamiens imprimés en quốc ngữ 1922-1954, 1979.

⁹ Lê Thanh Huyền, "Thư viện Việt Nam thời kỳ pháp thuộc" (Trường Đại học văn hoá Hà Nội - Thông tin thư viện, 2014); Nguyễn Ngọc Mô, *Tìm Hiểu Lịch Sử Ngành Thư Viện Lưu Trữ Hồ Sơ Việt Nam* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản thế

example, Lê Thanh Huyền's dissertation on the colonial library shows the transformation of Vietnamese library sciences from "feudal" into "modern."¹⁰ Furthermore, Huyền suggests the significance of the library as a "bridge between the two cultures [of West and East]" and as a space for readers to engage in new methods of scientific research and to access popular information. These important points are not examined in historical detail and are not situated within the global context of library development. Furthermore, Huyền's dissertation ends abruptly at the year 1945, following the standard convention of colonial versus post-colonial narratives. Other Vietnamese institutional studies of the library provide a retrospective account of the National Library of Vietnam [Thư viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam] and follows a nationalist narrative of Vietnamese cultural heritage.¹¹ Vietnamese libraries are framed within the teleology of eventual independence from French and American imperial influence on literacy and control of information.¹²

For other parts of Indochina, scholars Penny Edwards and Gregory Kourilsky provide foundational understanding of research and Buddhist libraries in Cambodia and Laos.¹³ Research on pre-colonial Vietnamese libraries is limited to a few studies on Nguyen state book collecting in the 19th century, the book burning incident during the Ming invasion in the 15th century, Buddhist temple libraries, and more general studies on early modern literati culture.¹⁴ Outside of Southeast Asia, a theoretically rich collection of research on American public libraries considers libraries as part of social infrastructure. Research on American public libraries extends into the

giới, 2002); Bích Hằng Dương, *Lịch Sử Sự Nghiệp Thư Viện Việt Nam Trong Tiến Trình Văn Hoá Dân Tộc* (Hanoi: Vụ Thư Viện, 1999).

¹⁰ See chapter 3 "The Influence of the Vietnamese Library during French Colonialism to the Libraries Profession and Vietnamese Culture" in Lê Thanh Huyền, "Thư viện Việt Nam thời kỳ pháp thuộc" (Trường Đại học văn hoá Hà Nội - Thông tin thư viện, 2014).

¹¹ For example, see the retrospective history of the library produced by the staff of National Library of Vietnam every five years: Lê Văn Viết, Nguyễn Hữu Viêm, and Phạm Thế Khang, *Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam - 90 Năm Xây Dựng và Phát Triển 1954-2007* (Hanoi: Thư viện Quốc gia, 2007); *Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam: 85 Năm Xây Dựng và Trưởng Thành, 1917-2002* (Hà Nội: Thư viện quốc gia, 2002).

¹² The nationalist narrative of cultural imperialism is most apparent in studies of library development in South Vietnam, where libraries are framed as part of American cultural imperialism and propaganda. For a schematic comparison of Socialist libraries in North Vietnam and 'American imperialist' libraries in South Vietnam during the Second Indochina War, see Phạm Tân Hạ, "Hoạt Động Thư Viện ở Thành Phố Sài Gòn Thời Kỳ 1954-1975" (Trường Đại Học Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân Văn: T.P. Hồ Chí Minh, 2005).

¹³ Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007); Gregory Kourilsky, "The Institut Bouddhique in Laos: Ambivalent Dynamics of a Colonial Project," in *Theravada Buddhism in Colonial Contexts*, ed. Thomas Borchett, Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism (New York: Routledge, 2018), 162–86.

¹⁴ George Dutton, "The Nguyen State and the Book Collecting Project" (Unpublished transcript); Alexander Ong Eng Ann, "Contextualising the Book-Burning Episode during the Ming Invasion and Occupation of Vietnam," in *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Geoff Wade and Sun Laichen (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 154–65. For an interregional study on China-Vietnamese book trade and Buddhist texts, see Kathlene Baldanza, "Publishing, Book Culture, and Reading Practices in Vietnam: The View from Thăng Nghiêm and Phố Nhân Temples," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 13, no. 3 (August 1, 2018): 9–28; John D. Phan, "Introduction: Considering 'Buddhist Literacy' in Early Modern Vietnamese Print Culture," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 13, no. 3 (August 1, 2018): 2–8. For research on the role of paperwork, recordkeeping, and socio-political role of Vietnamese literati, see John K. Whitmore, "Literati Culture and Integration in Dai Viet, c. 1430-1840," in *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-Imagining Eurasia to c. 1830* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 221–43; John K. Whitmore, "Paperwork: The Rise of the New Literati and Ministerial Power and the Effort toward Legibility in Đại Việt," in *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, by Geoff Wade (Singapore: Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 104–25.

interdisciplinary fields of public history, sociology, urban development, and public policy.¹⁵ Within Southeast Asia, the scholarship on libraries is limited to encyclopedic summaries of libraries and a basic contextual history of their origins and collections.¹⁶ Schematic studies of colonial libraries contribute to the field of international library science and libraries development, yet are separated from area studies research on Southeast Asian culture, history, and governance.¹⁷

Studies which contextualize library development within socio-political contexts overemphasize the library as a top-down instrument of colonial control. The dissertation by Emmanuelle Affidi on the colonial newspaper *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* [Indochina Review] analyzes the popularization “library” translation project to introduce French works to Vietnamese. However, Affidi only focuses on the library as an instrument to spread French republican values and Western knowledge. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and Doris Jedamski’s studies on the Balai Pustaka in the Dutch East Indies analyze libraries as a “functional agency of socialization” of capitalistic and ‘modern’ values.¹⁸ This instrumentalist argument privileges the state and oversimplifies concepts of culture. This approach casts ‘the state’ as a static, rational, and purely self-interested entity rather than a changing and plural institution created by individuals and ideas—from bureaucrats, librarians, translators, and private industries to changing notions of modernity, scientific rationality, and education.

This dissertation brings together the disparate scholarship on libraries together with Southeast Asia area studies to examine how builders and users transformed the mission, services, and cultural role of libraries in Indochina. Existing studies of the library have lacked historical context and theoretical complexity, and only provide narrow institutional histories. This study illustrates the plurality of actors involved in building libraries and reading cultures in twentieth century Vietnam. I situate the history of libraries within the changing colonial administration and social transformations of urbanization, associations, increased literacy, and education policy. Specifically, I examine how colonial language policy in library collections and state sponsored

¹⁵ American public libraries have a distinct history rooted in twentieth century civic discourse, democracy, and public citizenship. Nevertheless, this rich literature provides a useful model to consider social infrastructure, state institutions, and the discourse of public access and public engagement. Along with contemporary work on digital humanities and the future of libraries, the following books were particularly formative to concepts in this dissertation: Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, (New York: Crown, 2018); Susan Orlean, *The Library Book*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

¹⁶ Helen Jarvis, “The National Library of Cambodia: Surviving for Seventy Years,” *Libraries & Culture* 30, no. 4 (October 1, 1995): 391–408; D. E. K. Wijasuriya, Huck Tee Lim, and Radha Nadarajah, *The Barefoot Librarian: Library Developments in Southeast Asia with Special Reference to Malaysia* (Hamden: Linnet Books, 1975).

¹⁷ Librarians and library organizations such as the American Library Association and UNESCO spearhead the study of international libraries development from a library services perspective. This scholarship describes and evaluates library services, rather than consider theoretical complexity and historical context. Nguyen, Ung Long, “Library Activities in Vietnam,” in *Proceedings of the First Conference of Southeast Asian Librarians, Held at the University of Singapore on 14th-16th August 1970*, ed. Ahmad bin Ali Syed, Hong Too Lim, and Patricia Pui Huen Lim, Persatuan Perpustakaan (Singapore: Chopmen Enterprises, 1970); Mary Niles Maack, “Books and Libraries as Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy in Francophone Africa during the Cold War,” *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 36, no. 1 (2001): 58–86; Mary Niles Maack, *Libraries in Senegal: Continuity and Change in an Emerging Nation* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1981).

¹⁸ Elizabeth B. Fitzpatrick, “The Public Library as Instrument of Colonialism: The Case of the Netherlands East Indies,” *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 43, no. 3 (2008): 270–85; Doris Jedamski, “Balai Pustaka : A Colonial Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing,” *Archipel* 44, no. 1 (1992): 23–46.

publishing influenced the dissemination of French literature and popularization of vernacular Vietnamese quốc ngữ.¹⁹

This dissertation offers the following contributions: (1) a critical investigation into the role of libraries as an institution of state documentation, popular education, and literacy, (2) an analysis of the relationship between building the modern nation state and building libraries, (3) a cultural history of Vietnamese intellectual life, reading practices, and urban public spaces, and (4) a study of the major cultural institution of libraries and libraries development across colonial/post-colonial divides and through periods of war. My research is situated within three primary fields of inquiry and theoretical framework: the history of libraries development; the scholarship on the state and colonial institutions in Vietnam and Southeast Asia; and history of the book, reading cultures, and public space. This dissertation integrates the methods and concepts from these three fields and contributes an innovative analysis of the historical transformations, political significance, and social functions of the library in Indochina.

The Library as State-Building: The State and Colonial Institutions in Southeast Asia

This dissertation contributes to the growing body of scholarship that interrogates the origins, functions, and historical transformations of the state, governance, and colonial institutions in Southeast Asia. Rather than a singular monolith, ‘the colonial state’ existed in fragmented, changing forms such as surveillance systems and information gathering, taxation and legal codes, education and urban development. John Furnivall’s seminal work on the colonial state offers a foundational understanding of ‘state-building’ as self-interested, multilayered, and uneven. Drawing from his own experiences as a scholar-administrator in the Indian Civil Service in Burma, Furnivall describes state-building as a “fashioning of leviathan”—the implementation of legal codes, road building, justice system, tax collection, and foreign policy for the purpose of resource control and extraction.²⁰ Furnivall’s approach to understanding state-building, indirect and direct forms of colonial control, as well as the socio-economic impact of empire outlines an important schematic understanding of the colonial state and colonial policy.²¹ However, Furnivall perpetuates an inside-outside dichotomy of state-

¹⁹ The majority of state library collections in Hanoi and Saigon were in French. By the 1920s and 1930s, the Lending Section and Periodicals Section of these libraries included an expanding collection of Vietnamese quốc ngữ works. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Hanoi and Saigon libraries organized circulating bus wagons which disseminated Vietnamese language texts such as nonfiction educational books, language primers, and popular literature to the provinces. The history of colonial libraries intersected with the development of the Vietnamese quốc ngữ publishing industry in the 1920s to 1940s. During this period, intellectuals debated the linguistic, cultural, and political significance of quốc ngữ as a formalized written script for Vietnamese cultural expression and political identity. For a study of national language, literacy, and identity, see Benedict Anderson and David Marr: Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London: Verso, 1991) and David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

²⁰ John S. Furnivall, “The Fashioning of Leviathan: The Beginnings of British Rule in Burma,” *The Journal of Burma Research Society* 29, no. 1 (1939): 3–137. John Furnivall was born in 1878 in England and served in the colonial civil service in Burma for two decades since 1902. During this time he conducted research in Burma, founded the Burma Research Society, and advocated for Burmese self-rule.

²¹ Furnivall outlines the machinery and consequences of colonial administration in his comparative study of the British and Dutch state in colonial Burma and the East Indies. Notably, Furnivall argues that British capitalistic state transformed socio-economic organization in colonial Burma, resulting in a ‘plural society’—a multiethnic society where economic forces atomize and determine social relations. John S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

building that reduces indigenous agency and local administrators who challenge and transform colonial policy and practice. Furthermore, Furnivall prioritizes liberalism and resource extraction as the central *raison d'état*, which oversimplifies the subtle forms of cultural imperialism and discursive exchange that shaped colonial cultural institutions such as schools, libraries, and publishing.

Benedict Anderson offers a material and discursive framework to understand the construction of the nation and nationalism in his pioneering work *Imagined Communities*.²² Anderson is most known for his concept of 'imagined community' — a community of fraternal, horizontal comradeship where members do not all know each other but connected to each other through the technological innovations of print-capitalism (mass production of newspapers, novels, and the spread of vernacular print languages). Anderson's concept of imagined community is a useful lens to understand the evolution of a 'library reading community' as a specific community of colonial administrators, bilingual intelligentsia, and educated urbanites brought together by the material space and literary resources of the colonial library.²³ Furthermore, in Anderson's later revised 1991 edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson emphasizes the importance of colonial institutions such as the census, map, and museum to provide the 'grammar' of nationalism and imaginings of colonial dominion. Anderson's essay "Old State, New Society" specifically examines the concept, historical emergence, and social function of 'the state' distinct from the participatory interests of the people or 'the nation.' Anderson argues that 'the state' must be analyzed as an institution with specific modern functions such as collecting taxes, creating armies, providing services, and implementing law. Comparing the state to a business, Anderson sheds light on the expansiveness of the Dutch colonial state apparatus (staffed primarily by an indigenous ruling class) into society through education, surveillance, agriculture, and religion.²⁴ Anderson's approach to studying the state as a socially expansive institution informs my analysis of libraries within the framework of state documentation and popular education.²⁵

Christopher Goscha integrates Anderson's concept of imagined community and state machinery in his book *Going Indochinese*. Goscha reveals how the colonial state of 'Indochina' emerged from changing intellectual, political, and administrative debates as well as the structural

²² Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London: Verso, 1991). The first version was published in 1983.

²³ Besides the important concept of 'imagined community,' Anderson also contributes a historical argument on the four models of nations and nationalisms. I draw from his fourth model of nation and nationalisms specifically grounded in colonial contexts and institutions of education, bureaucracy, and migration. Anderson argues that it is through the experience of travel and educational access that this colonial intelligentsia gained power and created an imagined community of nationals.

²⁴ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 42, no. 3 (May 1, 1983): 477–96. Anderson's essay provides a comparative framework to understand the legacies of the old colonial state within Suharto's New Order. Anderson argues that "...the consistent *leitmotiv* of New Order governance has been the strengthening of the state-qua-state...[as seen in] the economic, sociopolitical, and military areas." P. 488.

²⁵ In other words, the history of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in Indochina reveals the conflicting mission of libraries and archives to function as a 'state' repository of colonial documentation and to serve 'national,' public interests and reading needs. The Central Library in Hanoi was modeled from the National Library of France (Bibliothèque nationale de France or BnF). Most times the Central Library functioned as an independent colonial geo-body, but in principle the library served as the colonial extension of the French nation. The creation of the Central Library as a pseudo-'national' library reveals how the process of envisioning the French nation and cultural identity extended into the infrastructure and governance of the French Indochina colonies.

processes of building roads, maps, and Indochina-wide administrative systems.²⁶ Goscha argues that ‘Indochina’ was built out of the political vision of Franco-Annamese collaboration, relied upon the labor of predominantly low-level administrators and officers of Viet ethnic heritage, and carried out an internal colonization of Laos and Cambodia. This dissertation extends Goscha’s study of building Indochina by examining the Indochina-wide documentation project of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries. Libraries and archives were concentrated in Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh and reflected the comparatively higher infrastructural development and colonial administration in those cities. Top-down attempts to centralize and standardize governmental procedures through the directorate—from submitting legal deposit copies of newly published material to the Hanoi Central Library to implementing standard library regulations—were inconsistently applied throughout Indochina. This dissertation traces both the symbolic role of ‘Indochina’ initiatives to modernize and standardize documentation as well as the everyday functional realities of Indochina libraries. Additionally, scholarship on nation-building in France during the French Third Republic (1870-1940) and its extension into the French colonial empire opens up new research directions to understand the relationship between metropole and empire.²⁷ Furthermore, Goscha’s research on the First Indochina War brings attention to the archipelagic process of decolonization and state-making through war-making.²⁸ Brett Reilly also emphasizes the ‘bricolage’ nature of overlapping and contending authorities of the post-colonial State of Vietnam and Democratic Republic of Vietnam from 1945 to 1955.²⁹ This important literature on decolonization provides a bottom-up approach to understand the piecemeal process of state-building and the manifestations of state authority at a local, regional, national, and global scale.

Colonial institutions such as libraries provide insight into the imperial visions, political motivations, and mechanical apparatus of colonialism. My dissertation on libraries is situated within the growing body of scholarship on the history of French colonial institutions such as the prison, asylum, school, Catholic Church, the police, and alcohol monopoly.³⁰ The underlying

²⁶ Goscha emphasizes that ‘Indochina’ was not just a discursive or political vision, but materialized throughout colonial maps and textbooks, informed transportation networks and the structure of an Indochina-wide colonial administration, and even influenced Vietnamese revolutionary debates in the 1930s. Christopher Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Books, 2012). *Going Indochinese* is a revised and expanded version of Christopher Goscha, “Vietnam or Indochina?: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954,” *Nordic Institute of Asian Studies*, no. 28 (1995).

²⁷ In his influential work *Peasants into Frenchmen*, Eugen Weber eloquently explores the development of the French nation through a process of internal colonization of local communities—the Paris government connected villages and provinces through an integrated system of roads, schools, markets, and standardized French language. Extending Weber’s analysis to the colonies through the lens of nation-building opens up new research directions to understand how the colonies contributed to define the “French nation.” For example, scholars such as Herman Lebovics and Gary Wilder have drawn attention to how empire redefined French cultural identity. Like Weber, Lebovics draws attention to the relationship between the national and the local, the *grand pays* and the *petit pays* within efforts to create a modern, nation-state. Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁸ Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); Christopher Goscha, “A ‘Total War’ of Decolonization? Social Mobilization and State-Building in Communist Vietnam (1949–54),” *War and Society* 31, no. 2 (August 2012): 136–62.

²⁹ Brett Reilly, “The Sovereign States of Vietnam, 1945–1955,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (November 1, 2016): 103–39.

³⁰ For historical studies on colonial institutions in Indochina, see Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam. 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Claire E. Edington, *Beyond*

purpose of many colonial institutions served state-building functions to exert hegemony and control, extract economic opportunity, and maintain operations through bureaucratic modernization and training of local administrators. Colonial institutions also engaged with discourses on modernity, technological prestige, and security which reified the social and political role of the colonial state.³¹ For example, colonial administrators justified the library as a ‘civilizing,’ scientifically organized temple of knowledge, and carried out intellectual hegemony over the language and content of the library collections. Administrators also expressed concern that the circulation of anti-colonial texts among Vietnamese would incite popular subversion of colonial authority. Administrators collaborated with libraries and publishing houses to sponsor circulating libraries and publishers to distribute pro-French or apolitical educational texts. Nevertheless, the actual development of colonial institutions was structurally uneven and historically changing based on limited budgets and a rapid turnover of colonial administrators. My project seeks to uncover the ‘invisible technicians’ who contributed to the development of the institution and culture of libraries.³² From directors and administrators to groundskeepers and librarians, the functions and bureaucratic language of library personnel provide insight into the everyday challenges and realities of cultural institutions throughout regime changes. My close analysis of the library as both a symbolic institution and functional instrument reveals how local library administrators responded to social, political, and economic demands.

Reading and Misreading: History of the Book, Reading Cultures, and Public Spaces

This dissertation provides rare insight into everyday reader behavior, cultures of public and library reading, and reception studies in a colonial context. Robert Darnton’s eloquent work on networks of book production and consumption informs this dissertation’s framing of the

the Asylum: Mental Illness in French Colonial Vietnam, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Gerard Sasges, *Imperial Intoxication: Alcohol and the Making of Colonial Indochina* (University of Hawaii Press, 2017); Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (University of California Press, 2012); Micheline Lessard, “Tradition for Rebellion: Vietnamese Students and Teachers and Anticolonial Resistance, 1888-1931” Ph.D. Dissertation (Cornell University, 1995); Gail P. Kelly, “Conflict in the Classroom: A Case Study from Vietnam, 1918-38,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 1987): 191–212. Haydon Cherry’s ambitious study of Saigon’s poor reveals a social history of interactions with colonial police, Haydon Leslie Cherry, *Down and out in Saigon: Stories of the Poor in a Colonial City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

³¹ This dissertation grounds the concept of ‘modernity’ within the everyday experiences and debates of historical actors rather than as a theoretical label. This framing of modernity comprises three parts: the manifestations of ‘modern’ institutions of the state and bureaucracy; the experience of Western colonialism, technologies, capitalism, and urbanism and the emergence of ‘modern’ social and cultural practices; and the modern imagined community as a foundation for political identity and nationalism. Formative to this framing is scholarship on early modern Vietnam, nationalism and political identity, and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s foundational *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2000). For early modern state-making in Vietnam, see George Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006); Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). For Vietnamese nationalism, see David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

³² According to historian of science Stephen Shapin, the ‘invisible technicians’ were the individuals who performed operational tasks but have largely been absent in the historical record as significant contributors to scientific knowledge. Steven Shapin, “The Technician,” *American Scientist* 77, no. 6 (November 1, 1989): 554–63.

social world of library builders and users.³³ I draw from European studies on the history of the library as part of an Enlightenment imperative to order knowledge and classify information.³⁴ I also situate colonial Southeast Asian reading cultures as a distinct phenomenon of translation, vernacularization, and literary exchange, with specific meanings for local scholarly, religious, and bureaucratic communities.³⁵

Only a limited number of studies directly examine print culture and history of the book in modern Vietnam. Shawn McHale's pioneering *Print and Power* addresses the rise of the 'Buddhist public sphere' and the multiplicity of print-based political communities (Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism) in the 1920s to 1940s.³⁶ Philippe Peycam has written about Saigon's journalistic public sphere and the relationship to modern Vietnamese national identity.³⁷ David Marr and Hue-Tam Ho Tai laid the groundwork for the intellectual history of Vietnamese radicalism, and provide a landscape of 1920s and 1930s Vietnamese journalists, thinkers, and writers.³⁸ David Marr and Hue-Tam Ho Tai's focus on generational politics is a useful frame to conceptualize historical change and collective politics. Martina Nguyen's dissertation on the Self-Reliant Literary Group [Tự Lực văn đoàn] contributes a close cultural and political history of an important group of modernist publishers and reformists.³⁹ Peter Zinoman thoroughly researched the life and work of Vũ Trọng Phụng, as well as Phụng's

³³ The following works were deeply formative to this dissertation: Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?," *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (July 1, 1982): 65–83; "Toward a History of Reading," *The Wilson Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (October 1, 1989): 86–102; *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979), and chapters 5 and 6 on the *Encyclopédie* and reader responses in Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999).

³⁴ For histories of information, the encyclopedia, libraries, and scholarly communities see Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); Daniel R. Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (February 1, 2000): 1–35; Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2000), Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

³⁵ A growing literature on Southeast Asian print culture examines the local histories of textual authority in the realm of Buddhism and Confucian bureaucracy. Justin McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011); Anthony Reid, "Tycoons and Warlords: Modern Thai Social Formations and Chinese Historical Romance," in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast China and the Chinese* (University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 115–47; Anne Ruth Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007); Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

³⁶ Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

³⁷ Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

³⁸ David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945*; Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

³⁹ Martina Nguyen, "The Self-Reliant Literary Group (Tự Lực Văn Đoàn): Colonial Modernism in Vietnam, 1932-1941" Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

literary engagements. Zinoman proposes an insightful concept of ‘provincial cosmopolitanism,’ to understand the network of scattered translated literature and social interactions which contribute to the development of intellectual and political visions.⁴⁰ While this aforementioned scholarship is formative to understanding Vietnamese intellectual and political history, the existing research does not directly discuss the important role of libraries or spaces of reading within the context of colonial institutions, urban leisure practices, and self-directed education. Furthermore, the overemphasis on social transformation through generational politics shrouds the everyday subtle subversions of authority and opportunities for personal empowerment, entertainment, and education through library reading.

This dissertation engages with scholarship on book culture as an interwoven network of social practices, material spaces, and everyday meaning-making negotiated through access to library reading matter.⁴¹ I analyze the library as a ‘space’, or what Michel de Certeau explains as “composed of intersections of mobile elements,” where specific everyday actions resist and redefine the meaning and intention of a ‘place’ itself.⁴² Specifically, I show how the library operated as an important “third space” of public community, self-directed learning, and access to global knowledge. Postcolonial theorists frame “third space” as spaces of dissent where meanings and administrative intentions are contested and redefined.⁴³ In this way, “third space” is a productive lens to understand authoritative moments of creative power that library readers exert—from their decision to select library reading matter to their interpretive translations of global literature. By the 1930s, readers transformed the mission of the Hanoi and Saigon library from a documentation resource for administrators into a public resource for self-learning.

The library functioned as a space of social and intellectual nourishment. Described as the “*public cultivé* [cultured public],” library readers were drawn to the invaluable print material of Reading Rooms in Hanoi and Saigon, which provided free access to books, newspapers, maps, and

⁴⁰ Zinoman reveals Vũ Trọng Phụng’s provincial cosmopolitan, anachronistic engagements with ‘modernity’ through reading nineteenth century romantic French literature and social sciences. Peter Zinoman, *Vietnamese Colonial Republican: The Political Vision of Vũ Trọng Phụng* (University of California Press, 2013); Peter Zinoman, “Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vũ Trọng Phụng’s Foreign Literary Engagements,” in *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 126–52; Also see chapter 2 in *Traveling Nation-Makers* on revolutionary romance: Lorraine M. Paterson, “A Vietnamese Icon in Canton: Biographical Borders and Revolutionary Romance in 1920s Vietnam,” 64–95. Peter Zinoman’s reading of revolutionary memoirs as a formulaic genre sheds light on the political and social function of the shared narrative of prison, resistance, and revolutionary ‘training’. Peter Zinoman, “Reading Revolutionary Prison Memoirs,” in *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 21–45.

⁴¹ Roger Chartier investigates the relationship between material spaces—the ‘order’ of libraries—and the affective experience of reading and interpretation. Influenced by Chartier’s “actualization of texts,” I analyze reading as a practice of embodied acts and meaning-making. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁴² Michel de Certeau distinguishes between a place [lieu] and a place [espace], which focuses on actions and constant metamorphoses. “It [space] is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflicted programs or contractual proximities...Space is a practiced place.” Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, P. 117.

⁴³ Homi Bhabha posits that “third spaces” challenge the dualities of colonial oppression and resistance or exclusion and inclusion. Bhabha explains how the theoretical lens of third spaces can reveal the possibility of “new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.” This “third space of enunciation” is a hybrid, interstitial space of re-imagining, ambivalence, and interrogation. Homi K. Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, (Routledge, New York 2006), p. 155–157.

reference works on topics ranging from literature to science. The library facilitated a self-directed type of learning that was unlike the pre-colonial Confucian practices of studying for civil service examinations. The library was also distinct from French-Vietnamese schools which focused on language acquisition and basic general education. Library readers self-selected reading matter to supplement classroom learning, to expand literacy in French and Vietnamese quốc ngữ, or to reference administrative texts for government and commercial research. Libraries offered a modicum of leisure, rest, and play for an emerging middle class, workers, and students. Large central libraries in Indochina were well-lit and ventilated, thus offering a luxurious space for social life later in the evenings, a social oasis away from the heat in the summers and cold of the winters. The library provided readers a social and intellectual urban cosmopolitanism of global reading matter as well as the public shared space to encounter other urban readers—high school and university students, commercial workers, government administrators, French expatriates, and other literate (often bilingual) French and Vietnamese readers searching for knowledge.⁴⁴

‘The Library’: Theoretical Framework and Historical Methodology

This study begins in 1865 with the founding of the Saigon Library as a colonial government documentation resource and ends in 1958 with the evolution of that colonial library into a three-part National Library system in the Republic of Vietnam. I examine the Indochina-wide documentation initiatives of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries; the development of the Hanoi Central Library; the rise of public library reading cultures in the Hanoi and Saigon reading rooms; the role of Buddhist libraries in Phnom Penh and association reading rooms in Cochinchina; the colonial policies of print control and sponsored translation; and the decolonization of libraries. A *longue durée* study of the library is necessary to convey how colonial institutions change over time under different political regimes, periods of war, and economic instability. Furthermore, a historically situated and people-centered understanding of libraries demonstrates how a plurality of builders and users shaped the library missions and functions. The builders of libraries—state officials, administrators, and librarians such as Paul Boudet, Albert Sarraut, Simone de Saint-Exupéry, Suzanne Karpelès, Ngô Đình Nhu, Trần Văn Kha, and Đoàn Quan Tấn—contributed to cultural and educational projects to organize and disseminate knowledge. Borrowing patterns and demands from readers shed light upon the reading tastes and political leanings of the diverse users of libraries—the educated elite, administrators, and urban students. A top-down and bottom-up analysis of the use and idealistic values of libraries provides a dynamic understanding of Vietnamese reading practices and state education policies.

My object of inquiry, ‘the library,’ focuses primarily on the history, politics, and cultural practices of the the Central Library in Hanoi and the Cochinchina Library in Saigon. While I examine a few other libraries such as the Phnom Penh Library, prison libraries, the Tonkin

⁴⁴ Besides scholarship on political identities, studies explicitly on class, race, and urban Hanoi and Saigon inform this dissertation. See, Philippe Peycam, “From the Social to the Political: 1920s Colonial Saigon as a ‘Space of Possibilities’ in Vietnamese Consciousness,” *Positions* 21, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 497–546, Van Nguyen-Marshall et al., *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam*, (Singapore: Springer, 2012), Gwendolyn Wright, “Indochina: The Follow of Grandeur” in *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 161-233, Michael G. Vann, “Building Colonial Whiteness on the Red River: Race, Power, and Urbanism in Paul Doumer’s Hanoi, 1897-1902,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 33, no. 2 (2007): 277–304, and Eric T. Jennings, “Urban Planning, Architecture, and Zoning at Dalat, Indochina, 1900-1944,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 33, no. 2 (2007): 327–62.

protectorate library, and association libraries, the overwhelming focus is on Hanoi and Saigon libraries due to the comparatively longer and more robust development of these two institutions. The Central Library and Cochinchina Library do not fit neatly into the static categories of public, administrative, research, or national library. Since the beginning of French colonialism in Indochina, government libraries and archives were created to provide documentation, reference matter, and leisure reading for administrators in Saigon, Hanoi, Hue. The Cochinchina Library opened in 1865 as a government documentation library in Saigon. By 1882, the Cochinchina Library was designated as a public library, and access was granted to readers over the age of 18 with an introductory identification letter from an existing library patron or government administrator who acted as the guarantor. The Cochinchina Library continued to function as the regional library for administrators, commercial workers, researchers, and students in Cochinchina until 1917 when the colonial government sought to centralize all documentation under the Directorate of Archives and Libraries. By 1919, the Hanoi Central Library was created as the headquarters of the directorate and model library for Indochina. The Hanoi Central Library also operated both as an extension of the National Library in France and as a ‘proto-national’ library of Indochina in the colonial capital of Hanoi. The Hanoi Central Library built the largest collection of published materials in Southeast Asia, trained cadres of librarian-archivists for colonial libraries and government offices, and at its peak in 1941 circulated over 100,000 works in the course of one year.⁴⁵ The Cambodge Library was opened in 1924 in Phnom Penh and the Hue Library operated as an administrative library annexed to the Superior Residence of Annam since the 1920s. Together with the Cochinchina Library, the Cambodge Library and Hue Library modeled its library operations and organization after the Hanoi branch and sent copies of regionally published material and regular reports to Hanoi. With the end of French colonialism in 1945, the Hanoi and Saigon libraries carried tentative titles as the “national” library of post-colonial Vietnam. At the end of the Indochina War in 1954, the Hanoi library was transferred to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and a quarter of the collections was moved to the re-envisioned national library in Saigon, the capital of the Republic of Vietnam. This study of ‘the library’ moves away from categorizations of libraries and concentrates on the social and political function of libraries such as for scholarly research, self-study, community building, religious education. This broadened view then situates the Hanoi and Saigon central libraries within a multilayered landscape of reading spaces such as association reading rooms, mobile libraries, Buddhist libraries, and private libraries.

Sources: The Making and Interpretations of Statistical Knowledge

This study analyzes never before used archives on libraries and reading, Vietnamese newspapers, unpublished government reports, and rare reader statistics. I contribute valuable insight into the historical patterns of Vietnamese reader behavior, demographics, library collections, and book circulation. The archives reveal a meta-history of colonial documentation practices and networks of government reporting. I closely examined the entirety of the archives of the “Direction des archives et des bibliothèques” collection at Trung tâm lưu trữ quốc gia 1 [National Archives Center 1] in Hanoi which collected documents on administrative operations of the Indochina libraries, internal draft reports of the Hanoi Central Library, and letters between

⁴⁵ TTLT1, *DABI*, File 1629 “Répartition Proportionnelle Des Différentes Catégories de Lecteurs Indigènes Titulaires D’une Carte Permanente et Des Livres Lus à La Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1937-1941,” [Proportional Distribution of Different Categories of Indigenous Readers, Holders of a Permanent Card, and Books read at the Central Library Hanoi], November 8, 1941.

Indochina government departments, private booksellers, and library branches in Saigon, Phnom Penh, and Hue. To understand the early history of French colonial documentation in Cochinchina and the evolution of the Saigon library from a documentation library to a public library to a national library for the Republic of Vietnam, I drew from several collections at Trung tâm lưu trữ quốc gia 2 [National Archives Center 2] in Ho Chi Minh City.⁴⁶ These collections reveal the fragmented and frantic decolonization of the colonial directorate. I supplemented the narrative of the Indochina libraries with the high-level administrative collections available at the Archives nationale d'outre-mer [National Archives of Overseas Territories] in Aix-en-Provence, France. Specifically, the private papers of Paul Boudet granted insight into the life and work of the director of the Indochina archives and library project.

The extensive data on reader behavior and library collections included in this dissertation were based on published and unpublished library reports, letters, and hand tabulated statistics. During the colonial period, librarian-archivists collected data on readers: their background, checkouts, library visits, and library card applications. Extensive records exist on the physical library collections: catalogs, genres, lists of books donated, destroyed, lost, stolen, requiring repair, and most popular among readers. The data on readers was strikingly uneven—at times extremely detailed on specific readers usually when they ‘misbehaved’, and at other times only as a tick mark in the total number of reader visits. Most of the records collected by low-level librarians circulated internally at the local branch. Preserved in the colonial archives, draft charts with scribbles of addition, averages, and estimates show the process of statistical knowledge making. These numbers transformed into neat weekly, monthly, annual reports and made their way upwards to high-level administrators. Finally, the latest version appeared as pie charts, line graphs, and lists of notable statistics in the published yearly report of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries from 1924 to 1939. Signed by the Director of Archives and Libraries Paul Boudet, these yearly reports summarized key activities in the Hanoi archives and Saigon archives, the Central Library in Hanoi, Cochinchina Library in Saigon, Library of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, Library of Annam in Hue, and the Legal Deposit in Hanoi.⁴⁷

One needs to pause and wonder: why were these statistics collected in the first place? Like all historical sources, statistics must be subjected to the same level of source criticism and contextualized scrutiny as letters, reports, and newspapers. Why the statistics were recorded is just as significant as what the statistics convey. First, these statistics provided valuable information to inform internal library needs and priorities. Internal documents reflect how administrators proposed a cost value analysis between purchasing new books and binding older, damaged books. For example, in 1941 a series of calculations and graphs created a ‘coefficient of use’ by analyzing the number of works consulted and loaned out of the total number of works in the collection.⁴⁸ Secondly, high library usage numbers justified social and educational value and thus influenced governmental financial budgets for the library.⁴⁹ Third, the sciences of

⁴⁶ The following collections at National Archives 2 were crucial to my study of the Saigon Library: Gouvernement de la Cochinchine, Nha Văn khố và Thư viện Quốc gia, Phủ thủ tướng Quốc gia Việt Nam, Thư viện Quốc gia Nam Việt, and Tổng Thư viện.

⁴⁷ Libraries differed in their method and consistency of data collection. The statistics and detail of collections and reader consultations for the Hanoi Central Library were always more extensive than the other libraries.

⁴⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1634 “Graphiques sur les statistiques annuelles de 1920 à 1941 du nombre des lecteurs et des livres consultés et prêtés à la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi 1920-1941.

⁴⁹ This raises the question regarding inflation of statistics, and if so when and to what extent. In this dissertation, I strive to only include statistics on readers and collections if they are reoccurring. In other words, if there is a paper trail of similar types of data recorded in previous months or years, I judge the statistics to be a result of calculated

documentation, library sciences [bibliothéconomie] and information sciences necessitated ‘control work’, the documentary monitoring of library collections and its users. Higher-level library administrators were trained at the Grande École de Chartres school for archives and libraries in France and thereby trained a cadre of indigenous librarians, archivists, paleographers, and secretaries in techniques of recordkeeping, measurement, and report writing. In application, librarian-archivists carried out their own system of documentation depending on the local demands for reporting, limitations in number of personnel, and their own personal methods. In a 1934 report on the Cochinchina Library, an administrator critiqued the system of hourly recording in the Reading Room: “The number of readers is calculated each hour and at the end of the day the number is totaled. A reader who had read at the library from 3PM to 5:30PM would be counted as 5. The total obtained at the end of the year then is completely arbitrary.”⁵⁰ By June 1935, the library reported that it had revised its technique and recorded more accurate statistics of readers entering and exiting the Cochinchina Library. This example showcases how methodologies of library science was an iterative and localized process.

In order to critically analyze statistical sources and the process of their construction, I draw from the body of scholarship on colonial knowledge production and science and technology studies. These fields provide an enriching lens to consider the inextricable relationship between empire and knowledge, measurements and interpreters.⁵¹ Library statistics served a functional role to communicate information as well as to convey modern scientific practices of administrative legitimacy.⁵² The published reports appear rational and objective, but in fact were built on colonial epistemologies. For example, the reports regularly emphasized the growth of the library collection size as a marker of progress. The reports listed works of ‘significance’ recently added to the collection which often included reference works on French language and history, scientific and language dictionaries, and contemporary and rare books on Indochina by orientalist scholars. Unpublished reports shed light on the social life of libraries and administrative condemnation of ‘misreading.’ These documents include lists of reader penalties for overdue or stolen books, complaints from library staff over the disorderly conduct of student readers, and petitions from readers to reinstate revoked library privileges. These anecdotes and library statistics require a thoughtful “reading along the grain,” as Ann Stoler has coined, to understanding the underlying politics and functions of these documents.⁵³

intention and technical science of recordkeeping. In my analysis, I contextualize statistics together with qualitative data such as internal letters, reader complaints, and reader applications in order to convey a more balanced view of the daily life of libraries operations. Furthermore, I contextualize published library materials such as statistics, images, and reports as embedded within the pursuit of objectivity and the performance of truth.

⁵⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1423-01 "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et des Bibliothèques de la Cochinchine en Septembre 1934."

⁵¹ Scholars of the British Empire, Bernard Cohn and Christopher Bayly examine how practices of statistical data on natural, human, and military resources became crucial tools of empire building. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵² Theodore Porter demonstrates how the rationality of documentation and statistics is used by the state in cases where it has weak social legitimacy. Similarly, the Vietnamese library can be framed as an institution of building legitimacy among its colonial subjects. The promotion of a discourse on modernity and information technologies helped to build social legitimacy in the library and by extension the legitimacy of the colonial state to invest in cultural and educational programs for its subjects. Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁵³ Drawing from this method, I examine Vietnamese libraries both as a place and process. Library projects often

Structure

This dissertation follows a chronological organization with the following thematic chapter topics: the builders, the readers, the print industry, print control, and decolonization. Chapter 1 reveals the interdependent process of building libraries and building the French colonial Indochina state from 1858 to 1939. I focus on the early library reference collections for colonial administrators, Paul Boudet and other ‘builders’ of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries, and the initiatives to standardize libraries in Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh. Furthermore, this chapter sheds light on the symbolic function of libraries as a ‘modern’ institution of library science and authoritative knowledge. Chapter 2 traces the everyday politics and social dynamics of library readers in the Hanoi and Saigon libraries in the 1920s and 1930s. I examine the evolution of library collections, reader behavior and demographics, and literary preferences in the libraries. Library users redefined the public space of the reading rooms of the Central Library in Hanoi and Saigon, and transformed the rooms into spaces for study, socializing, and personal empowerment through access to popular education material. Chapter 3 reveals how the cultural economics of the Vietnamese print industry shaped production, circulation, translation, and literary trends in print media throughout the colonial period. This chapter moves beyond the confines of state libraries and examines publishing initiatives and association libraries which navigated the landscape of colonial control and reader demands. Furthermore, this chapter reveals how different administrators, translators, publishers, and readers conceptualized the meaning of building libraries with ‘good reading’ — as cultural imperialism and spread of French ideals, as increased literacy and access to ‘modern’ ideas, as cultural consumption and display of urban intellectualism, or as social empowerment by mutual aid societies. Chapter 4 shows how the colonial state attempted to control print media through subsidized printing, book distribution, mobile libraries, and censorship from 1919 to 1945. I reveal the ideological influences between French and Dutch colonial projects and demonstrate how the French colonial state drew from the Dutch East Indies Balai Pustaka publishing and libraries model in the 1930s. I also consider the shift from indirect to direct methods of print control, particularly under Vichy authoritarian rule in the context of World War II (1940-1945). Chapter 5 examines the decolonization of Indochina’s libraries collections and the struggle for documentary heritage from 1945 to 1958. I show how the emergence of the post-colonial ‘national’ and ‘public’ library in Saigon intersected with the building of national culture, state legitimacy, and urban education. I conclude with a brief epilogue on the legacy of colonial knowledge and institutions in the post-colonial Vietnamese states.

differed in reality from the idealistic visions of state policy. Understanding this aspect of state building can reveal the various influences, slippages, and contradictions hidden underneath the rhetoric of hegemonic state power. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

CHAPTER 1

Building the Colonial State, Building Libraries: The Documentation and Modernity Project of Indochina, 1858-1939

To colonize is to document. Since the beginning of French encroachment into the Vietnamese southern regions in 1858, colonial authorities established libraries and archives to collect print matter. The interdependent institutions of libraries and archives preserved the paper trail of the colonial administration: reports, statistics, and letters. Archives and libraries also curated research materials (maps, histories, dictionaries, scientific manuals) for colonial government administrators and orientalist scholars. The task of documentation went hand in hand with military and economic operations in order to exert control and exploit resources in a new colony. Libraries and archives functioned as colonial tools of documentation and control, technologies of bureaucratic rationality, and symbolic institutions of knowledge and modernity.

This chapter demonstrates the interdependent processes of building libraries and building the French colonial Indochina state from 1858 to 1939. Focused on administrative figures and the changing mission of libraries, this chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1 traces the early motivations of interdependent library-archives projects to document governmental history, to provide reference material for administrators, and to offer a ‘healthy’ leisurely activity for French *colons*. Part 2 examines the rationales to create the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina [Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, henceforth referred to as DABI or the Directorate] in 1917. The Directorate centralized the administrative management, technical procedures, and collections of all libraries and archives throughout Indochina. Modeled on French concepts of library science, the Directorate envisioned libraries, bibliographies, and a legal deposit regime as a way to classify ‘valuable’ knowledge on Indochina. Furthermore, DABI and its director Paul Boudet transformed and expanded the mission of colonial Indochina libraries from only serving colonial administrators to including the larger indigenous reading public. Part 3 shows the successes and limitations of these centralization initiatives to standardize library operations, to follow the model ‘modern’ Hanoi Central Library, and to create a network of libraries throughout Indochina. The development of libraries over time sheds light on the changing state visions regarding cultural modernity, public education, and control of information.

Along with the great French colonial public building projects such as schools, roads, train stations, and opera houses, libraries represented modern institutions and infrastructures. Libraries symbolized Western notions of ‘modernity’ as an institution of public education and scientific classification. The symbolic modernity of these projects reinforced and justified a hierarchy of French civilizational grandeur over the colonized population. Furthermore, libraries functioned to define and exercise ‘modern’ state functions of surveillance and control of information within the framework of government documentation, bureaucratic rationality, and information science. However, as this chapter reveals, the development of the ‘modern’ library in Indochina did not follow a simple process of ‘Westernization.’¹ The cases of Central Library in Hanoi and the

¹ As Christopher Goscha has argued in his work, ‘multiple modernities’ took different, uneven forms in colonial Indochina such as bureaucratic rationality, technological transformations in transportation and communications, and new concepts of space and identity. Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

Cochinchina Library in Saigon reveal how attempts to graft a purely French model to Vietnam ultimately failed. Furthermore, libraries development in Cambodia, Laos, and Hue show the limitations of top-down Indochina-wide projects. These cases draw attention to the collaborative efforts of local administrators, scholars, religious reformers, and educators within the building of libraries and cultural heritage. This chapter reveals how the development of libraries in Indochina followed a distinctly colonial path of administrative localization and uneven implementation of idealistic and changing visions.

Part 1

To Colonize and to Document: Libraries and Archives in Service to the Colonial Administration, 1858-1917

Early Conquest and the Formation of French Indochina, 1858-1912

Motivated by political prestige and commercial interests, French colonial encroachment began in southern Vietnam in 1858. The French conquest of Vietnam and the formation of French Indochina developed slowly and in a piecemeal way over the course of 40 years. A contested process, French colonial conquest in the late nineteenth century included politicized justifications for intervention, sporadic military battles, and administrative negotiations with a decentralized Đại Nam state led by the Nguyễn administration in the imperial capital of Hue. In 1862 the Hue court signed the Treaty of Saigon, surrendering the southern provinces of Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh (Saigon), and My Tho (Dinh Tuong). In 1863, The French government designated Cambodia as a protectorate and created a Consultative Council and governor in Saigon to directly rule the colony “la Cochinchine Française” (Cochinchina, southern Vietnam). By 1867 the French obtained the remaining provinces of southern Vietnam, Chau Doc (An Gian), Ha Tien, and Vinh Long. The French Navy Admirals government monopolized the colonial administration (both European and indigenous offices) and Consultative Council in Saigon, reporting directly to the Ministry of Navy and Colonies up to 1879 when the French Third Republic appointed a civilian governor for Cochinchina. During the 1880s the French colonial government in Cochinchina expanded and built up Saigon as a commercial center and a main transportation hub. According to Christopher Goscha, the early admiral-governors used a mix of direct and indirect rule—relying upon lower-level Confucian bureaucrats from the Nguyễn civil service and also colonial trained civil servants such as French-educated Vietnamese, French inspectors, and Vietnamese interpreters.² French remained the primary language of colonial documentation and official administrative reports. Since the seventeenth century, Catholic missionaries developed quốc ngữ initially as a way to proselytize. By the end of the nineteenth century, the French colonial government promoted the use of French and Vietnamese quốc ngữ over Chinese characters in order to politically and culturally distance the new colonial administration from China and its cultural-linguistic influence on Vietnam. The Cochinchinese government opened more schools to train Vietnamese interpreters and civil servants in quốc ngữ. However in Cochinchina, Chinese, chữ nôm (demotic script), French, and other local indigenous languages remained in use through the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1884, French colonialism expanded northward to integrate Tonkin (Northern Vietnam) and Annam (Central Vietnam) as protectorates. In 1887 the French government officially created

² Goscha. P. 67.

French Indochina which included the five ‘pays’ Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, (three regions that today comprise the nation state Vietnam), Cambodge (Cambodia), and Laos (from 1893).³ Cochinchina was ruled as a direct colony and subject to French metropolitan law. However in everyday application, the interpretation of colonial law varied widely especially in the realm of civil liberties. Annam, Tonkin, Laos, and Cambodge were designated as protectorates. In comparison to a directly ruled colony, a protectorate maintained local forms of governance. According to official protocol, the Hue court symbolically maintained the authority over local governance in Annam and Tonkin. Yet in practice the French Indochina bureaucracy depended upon both the imperial mandarin administrators and a new system of Vietnamese and French colonial officials. By 1897, Laos, Cambodge, and each of the three Vietnamese regions had a French colonial resident and French commissioners (resident superiors). The French colonial government system created a top-down structure of power and control but relied upon pre-existing local Vietnamese structures for low-level district and village administration. Furthermore, the building of French colonial Indochina drew upon the labor of lower-level Vietnamese administrators and soldiers who carried out an ‘internal colonization’ of Laos and Cambodge.⁴

The entire Indochina union was ruled by a governor general, appointed from Paris who followed orders from the Ministry of Colonies. By 1897, Governor General of Indochina Paul Doumer (1897-1902) worked to integrate and build the infrastructure of the Indochinese union, centralizing its departments, civil service, budget and taxation, and investing in public works. Doumer also developed the Bank of Indochina and state monopolies of opium, salt, and alcohol.⁵ In 1902, Hanoi was made the administrative capital of colonial Indochina and the seat of the governor general. The early period of conquest and colonial infrastructure building from 1858 to 1908 was characterized by military violence, administrative coercion, and infrastructure development. The intense building of the colonial state and public works projects meant that much of the financial, taxation, and labor burden fell on the indigenous population, especially the economically vulnerable rural population.

From the very beginning of French encroachment, Vietnamese responded and resisted in a variety of ways—from complete withdrawal from government administration to peasant protests, scholar-elite led rebellions and critiques, and collaborative reform based on Japanese and Chinese modernization movements.⁶ Many of these Vietnamese reformists, notably Phan Chu Trinh, proposed ways to work within the context of French colonialism to modernize Vietnamese society and education, reform the government, and improve civil liberties. Governor General Paul Beau (1902-1908) had introduced a few reforms such as the creation of a Franco-Indigenous school, a liberalized penal code, and the creation of the Indochinese University in Hanoi. However, in 1908 a series of Vietnamese led revolts against colonialism and the severe

³ French Indochina was the union organization of the five ‘pays’ or regions with distinct political administrations.

⁴ For a study of French-Vietnamese collaboration and the internal colonization of Indochina through the bureaucracy and infrastructure building, see Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954*, *Nordic Institute of Asian Studies*, no. 28 (1995).

⁵ Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*. P. 75-76.

⁶ Backed by the Nguyễn emperor Hàm Nghi, in the 1880s to 1890s scholar mandarins led a popular “Save the King” [Cần Vương] movement against French colonialism. Other important intellectual movements responding to French colonialism included Phan Bội Châu’s (1867-1940) and Phan Chu Trinh’s (1872-1926) reform-based movements inspired by Japanese and Chinese modernist and republican reforms.

political crackdown reversed many of the liberal reforms.⁷ Back in the metropole, French socialists critiqued the exploitative policies in French Indochina which undermined the humanistic fundamentals of a French Republic. With this liberal reformist zeal, the Paris government appointed Albert Sarraut as Governor General of Indochina in 1912.

The Early Saigon Library: From Government Documentation to Public Library, 1865-1912

This gradual and piecemeal process of colonial conquest was reflected in the fragmented Indochina institutions such as the libraries and archives. During the early years of French colonial conquest in Indochina, each of the five territorial regions managed their own government library and archive. These early libraries and archives developed in cooperation with each other, tasked with the general function to conserve government documents such as correspondence, reports, and legal decrees, as well as reference materials such as maps, dictionaries, ethnographies, encyclopedias, and periodicals. The archives and libraries documented government functions, provided reference reading matter for administrators, and over time extended its collections to non-administrators. During the French colonial period from 1858 to 1945, a regional library and archive developed in the following capitals: Hanoi in Tonkin, Hue in Annam, Saigon in Cochinchina, Phnom Penh in Cambodia, and Vientiane in Laos. Created since the beginning of French colonial rule, the Cochinchina library in Saigon had a long history as an independent institution of documentation before the Indochina-wide centralization initiatives in 1917.

The Saigon Library went by many names—Bibliothèque de Saigon [Saigon Library], Bibliothèque de Documentation du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine [Library of Documentation of the Cochinchina Government], Bibliothèque de Cochinchine [Library of Cochinchina], and Bibliothèque de la secretariat du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine [Library of the Secretariat of the Cochinchina Government]. These names reflect the changing administration and functions of documentation and libraries in Cochinchina.⁸ Established during the Admiral government period in Cochinchina, the colonial administrators positioned building the library as an essential part of building colonial infrastructure: “Since 1862, [the administration] recognized it necessary among so many other urgent preoccupations like the construction of lighthouses, hospitals, and a telegraphic service, to create a library. Certainly it did not intend the library to be an institution largely for the public, but rather as a reference library.”⁹ In 1865, the Saigon Library was officially organized in order to document government functions and collect reference matter for administrators rather than for the mass public.

Although initially intended as a reference library, the Saigon Library carried a range of materials varying from administrative tracts to literature, travelogues, and Paris literary magazines. “Next to the administrative and juridical works, there was a spot dedicated for less

⁷ A series of 1908 revolts against French labor demands and a plot against French colonial troops resulted in a wave of harsh crackdowns against the Vietnamese involved in the plot as well as the beloved amongst Vietnamese intellectuals and reformists, Phan Chu Trinh.

⁸ The historical narrative of the Saigon Library is compiled from the following archival records : TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102 “H`òSơ v`êTổ Chức và Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Nam Phần Năm 1951-1957” [Organization and Activities of National Southern Library, 1951-1957], Document 6: “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam” [The National Library of South Vietnam]; ANOM, PB, Folder 53 “Dossier Concernant La Construction Des Bâtiments Pour Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine” (c. 1946).

⁹ ANOM, PB, Folder 53 “Dossier Concernant la Construction des Bâtiments pour les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine” (c. 1946).

austere works to help the colonial collaborators to stay abreast of the current intellectual movements of the Metropole. For example one finds the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, parts of [the magazines] *Archéologie...* and *Illustration*, (such as the valuable reportages of the expedition and woodcut illustrations of Cochinchina).¹⁰ On October 26, 1866, the governor of Cochinchina, Admiral de la Grandière wrote to the Minister of Colonies in Paris and requested a list of books to be sent to Saigon, paid for by the local budget. He expressed, “It is of great interest to the colony to create a collection of the principal works of our [France’s] literature.”¹¹ In the following letter on May 9, 1867 Admiral de la Grandière reiterated to the Minister of Colonies the importance of building a library collections in the colonies.¹² He reported that the existing Saigon Library collections only contained donated and discarded books. “Your Excellency will not fail to recognize the importance of the Saigon Library today. Several shipments of books have been made [to the library] from the Departments of War and Interior. But these works only form the basic foundation of a collection or they were old classics and scientific books which no longer have much interest.”

In his requests for books, de la Grandière emphasized the importance of providing relevant reading matter and leisure activities to the officers stationed in the colonies. De la Grandière argued that a more complete library collection could “provide an element of occupation for our military officers whose idleness is often a cause of bad behavior.” Books functioned as sources of entertainment and healthy leisure and extended a sense of productive order over military officials. Admiral de la Grandière begged the Minister of Colonies to swiftly approve and send more “useful” books and the “principal books of our literature” to the colony. However even by 1868, de la Grandière’s demands for more books had not been met. On February 27, 1868 de la Grandière expressed with urgency to the Ministry of Colonies the necessity of building the Saigon Library collection: “Since your Excellency had expressed the intention to develop the libraries in the Colonies, I beg you to fulfill [this mission] as soon as possible, and as much as possible for Cochinchina, so that the many officers of the various Navy corps stationed in the colony can find a useful and intelligent function for their leisure [time].”¹³ As illustrated in these letters from Admiral de la Grandière to the Minister of Colonies, the Saigon Library functioned as a governmental documentation library that served the European community of civil servants, merchants, soldiers, and missionaries in the 1860s and 1870s.¹⁴ Initial collections of the library included subscriptions to periodicals from France, the Dutch East Indies, other French colonies, and local publications in Cochinchina. Most of the periodicals and reading matter in the library covered the following topics: comparative colonialism, maps, and early research on Vietnamese customs, governance, and society. In 1868 Admiral de la Grandière also began to develop a separate archives and ordered that official dossiers be retained

¹⁰ ANOM, PB, Folder 53 “Dossier Concernant La Construction Des Bâtiments Pour Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine” (c. 1946).

¹¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 614 “Notice sur les Archives et les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine et des Imprimeries du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine à l’époque des Amiraux, 1863-1908” [Notice on the Archives and Libraries of Indochina and the Printers of the Government of Cochinchina during the Admirals Era, 1863-1908], Document 704: Letter from Admiral de la Grandière to the Minister of Colonies, Saigon, October 26, 1866.

¹² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 614, Document 422: Letter from Admiral de la Grandière to the Minister of Colonies, Saigon, May 9, 1867.

¹³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 614, Document: Letter from Admiral de la Grandière to the Minister of Colonies, Saigon, February 27, 1868.

¹⁴ Judith Henchy, “The National Library of Vietnam,” in *International Dictionary of Library Histories*, ed. David H. Stam, volume 2, (Taylor & Francis, 2001), 598–601.

and classified.

In 1882 the Saigon Library was designated as a public library under the colonial Direction of Interior. This is significant because it signaled a shift in the function of government funded libraries as formally part of the Directorate of Interior (internal affairs) along with police and security, law and order, and local government. In a letter between the Director of the Ministry of Interior and the Governor of the Ministry of the Navy in 1883, the director of the Ministry of Interior remarked that the only library open to the public in Cochinchina was the Saigon Library.¹⁵ The library collection contained 2,920 volumes and did not yet have a catalog.



Image 1-1. Exterior of Cochinchina Library [Saigon Library] in the Government of Cochinchina secretariat building.¹⁶

In 1902, Governor General Paul Beau (1902-1908) placed the library under the supervision of the Government of Cochinchina. Renamed the “Bibliothèque de Cochinchine,” the library shared a cramped space initially only dedicated to the newly reorganized archives of Cochinchina.¹⁷ The new space for the library and archives was the second floor of the

¹⁵ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102 “H ồ Sơ v ề Tổ Chức và Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Nam Ph ần Năm 1951-1957” [Organization and Activities of National Southern Library, 1951-1957], Document 6: “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam” [The National Library of South Vietnam].

¹⁶ ANOM, PB, Folder 52 “Photographies du service des archives et des bibliothèques à l’Indochine.”

¹⁷ On September 29, 1902 the local administration of Cochinchina proposed to the Colonial Council the creation of an archive service. The Draft Budget for 1903 allocated a sum of 10,000 francs for the director of the new archives, a credit of 1,000 piastres for furniture, and 30,000 piastres for the construction of the building. Trần Văn Kỳ. *Les*

Government of Cochinchina Secretariat compound on 27 Rue de Lagrandière (now 159-161 Lý Tự Trọng).¹⁸ This move thereby established both the library and archives as part of the Government of Cochinchina, serving both the government and the larger public. By 1902, the Cochinchina Library housed government records and a limited number of general works of literature, periodicals, and histories. According to the 1903-1906 dossier of borrowers, nearly a thousand request slips were submitted to the Cochinchina Library requesting the administration to permit readers to borrow books to read at home.¹⁹ Although the library was not yet an official lending library, both administrators and non-administrators, French and Vietnamese requested permission to borrow books and take them out of the library. As evident in the borrowing logs from 1907, the Cochinchina Library expanded beyond French administrators to serve the larger Saigon public: French businessmen, women, teachers, and a growing community of Vietnamese administrators, journalists, merchants, and students.²⁰

By March 1907, the Cochinchina Library created an official catalog of its collections. The catalog classified its holdings into the following categories: general works (almanacs, dictionaries, manuals), law (political economy, codes, jurisprudence), science (philosophy, morality, religion, medicine, technology), culture (colonialism), history and biography (French, army, modern), geography/ethnography/travel (Europe, Asia, Indochina, Africa), literature (literary criticism, children's books, novels, poetry, plays), and art (music, albums).²¹ The categories of religion, history and biography, novels, poetry, plays, and music contained the most works. The comparative abundance of these categories sheds light into the collecting regime of colonial libraries as well as the availability of materials in the early twentieth century. The most covered genre of materials available in the library was literature. By 1909, the library collection featured over 10,000 books and periodicals on sciences, history, literature, law, and periodicals.

Besides the Cochinchina Library in Saigon, other libraries developed throughout Cochinchina and Tonkin with specific government or regional functions. The mayor of Haiphong opened up the Library of Haiphong in 1905 with the mission to provide "freely to all persons who wish to read on site."²² In 1907, the administration built the French-Vietnamese library of the protectorate with the specific function of serving Vietnamese administrators, teachers, and students. In 1913, the superior resident of Tonkin also built a library on 5 Rue Vong Duc. The

archives du gouvernement de la Cochinchine: Organisation, Methode de classement. Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise, 1915. P. 8-11.

¹⁸ In 1888 a new compound was built to house the new Government of Cochinchina Secretariat (the new administrative department that included the former Directorate of Interior).

¹⁹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11894 "Fiches Personnelles des Emprunteurs à Domiciles (A-L) de La Bibliothèque Années 1903-1906" [Personnel slips of borrowers to read at home (A-L) of the Library 1903-1906].

²⁰ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11886 "Demandes d'inscription à la Bibliothèque sur la Liste des Personnes Jouissant de la Faveur du Prêt à Domicile Années 1907-1919" [Applications requesting borrowing home privileges, 1907-1919], TTLT2, GC, Folder 11974 "Dossier Relatif aux Renseignements sur les Archives Locales Conservées en Cochinchine, à la Création et Organisation du Service des Archives, d'un Emploi de Bibliothécaire, d'un Atelier de Reliure, au Règlement Intérieur de la Bibliothèque, Catalogues Méthodiques des Ouvrages, Par Ordre Alphabétique des Auteurs Années 1905-1917" [Folder regarding information on local archives conserved in Cochinchina, the creation and organization of Archive services, the employment of a librarian, the binding workshop, interior regulations of the library, methodic catalog of works by alphabetical order of author name 1905-1917].

²¹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11974, Document: "Bibliothèque, Catalogue Méthodique des Ouvrages, 1er supplément, Mars 1907" L. Griffa and Secrétariat du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine, Saigon, Bibliothèque. Catalogue méthodique des ouvrages, avec table alphabétique des auteurs (Saigon: Coudurier et Montégout, imprimeurs-éditeurs, 1907).

²² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 119 "Règlement de la Bibliothèque de la ville de Haiphong 1905-1918."

Directorate of Instruction helped to build libraries in schools and libraries for teachers, such as the Circulating Pedagogical Library in Cochinchina (1883) and a Pedagogical Library of the Protectorate in Tonkin for French teachers (1906). Municipal libraries opened in provincial capitals of populous regions such as Haiphong (1905), Bacninh (1910), and Namdinh (1914). Organizations and services such as the Saigon Société des Études Indochinoise [Society of Indochinese Studies] and the Hanoi Mining Service also maintained their own library for their members.²³ Many of the early libraries received institutional support and guidance from the École Française d'Extrême-Orient [French School of the Far East], the French Orientalist research institution that produced ethnological, religious, linguistic studies on Indochina.²⁴ The ÉFEO also organized its own library of research materials and rare manuscripts in Chinese, Japanese, Pali, Vietnamese, Tai, Burmese, and Khmer.

However, many of these libraries lacked a substantive, updated, and organized collection of materials. For example, the article “Municipal Libraries” published in *Du Courrier d’Haiphong* on January 20, 1918, described the Haiphong Library as decentralized, unsupervised, and “rudimentary.”²⁵ “Municipal libraries, at least the one in Haiphong, have hitherto only been envisaged as a pleasant distraction for its readers, and has little interest in collecting more complete works and documentation. Nine-tenths of the works found there are novels, often very mediocre, and there are barely even a few serious books even on the topic of Indochina...” The author criticized the limited collections and lack of essential Indochina materials such as the annual government reports, the maps on Indochina published by the Geographical Service, and the Chamber of Commerce meeting minutes. The author predicted the doomed fate of the Haiphong Library if the collections and organization continued in this unsupervised manner: “A considerable number of documents are lost and one day the library will have to repent for this negligence when the library discovers that the its funds could have been better used than for the binding of humorous graphic books or the purchase of crime novels...” By 1926, the Haiphong Library continued to operate in a “deplorable” state. In a letter to the mayor of Haiphong, the author demanded the following drastic architectural improvements: the movement of the municipal library to a more central location, the building of an improved and well-ventilated reading room for 20 people, a lending section for 10 thousand works, storage for 50,000 volumes, and at least three offices.²⁶ The letter concluded with an idealistic vision for the Haiphong Library: “A well-designed building...surrounded by a garden, would not harm the view of these grand open spaces. The library would be placed, not far from the fields of sports and play: and it could offer like in Phnom Penh, a calm asylum for the workers and a relaxation to those who play sports.”

Culture & Education Policy: Albert Sarraut, Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration, Cultural Reforms and a ‘Rational’ Bureaucracy, 1912-1919

Beginning in 1912, the new reformist Governor General Albert Sarraut initiated a series

²³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4 "Archivage des articles des journaux dans la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques à Hanoi 1918, Document: “Le service des archives et la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi” *L’éveil économique*, c. 1919.

²⁴ For a thorough study of the ÉFEO, see Pierre Singaravélou, *L’École Française d’Extrême-Orient ou l’institution des marges: essai d’histoire sociale et politique de la science coloniale*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999).

²⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4, Document: "Bibliothèques municipale" *Courrier d’Haiphong*, January 20, 1918.

²⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 119, Document: Letter to the Mayor of Haiphong, c. 1926.

of political, cultural, and educational policies built on the principles of “Franco-Vietnamese Association.” Sarraut envisaged Indochina as a collaborative association—a liberal and radically republican form of colonial rule based on partnership between Vietnamese and French political and economic elites.²⁷ Franco-Vietnamese Association was marked by the rhetoric of republican reform, social and economic progress, modernity, and civilization.²⁸ In a speech at the Temple of Literature in Hanoi on April 17, 1919, Sarraut declared that ‘Franco-Vietnamese collaboration’ was a reform centered approach to bring eventual self-government. “Colonies are states in the making” with their own functions, operations, and they must serve their own interest within the French empire.²⁹ Sarraut emphasized that the French and Vietnamese must work together “for the good of this wonderful Indochina and for the welfare of her populations.”

During his two terms in office (1912-1914 and 1917-1919), Sarraut implemented his policy of ‘Franco-Vietnamese collaboration’ in the following institutions: the creation of an indigenous affairs bureau for the development of liberal policy, the expansion of local councils, an increase in the size of the Cochinchinese Colonial Council to include more Vietnamese, the development of Franco-Vietnamese education, and revival of the Indochinese University in Hanoi. Related to these reforms was an effort to rationalize the colonial state through streamlined administrative offices, reporting structures, and policy formations. In 1917 Sarraut also helped to create the political police, the Sûreté Générale, with Louis Marty as its head. While many of Sarraut’s social and political initiatives failed to resonate evenly throughout Vietnamese society, Sarraut’s commitment to centralize government documentation and expand cultural policies directly influenced the function of libraries for popular education, access to Franco-Vietnamese literature, and literacy development throughout Indochina. One of Sarraut’s most significant colonial legacies was the establishment of a centralized directorate for all colonial documentation, publications, libraries, and archives throughout Indochina.

Part 2

Visions of the Modern Public Library: Centralization, Comprehensive Knowledge, and Organization through the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina (DABI) and the Central Library of Hanoi, 1917-1919

Standardizing Indochina: Documentary Control and the Directorate of Archives and Libraries, 1917

On November 29, 1917 Governor General Albert Sarraut issued a decree to centralize

²⁷ Christopher Goscha argues that the Franco-Vietnamese association policies developed out of fears caused by additional anti-colonial revolts in 1908 and post Great War French initiatives to retain global power. These idealistic visions of a cooperative French-Vietnamese, semi-independent French Indochinese Union permeated the justifications and rationale of colonial policy from 1917 through to the 1940s.

²⁸ Franco-Vietnamese collaboration also provided a structure for ethnic Vietnamese colonial administrators to operate the Indochinese state. French colonial Indochina relied upon the internal colonization and administrative structure of Vietnamese bureaucrats throughout the Mekong Delta and westwards into Vientiane and Phnom Penh. Compared to other French settler colonies, the total number of Europeans in Indochina never surpassed more than 35,000 at any one time, and most lived in the Vietnamese cities of Hanoi and Saigon.

²⁹ “Discours prononcé le 17 avril 1919 au Van-Mieu” as cited in Christopher E Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen, Denmark,; NIAS Books, 2012). P. 26. For more on French-Vietnamese collaboration, see Agathe Larcher, ‘La Voie étroite des réformes coloniales et la “collaboration franco-annamite (1917-1928)”’ *Revue Française d’Histoire d’Outre-mer*, vol. 82, no. 309 (4th trimester 1995), pp. 387-420.

libraries, archives management, and public records into a unified Directorate of Archives and Libraries in Indochina.³⁰ This was the first large-scale attempt to standardize the five regional libraries and archives, compile and publish bibliographies, and unify Indochina procedures with French library and archives administrative and technical systems.³¹ Between 1917 and 1919 the colonial administration established the roles, responsibilities, and function of the Directorate and the position of the Director. The core institutions of the directorate included the following: the Central Library, Central Archives, the bibliography of Indochina, the Legal Deposit—all based in Hanoi—and the regional archives and library branches in Saigon, Hue, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane.

One of the first articles of the 1917 decree outlined the role and responsibility of the Director. The Director of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina managed the everyday administrative and technical operations of the central library and archives in Hanoi. The Director was also responsible for Indochina-wide library and archives operations: organizing, classifying, expanding, and standardizing libraries and archival holdings and procedures as well as pursuing the “progressive mission of great public and well categorized libraries of Indochina.”³² Article 3 of the 1917 decree explained the authority and essential responsibilities of the Director and the Directorate over all archives and public libraries collections:

- 1- to periodically inspect the local public archives and libraries;
- 2- to organize the classification of archives and the holdings of all public libraries following an organization scheme and uniform structure;
- 3- to give necessary directions to European and indigenous personnel employed at the libraries or [to give directions for] the classification of archives; and when necessary, to report to qualified authorities any negligence or faults committed by that personnel;
- 4- to give regularly to the public libraries, in terms of purchases, guidance for bibliographic and periodical [purchases], and to suggest to public libraries all indispensable, *useful* or *interesting* publications;

³⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 38 “Création de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1917.” In July 1917 the Governor General of Indochina Albert Sarraut and heads of local administration throughout Indochina initiated talks to create a centralized operation of libraries and archives management in Indochina. The Direction of Archives and Libraries would bring together libraries and archives in the five regions of Indochina, create a central library, a legal deposit, and standardize documentation throughout Indochina. With the hopes of standardizing the colonial archives and libraries with the metropolitan materials, Sarraut signed the decree to create the Directorate of Archives and Libraries on November 29, 1917 in Saigon.

³¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 38 “Création de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1917” [Creation of the Direction of Archives and Libraries of Indochina], Document: Circular Number 36-C from the Governor General of Indochina to the Heads of Local Administration and the Heads of Services related to the Governor General, Hanoi July 6, 1917. This circular declared the unification of classification techniques between colonial archives and libraries with metropolitan archives and libraries and placed Paul Boudet as the director of this organization initiative.

³² ANOM, PB, Folder 48, Direction des archives et des bibliothèques, "Règlement et instructions pour l'organisation et le classement des archives (arrêtés du 29 novembre 1917 et du 26 décembre 1918)." (Hanoi-Haphong: Imprimerie d'Extrême-orient, 1919).

5- to revise the organization of the existing public libraries and initiate the creation of new libraries for reading in place and borrowing home;

6- to advance a progressive mission of great public libraries of Indochina [through creating] a number of *categorized libraries*.³³

The original decree emphasized the responsibility of the directorate to guide public libraries to be well “categorized libraries [bibliothèque classées]” and to build collections of “indispensable, useful, and interesting” materials. Throughout decrees and reports on library and archives development, administrators frequently discussed the importance of control, surveillance, and order in the organization of knowledge. These concepts derived from French Enlightenment notions of ordering knowledge and nineteenth century French traditions of documentation and library science [bibliothéconomie]. According to the 1917 decree, the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina followed many French standards of documentation such as the following procedures of information management: “surveillance committees” manage library collections, the director of archives and libraries holds “permanent technical control” of the collections and must also maintain order in the libraries. The director was also responsible to inspect local public archives and libraries and to promulgate an organizational scheme and uniform structure among public libraries.³⁴

The French colonial government believed that centralized archives and libraries—a system to preserve publications and government documentation and to disseminate knowledge—was crucial to establishing control, order, and a functional colonial state and society. The colonial administration justified the creation of the directorate to improve management and long-term preservation of administrative documents and publications. Ann Stoler describes the colonial impulse to document and fears of illegibility as a colonial “epistemic anxiety.”³⁵ Early Indochina archival practices and the centralization initiatives in 1917 reflect a certain degree of “epistemic anxiety” as well as the logistical needs to preserve information for future use by colonial administrators. Documentation also defined the epistemological boundaries of ‘colonial’ history of France in Indochina. Since the beginning of colonialism, the colonial government had recognized the urgent need to organize the archives and libraries documents for the purpose of preserving colonial history. For example, in 1915 secretary Tr`ân Văn Kỳ summarized the Cochinchina Local Administration’s justifications for archival preservation and organization: “These documents—of which are great in number and are a priceless value for the history of the colony—are currently so disorderly that they render all research impossible; for that matter, over time little by little bundles of documents are destroyed because they are abandoned without precaution to the humid climate of Cochinchina. If we are not careful nothing will remain of the information they hold.”³⁶ With the establishment of a formal archive service in 1902 in

³³ Article 3 of “Decree to create the position of the Director of Archives and Libraries of the Government General of Indochina,” November 29, 1917.

³⁴ ANOM, PB, Folder 48, “Arrêtés du 29 Novembre 1917 et 26 Décembre 1918 au sujet de l’organisation du Dépôt Central d’archives et de la Bibliothèque Publique Centrale de Hanoi (1917-1918).”

³⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Ann Stoler describes the colonial state’s impulse to document as an “epistemic anxiety”—an attempt to exert control over the colony through the knowledge production of archives, reports, and statistics.

³⁶ Tr`ân Văn Kỳ. *Les archives du gouvernement de la Cochinchine: Organisation, Méthode de classement*. Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise, 1915.

Cochinchina, the local administration began to organize the documents by “destroying those without interest, protecting others from destruction...and classifying the documents with a rational method so that others can consult them and make the most of the documents...”³⁷ The Colonial Council of Cochinchina reasserted the importance of the organization of documents with the statement, “It is completely impossible to make a legitimate administration in the colony without a perfectly organized archive service.”³⁸ In other words, the archives preserved colonial history for future reference as well as legitimized the colonial administration.

With the 1917 Directorate of Archives and Libraries, the colonial government could continue to administer libraries and archives under the “direction of technical experts.”³⁹ In July 1917, French colonial archivist and paleographer Paul Boudet surveyed the existing landscape of archives and libraries throughout Indochina and concluded that many of the public papers and collections were in a “state of abandonment” and thus concluded that a centralized institution of specialists was necessary to organize the Indochina libraries and archives. The Directorate of Archives and Libraries would thus standardize documentation protocol and instruct libraries and archives throughout Indochina in the science of building and maintaining collections.

Two newly created advisory and surveillance commissions—a Superior Commission and a Local Commission—would manage the operations of the directorate, advise in the destruction of nonessential administrative documents, and oversee construction of management of directorate buildings.⁴⁰ The superior commission consisted of the Inspector general of Public Instruction, the Director of the l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, the head of Administrative Services to the Governor General, the Director of Archives and Libraries, and a clerk of the Civil Service. The local commission was made up of the director of the local government office, the head of local education service, and an administrator designated by the head of local administration. Librarians must also attend the Commission meetings and provide updated reports on the function of their services.

On December 26, 1918, Albert Sarraut expanded the official archives and documentation protocol to create a network of archives documentation for the five regional archives depots in Hanoi, Saigon, Hue, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane. Individual government offices were required to maintain their own archives of internal documentation, and had to submit portions of their archives first to the regional archive and then to the central archive in Hanoi.⁴¹ This 1918 decree on archives also established a more scrupulous system of discerning which documents to conserve in regional and Hanoi depots, to keep locally, or to eliminate due to disuse. Paul Boudet explained the rationale behind the organization of Indochina archives:

For a moment there was the idea of bringing together all the archives of Indochina into

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Paul Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l'Indochine* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1919). P. 13.

⁴⁰ “Direction des archives et des bibliothèques, Règlement et instructions pour l'organisation et le classement des archives (arrêtés du 29 novembre 1917 et du 26 décembre 1918).” Article 12 of November 29, 1917 decree outlined the creation and duties of the two surveillance commissions.

⁴¹ ANOM, PB, Folder 83, “Arrêtés du 29 Novembre 1917 et 26 Décembre 1918 au sujet de l'organisation du Dépôt Central d'archives et de la Bibliothèque Publique Centrale de Hanoi (1917-1918).” Introductory essay “Les Archives de l'Indochine” by Paul Boudet in *Indochine Française, Manuel de l'archiviste. Instructions pour l'organisation et le classement des archives de l'Indochine* [Préface de Paul Boudet] (Hanoi: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1945).

one single collection. The project was seductive and we could recall the efforts of Napoleon who was eager to centralize in Paris the Archives of many states of his empire. But we gave it up. It is logical that each country of the [Indochina] Union keep in its capital the documents which concern it. It is a happy decentralization, if an efficient leadership maintains the unity of technical methods throughout Indochina...”⁴²

Described as a “favorable decentralization,” this system would maintain most of the archives and libraries locally, while centralizing the technical procedures and reporting of collections throughout Indochina. For example, the November 29, 1917 decree also required the existing archivists throughout Indochina to complete a three to six-month internship in Hanoi to learn methods of classification and conservation. Through this “favorable decentralization,” the Hanoi Central Archives standardized technical methods and inspected all the existing archives maintained by the Governor General and its departments, the residence superiors, and all the public papers from the five different *pays* in the Indochinese Union.

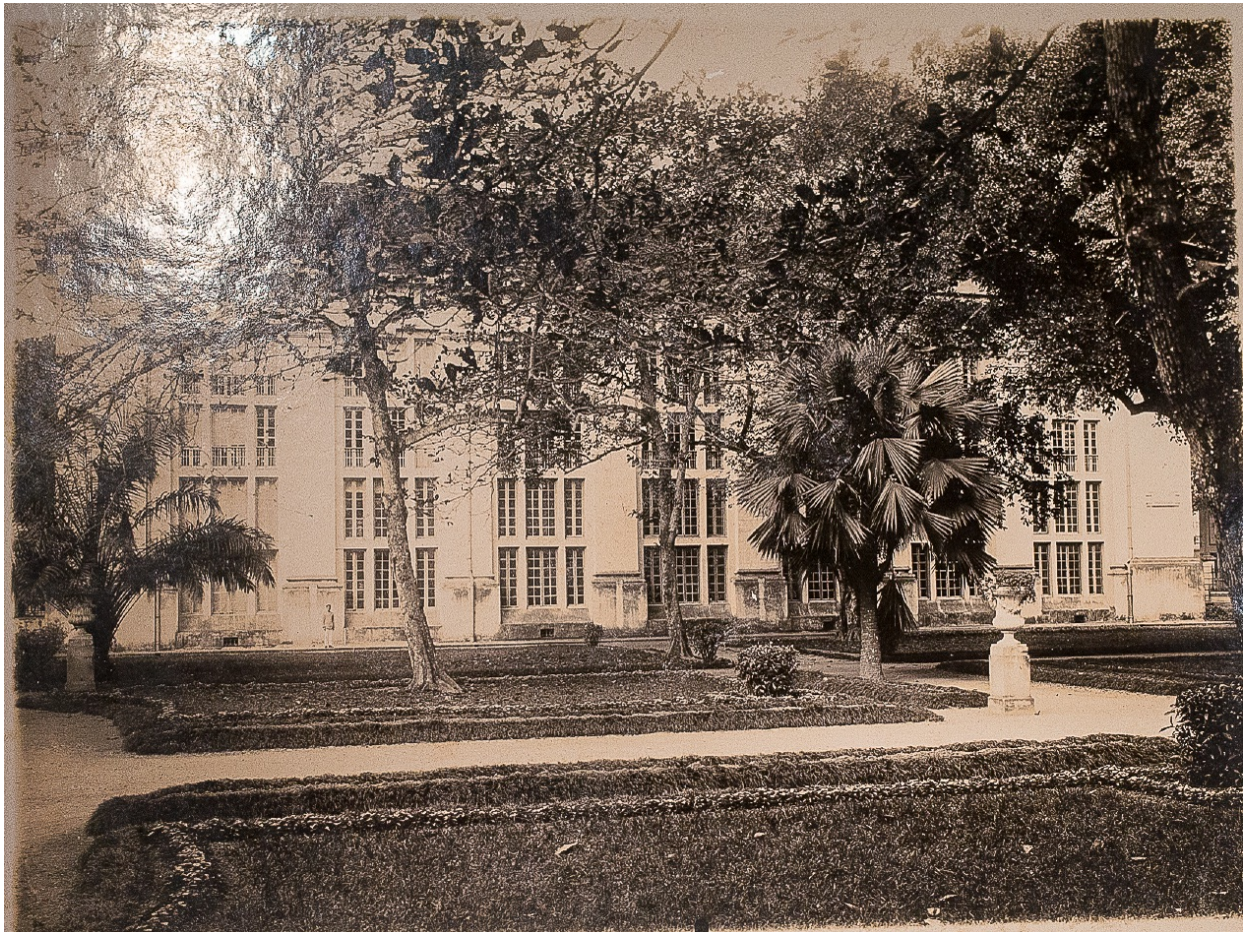


Image 1-2. Front façade of the Central Archives in Hanoi. The Central Archives organized all governmental documentation and permitted limited consultation with special permission. In 1925, the archives governmental building included the Central Archives on the ground floor, the Superior Resident of Tonkin and Municipality (1st floor), General Services of Indochina (2nd

⁴² Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l'Indochine*. P. 14-15.

floor), Admirals and Governors of Cochinchina, Governor General of Indochina (3rd floor). Photographs 1-2 to 1-5 were taken together, approximately in the 1930s.⁴³



Images 1-3 and 1-4. Photographs of the interior storage and consultation space (pictured are most likely archives personnel and administrator readers).

⁴³ ANOM, PB, Folder 52 “photographies du service des archives et des bibliothèques à l’Indochine.”



Image 1-5. Original caption of this photograph reads “Central Archives card catalog, 150,000 cards.”



Image 1-6. Staff arrange archives documents at the Central Archives in Hanoi. C. 1936-1940.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940.” Undated photograph.

The directorate attempted to create an all-encompassing bureaucratic system with an efficient and consistent documentation regime. First, government reports, correspondence, and statistics must be produced, replicated *en masse*, and submitted to corresponding higher offices and the local archives for preservation.⁴⁵ Second, all print media—serials, books, maps, images, and records—newly published in Indochina were required to be deposited into the central legal deposit in Hanoi. Moreover, the creation of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries signaled the extension of French authority from the metropole to Indochina through the implementation of a French model of state libraries and documentation. According to the official circular on the Directorate, the new institution would “adopt a uniform classification system similar to that of the metropolitan archives, which makes it easy to maintain and control a good order of the archives.”⁴⁶ With the creation of the directorate, French colonial authority appeared on paper to operate systematically throughout Indochina. The Directorate symbolized a bureaucratic rationality and organization structure—through a hierarchy of standards and reporting protocol, the system seemed to convey the pervasiveness of colonial control throughout all of Indochina. However, in reality the surveillance system of paperwork, records, and publications operated in a mode of “favorable decentralization.” The Directorate issued standardized techniques for libraries and archives management, yet the everyday implementation of these responsibilities varied widely based on specific personnel and local needs of each archive and library.

Paul Boudet, Director of Archives and Libraries in Indochina and the Development of Encyclopedic and Lending Libraries for the Public

Colonial libraries were not only influenced by Sarraut’s policy of Franco-Vietnamese association, the rhetoric of France’s modernizing mission, and standards of metropolitan library science. They were also shaped by the leadership of the first and only colonial era director of the archives and libraries and Central Library in Hanoi, Paul Boudet.⁴⁷ Paul Boudet (1888-1948) graduated from the renowned archives and libraries school in Chartres [École nationale des Chartres] (1909) as an archivist paleographer.⁴⁸ Prior to coming to Indochina, he served as an archivist-in-training at the Archives of Vosges (1914) and the deputy curator of the libraries and archives of Rouen (1915).⁴⁹ He arrived in Hanoi on March 1917 under the recommendation of the *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* and set about researching the existing

⁴⁵ This centralization of archives from specific departments and services sought to remedy the inaccessible archives. One author described the state of the archives prior to DABI as: “the most absolute disorder and incessant loss of documents, reports, etc... It was impossible to do any research, or it was a huge waste of time.” TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4, “Le service des archives et la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi” *L’éveil économique*, c. 1919. The author signed the article “C.H.”

⁴⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 38 “Création de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1917” [Creation of the Direction of Archives and Libraries of Indochina], Document: Circular Number 36-C from the Governor General of Indochina to the Heads of Local Administration and the Heads of Services related to the Governor General, Hanoi July 6, 1917.

⁴⁷ Paul Boudet served as director of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries and the Central Library in Hanoi from 1917 to 1945. Rémi Bourgeois also worked as interim director 1938-1939.

⁴⁸ ANOM, PB, Folder 86, “Dossier Relatif à Paul Boudet,” s.d.

⁴⁹ André Masson, “Paul Boudet,” *Bibliothèque de l’école des Chartes* 107, no. 2 (1948): 335–37. Paul Boudet died from sickness on November 11, 1948 after a final attempt to address the administrative handover and archives and library situation during the First Indochina War. Boudet has been honored as one of the leaders of intellectual achievements of France in the Far East.

organizational structure of archives in Indochina. On November 30, 1917, Governor General Sarraut appointed Paul Boudet to be the first director of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in Indochina. André Masson described Boudet as an ambitious and “extraordinary 28-year-old leader,” who was handed the management of a service with little to no budget or staff but “tirelessly pursued a policy of construction and development according to the most modern standards of library science and archival work.”⁵⁰



Image 1-7. Paul Boudet seated in his office at the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina.⁵¹

Governor General Pierre Pasquier praised Paul Boudet’s dedication to the difficult task of organizing the archives and libraries with exuberant admiration:

You [Paul Boudet] arrived with this ardor which shield the neophytes. You reached the Asiatic waters and its mysteries as a man of letters possessed by a curiosity that is like the execution of a science. In a domain unexplored by a “chartist” you embarked on a task, and my what a task! French Indochina, its history, its past, its “actions” by the first conquerors, the imprint of its first administrators! You were going to be the secular Benedictine who would save, preserve this heritage of the past. Indochina? What a destination! Its founders? What a subject [of study]. Protect and pass down its treasures? What a mandate!⁵²

Pasquier respectfully commended Boudet’s “courage and firm resolution” to organize the documents of Indochina. In particular, Pasquier emphasized the critical importance of Boudet’s

⁵⁰ Masson. P. 336.

⁵¹ ANOM, PB, Folder 52.

⁵² Pierre Pasquier served as Administrator of the Civil Services in Indochina and Superior Resident of Annam (1921) and Governor General of Indochina (1928-1934). Pierre Pasquier, Preface to Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine*. P. 3-5.

work for the study and preservation of French colonial history. Pasquier argued that with organized archives of precious texts and administration reports, the current government could study and learn from its past. Boudet could “rescue the tragic state of documents...from the hordes of ‘African termites’ which like a scourge ravage everything in its path...” and apply strict conservation techniques and Western science to preserve the precious colonial documents.

Beyond his administrative duties, Boudet was a scholar-bureaucrat, actively involved in academic life in the colonies. His personnel files in the *Archives nationales d’outre mer* (colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence, France) reveal a wealth of unpublished research and manuscripts on such topics as Vietnamese history from the tenth to eighteenth centuries, Vietnamese intellectual figures, history of the book and archives in Portugal and Rome, as well as the relations between Indochina and Japan, Cambodia, China, Laos, and Siam.⁵³ Boudet taught history and geography at *l’École de droit et de pédagogie de Hanoi* (1918-1922) and Vietnamese history at *la faculté de droit de l’Indochine* (1939-1945). A member of the Council of Scientific and Historical Research, the ÉFEO, and the Society of Geography in Hanoi, Boudet also published in the *Revue indochinoise Extrême-Asie* (serving as the director in 1925-1930).⁵⁴

Under his leadership, Paul Boudet standardized technical and administrative policies for documentation, archives, and libraries in Indochina. Most importantly, Boudet contributed to the definition of the function, mission, and definitions of a modern library in Indochina. In his study *Les archives et les bibliothèques de l’Indochine*, completed in 1919, Boudet described the current disorderly state of archives and libraries in Indochina and the urgent necessity for centralization.⁵⁵ In his study, Boudet defined the structure, mission, and model of libraries based on French libraries and explicated which types of library works had ‘value.’ Boudet divided libraries into three categories: encyclopedic libraries, lending public libraries, and specialized scientific libraries. Of these three library categories, Boudet believed that specialized libraries such as the ÉFEO, Public Works library, or scientific institutions had already developed modern and effective systems of library organization and access. He believed that encyclopedic libraries and lending public libraries were in dire need of complete reorganization. Boudet argued that encyclopedic libraries must assemble the “best works of all levels of knowledge” in orderly and stable collections. Emphasizing comprehensiveness and order, Boudet believed encyclopedic libraries to be the fundamental model for all modern libraries. In comparison, lending public libraries focused on satisfying reader interests but with an important caveat: only “valuable” reading matter should be provided to readers. Boudet argued that lending libraries must not satisfy reader demands for “literary works without value that already clutter the modern bookstore.” Boudet argued that modern lending libraries must provide works of “value” to its readers. However, Boudet was vague about his definition of value. This discursive ambiguity regarding ‘value’, ‘usefulness’, and ‘good,’ reading material often characterized the language of building a ‘modern’ library. By reading closely the reports on library development such as Boudet’s 1919 study, it appears that the tenets of a ‘modern’ library implied French in form, public in function. In other words, a modern library followed the French model of libraries,

⁵³ The ANOM contains a large collection of private papers of Paul Boudet, abbreviated as ANOM, PB.

⁵⁴ In the context of the Paris Colonial Exhibition in 1931, Boudet and Masson also compiled and published a collection of valuable iconography related to the long history of French involvement in Indochina from Catholic missionaries in the seventeenth century to official intervention the nineteenth century. Paul Boudet and André Masson, *Iconographie Historique de l’Indochine Française. Documents sur l’histoire de l’intervention Française en Indochine*, (Paris: G. Van Oest, 1931).

⁵⁵ Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine*.

specifically the Bibliothèque Nationale de France [National Library of France], to provide scientifically classified, curated ‘best’ works to the greater public.

Boudet applied his analytical framework of encyclopedic libraries and ‘valuable’ collections to the Cochinchina Library. He perceived the Cochinchina Library to be both an encyclopedic and lending library in need of complete reorganization and development. Boudet recognized the work of early libraries and archives under the Admirals in Cochinchina from the 1860s to 1880s, who judiciously collected the “best works” such as *Moniteur de la Flotte*, *Tablettes des Deux Charentes*, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, *l’Illustration*, *le Magasin pittoresque*, *le Temps*, and many others. However, Boudet sadly remarked that almost all of the early collections had been destroyed by bookworms: “In all the [early efforts of library collection by the Admirals] there is nothing left or almost nothing. We recover in Saigon a large amount of these newspapers, but worms had reduced these to a state of lacey shreds and they are not in any better [condition] than [documents] subjected to the pestle.”⁵⁶

By 1885-1886, the Cochinchina Library transitioned into a public library, increased its staff number to seven, and expanded its budget to build a collection of “20,000 works of value, of foreign books and in indigenous languages, of local periodicals and that of neighboring countries.”⁵⁷ Boudet commended that these “best works” would connect the colonies to France and keep them “abreast of the intellectual movements of the Metropole.” Boudet requested that the Cochinchina Library maintain a copy of the manuscripts from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Boudet’s vision for Cochinchina was to operate as a colonial library connected back to France. Indigenous language works, local periodicals, and important works from Southeast Asia, could serve local readers, but Cochinchina readers must also be cognizant of the metropole collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. However, Boudet criticized the lack of sustained efforts to transform the Cochinchina Library into a great ‘European’ library – comprehensive in ‘valuable’ topics and systematically organized. Boudet commented that Cochinchina Library administrators failed to carry out the proposed improvements to develop the budget, personnel, and collections. Boudet remarked, “The future of this country does not depend only on the methods employed but also from the perseverance to maintain them.”⁵⁸

Central Library in Hanoi: A Model of Public and Modern Libraries in the Colonies, 1919

Boudet concluded the report with hope, explaining how the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in Indochina established since November 29, 1917 would create a new central library in Hanoi—a model library marked by modern functionality, comprehensiveness, orderliness, wide public access, and links to the metropole. Boudet’s report also proposed the re-organization of existing libraries and establishment of new lending libraries in major cities in Indochina such as Hanoi, Haiphong, Saigon, Hue, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane. Each territory would continue to maintain its regional library and archive with a deputy director, who reported to Paul Boudet and the new Central Public Library in Hanoi.

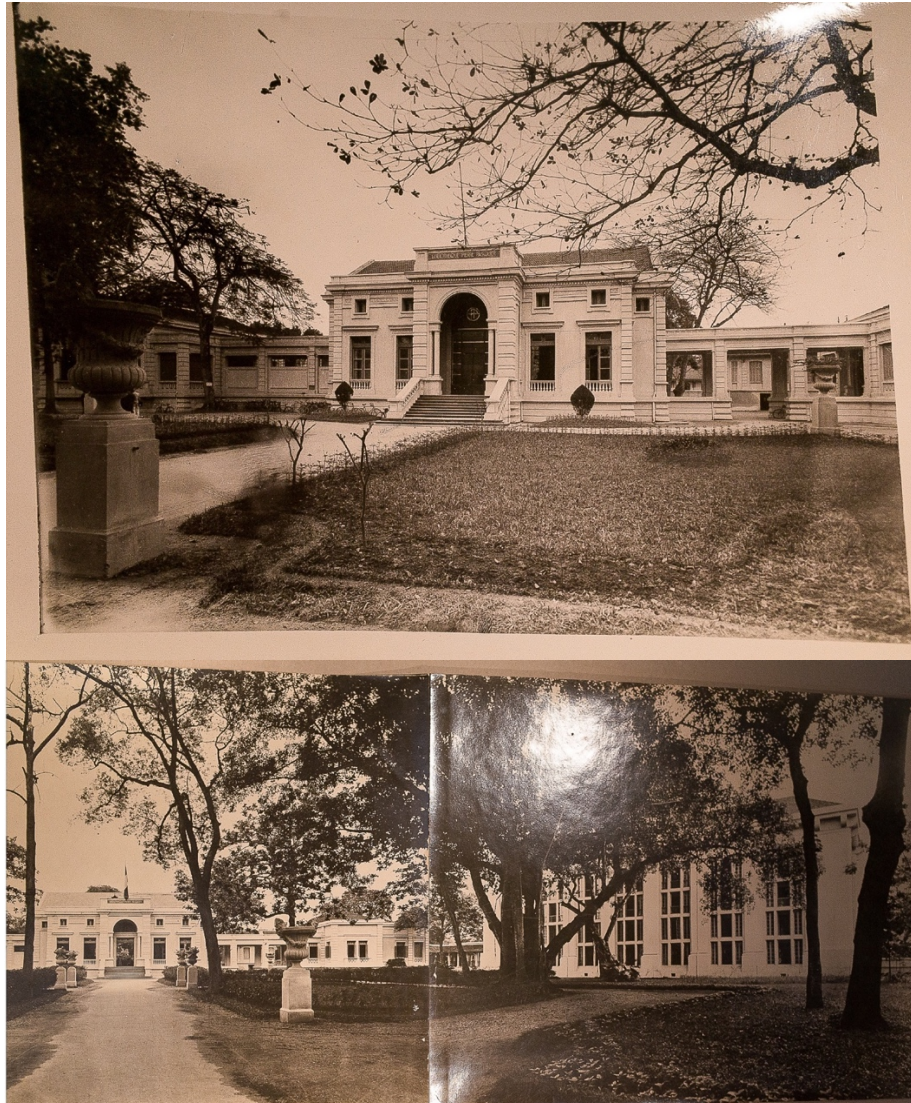
On September 1, 1919, the Central Public Library opened on 31 Rue Borgnis-Desbordes (now 31 Trường Thi Street) in the center of Hanoi. The Central Public Library of Indochina, also called the Central Library and the Pierre Pasquier Library, would become the National Library of Vietnam today. The Central Library was regulated by the Inspector General of Public

⁵⁶ Ibid., P. 17.

⁵⁷ Ibid., P. 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Instruction, the Director of Higher Education, the Governor General of Indochina, and managed by the Director of Archives and Libraries, Paul Boudet. The main part of the Central Library was housed in the ancient palace of the Kinh Lược, the high mandarin representative of the Court of Hue in Tonkin in the pre-colonial period. From its inception, the Central Library included a secretariat (administrative office), a reading hall, a lending section, a working room, a reading room for children, a book binding room, a newspaper and magazine room, a copyright room, and bibliography room. By the end of French rule, the Central Library held over 150,000 works, a daily readership between 300 and 600 readers (majority of whom were Vietnamese), and a popular lending section.⁵⁹



Images 1-8 and 1-9. The first photograph shows the front façade of the Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier (Central Library). The second photograph demonstrates how the Central Library was located in close proximity to the archives and governmental offices building, pictured on the right.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Masson, “Paul Boudet.” P. 336.

⁶⁰ ANOM, PB, Folder 52 “photographies du service des archives et des bibliothèques à l’Indochine.”

The colonial administration envisaged the Central Library to be the model public and modern library for all of Indochina. However, initial plans and publicity for the Central Library in Hanoi were unrealistic and utopic. In a newspaper article published prior to the opening of the Central Library, the author praised Paul Boudet's organizational efforts and the potential for the new Central Library to provide an important resource to Hanoi, described as "the capital, intellectual, and university center of Indochina."⁶¹ The author anticipated the future of the library with optimism: "One will find at the library all the documentation presented by the service in an economical way: reports, notices, statistics, etc. This will be of great use. University students will replace the library staff in the evening, and thus be introduced to the science of classification and preservation of books..." The author argued the importance of the library as a methodologically organized "set of tools [outillage] built according to the newest progressive [methods], bringing together the shelves, files, card catalogs."⁶²

In terms of official mission and protocol for the Central Library, Paul Boudet exported the French library model to the Central Library in Hanoi and all Indochina libraries. According to these expectations, colonial libraries should be 'modern', follow a rigorous classification and control protocol, and provide a curated collection of contemporary and classic works of 'value.' The Central Library in Hanoi was modeled after vague ideals regarding the responsibilities of 'modern' national library in France as well as Enlightenment concepts of knowledge. In his 1919 study *Les archives et les bibliothèques de l'Indochine*, director Paul Boudet argued that the Central Library must maintain two primary tasks: first, the library must function as a comprehensive repository of all that is printed in Indochina and second the library must be "encyclopedic, encompassing all levels of knowledge."⁶³

The Unofficial "National Library" of Indochina: Comprehensive Knowledge, Legal Deposit, and Control of Information

The concept of a library as a comprehensive repository had its origins in nineteenth century European national libraries. According to these European models, national libraries were responsible for producing a legal deposit, national bibliography, and union catalog. These tasks were part of the overarching role of the national library to document the publication history of a nation and to build a national media repository. Furthermore, nation-wide documentation such as legal deposit and national bibliography kept the nation-state abreast of the landscape of print matter and helped to monitor potentially subversive print media.⁶⁴ In 1795 the French National Convention declared the library to be national property and established the right for the national library to obtain legal deposit copies (*dépôt légal*) of all printed publications in the country.⁶⁵ In

⁶¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4, "Le service des archives et la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi" *L'éveil économique*, c. 1919. The author signed the article "C.H."

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l'Indochine*.

⁶⁴ The legal deposit in European national libraries originated out of royal and private libraries which used legal deposit to build collections and monitor information. In comparison, the United States and Australia legal deposit emerged out of copyright law to protect an author's copyright or as a condition for a license to print. "Chapter 2: The Co-Operative Library" in K. W. Humphreys, *A National Library in Theory and in Practice*, (London: British Library, 1988). Pg. 35.

⁶⁵ France abolished the legal deposit during the French Revolution and then reinstated it in 1795 due to copyright claims. *Histoire des Bibliothèques Françaises: Les Bibliothèques Sous l'ancien Régime 1530-1789* (Paris: Ed. du

1811, the National Library of France began publishing an annual national bibliography to document the nation's publishing history, or materials acquired through legal deposit. Besides the national bibliography, the union catalog also recorded information on library holdings within a country. "A library is called a national one when it is the official depository of printed works; a general access library; an information-bibliographical center; and a center of coordination, planning, and stimulation of the entire library system of the nation."⁶⁶ These functions situated the library as the center to define, record, and disseminate 'national' works and 'international' works of significance.

Paul Boudet argued that the development of the Indochina legal deposit was essential to building the Central Library in Hanoi and the National Library in France: "These projects [of library development] are deeply related to the improvement of the legal deposit. Here [in Indochina] as in France, it operates in a faulty way. It is essential that we improve it." Prior to the Directorate, the colonial administration loosely applied an 1881 French law regarding legal deposit to Indochina. During these years, only a limited amount of Indochinese materials made their way to France. Boudet summarized the legal deposit in 1927:

Indochinese publications arrived to France intermittently, and publications from certain countries [*pays*] were not received at all. It is easy to realize, by reading the Bibliography of France, that the publications of Cochinchina were virtually the only publications which arrived to Paris. The consequence was that certain publications—notably that of Tonkin—which was of great documentary interest for Indochina and France—was exhausted from the bookstores and almost impossible to find, even though we should have been able to consult these works certainly at least in the National Library of Paris.⁶⁷

Over time, the Directorate developed more precise and centralized requirements for an efficient legal deposit in Indochina.⁶⁸ In 1919, Boudet proposed the following regime for legal deposit: four copies of all publications (including all print media such as books, pamphlets, newspapers, images, maps, records) published in Indochina must be filed to the legal deposit by the publisher. Two of those legal deposit copies were then transferred to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, one copy to the Central Library deposit in Hanoi, and one copy submitted to respective regional branches of the five Indochina '*pays*'. For example, a newspaper publication from Cochinchina must submit one copy to the Cochinchina Library, one to the Hanoi Central Library, and two to the National Library of France. Boudet concluded that with this application of legal deposit, "the Central Library would become both an encyclopedic library—indispensable in an intellectual center like Hanoi—and a deposit of all that is printed in

Cercle de la Librairie, 1988); *Histoire des Bibliothèques Françaises: Les Bibliothèques Au XX Siècle 1914-1990* (Paris: Ed. du Cercle de la Librairie, 1988).

⁶⁶ Natalia Tyulina, "National Library," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, ed. Allen Kent, Harold Lancour, and Jay E. Daily, trans. Rosalind Kent, vol. 19 (CRC Press, 1976), 94–113. The Bibliothèque du Roi also obtained deposit copies of some works since 1537.

³ Ibid. Pg. 107.

⁶⁷ ANOM, RSTNF Folder 4197 "Archives et bibliothèques/ dépôt légal: pièces de principe, listes mensuelles des périodiques paraissant au tonkin (brochure)," Document "Régie du dépôt légal [Legal Deposit Regime]," Document: "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du dépôt légal en Indochine [Report on the Function of the Legal Deposit in Indochina] by Monguillot Secretary of the Governor General of Indochina to the Minister of Colonies, Hanoi June 22, 1927."

⁶⁸ Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l'Indochine*. P. 19.

Indochina.”⁶⁹ On January 31, 1922, the dépôt légal law changed the responsibilities of deposit submission from the publisher to the printer and added a timeline for submissions. The new law required the local government offices (Superior Residence or Mayor) to transfer the legal deposit copies to the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in Hanoi before the end of each month. Each month the central legal deposit in Hanoi submitted two copies of legal deposits to the Ministry of Interior in France, who was responsible to distribute one copy to the National Library of France and another copy to a major French library.⁷⁰

Using the national library in France as a model, Boudet called for a sustained commitment to collect legal deposits and publish bibliographies. On the surface, the central library functioned like a ‘national’ library of Indochina to organize regional and public libraries, to preserve all the works published in Indochina through legal deposit, and to broadcast its collections through bibliographies. At the same time, the Central Library operated like a smaller, approximate extension of the French National Library in Paris due to the mandatory deposit of all Indochinese works to France. Thus, the Central Library maintained two interwoven identities as a representative of the metropole national library and as a regional library of publications in the colonies.

From its very beginnings, the department of legal deposit was essential to the development of the library collections of the new Central Library in Hanoi. Not only would the legal deposit help build up the library collections in Indochina, but it would also keep abreast of print media published in the colonies. The legal deposit created a surveillance system to understand, record, and preserve all that was written in the colony. In his 1919 report *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine*, Paul Boudet called attention to the dire state of the literary and governmental documentation in Indochina. Boudet began his report claiming the universal imperative to “preserve and maintain order of the administrative documents.” The Directorate emphasized the immense value of archives and documents and the responsibility of archives and libraries staff to protect and conserve the documents for posterity. Following French library and archives law from 1855, the Indochina Directorate of Archives and Libraries also established living quarters within or nearby the buildings for library and archives staff to “protect the works of value.” Described as the “right of lodging”, the director was required to reside within the library and archives compound to conduct “unceasing surveillance” of the materials.⁷¹

Boudet argued that the government needed to preserve these documents from the tropical climate and disorder lest “nothing will remain of the information they hold.” The word ‘information’ here is the French word “*renseignement*” which usually means uncountable information, details, or intelligence. The word “*renseignement*” is used once more in this report when referring to the role of the library to centralize difficult to access information and statistics. Boudet declared,

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ ANOM, RSTNF Folder 4197 “archives et bibliothèques/ dépôt légal: pièces de principe, listes mensuelles des périodiques paraissant au tonkin (brochure),” Documents: “Régie du dépôt légal [Legal Deposit Regime],” “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du dépôt légal en Indochine [Report on the Function of the Legal Deposit in Indochina] by Monguillot Secretary of the Governor General of Indochina to the Minister of Colonies, Hanoi June 22, 1927.” TTLT1, DABI Folder 2014-02 “Application sur la Régie du Dépôt Légal de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine a Hanoi 1951-1954,” Document: “Régie du dépôt légal” c. 1953.

⁷¹ TTLT1, DABI Folder 88 “Logement Aux Fonctionnaires de La Direction Des Archives et Des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1921-1949,” Documents: Letter from Paul Boudet to the Governor General on November 5, 1921 and Letter from Paul Boudet to the General Director of Public Instruction in Indochina on February 3, 1926.

The students and the professors are not the only ones interested in the creation of the libraries. Each and everyone will go there to search for precise information that is currently so difficult to procure: the documents compiled by the Economic Affairs Department which previously remained almost inaccessible can now be usefully consulted there. A large body of statistics, of collections, of publications will be read by the public and convenient catalogs will facilitate quick consultation.⁷²

Three characteristics surround the concept of information in this report. First, information was valuable and thus was worthy of preservation. Second, information was scattered and difficult to obtain and consult without an organizational body such as the library and catalogs. And third, the government and the general ‘public’, not just academics, relied upon the library for literary works, statistics, and general information. Like a national library, the Central Library also had a responsibility to organize comprehensive information and works produced in Indochina for the government, academics, and the general public.

Encyclopedic Knowledge and Order of Information in Bibliographies

Paul Boudet argued that the central library must be “encyclopedic, encompassing all levels of knowledge.” The idea of ‘encyclopedic’ knowledge had its origins in the European Enlightenment. As Peter Burke argues in *Social History of Knowledge*, the development of curricula, libraries, and encyclopaedia during the European Enlightenment advanced a new philosophy of knowledge as cumulative, infinite, and ordered.⁷³ The intellectual publishing project of the *Encyclopédie, a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts* by Jean Le Rond d’Alembert (1714-1783) and Denis Diderot (1714-1783), presented knowledge as ‘encyclopedic’ or arranged into interdependent branches and observed from a vantage point. This ‘modern’ idea that knowledge could be ordered directly influenced French library sciences and colonial organization of the Central Library and Indochina libraries.

For example, the organization of the central library of Hanoi reflected Enlightenment ideas of classification, dissemination of knowledge, and curation by experts. During his tenure, Boudet developed important classification schemes for the archives and libraries and produced the first abridged annual bibliography of books published in Indochina “*Bibliographie de l’Indochine*” beginning in 1922. The first published bibliography was prefaced by the essay “*Pour Mieux Connaître l’Indochine Essai d’une Bibliographie*” where Paul Boudet justified the importance of a functional bibliography of works published on Indochina.⁷⁴ Boudet’s essay demonstrates the relationship between knowledge and empire and highlights different approaches to organizing knowledge. Boudet began his introductory essay by juxtaposing existing bibliography projects with his new, modern project. Boudet argued that eighteenth and nineteenth century projects to build a complete and universal bibliography were overly utopic. This mention of earlier projects alludes to Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine’s experimental

⁷² Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine*. P. 20.

⁷³ Peter Burke, “Classifying Knowledge: Curricula, Libraries, and Encyclopaedia,” in *Social History of Knowledge From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2000), 81–115. For a history of the *Encyclopédie* see Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979).

⁷⁴ Paul Boudet, *Pour Mieux Connaître l’Indochine Essai d’une Bibliographie* (Hanoi-Haiphong: Impr. d’Extrême-orient, 1922).

universal bibliographies, whose work sought to identify and parse out “essential knowledge” from the sea of information that was simply “idiosyncratic conjecture.”⁷⁵

Instead, Boudet advanced the concept of “useful” bibliographies throughout the remainder of his essay. Rather than make a bibliography out of “vain curiosity” or a bibliography that was “too complete” like that of Henri Cordier, Boudet proposed a different type of bibliography.⁷⁶ According to his introductory essay “To better know Indochina,” Paul Boudet carefully selected the works based on their “value or interest” and whether or not its contents in fact accomplished what the title claimed. With vague parameters of “usefulness,” Boudet framed his bibliographic project as antithetical to overly scholarly, totalizing bibliographies that did not efficiently and systematically curate the “imposing mass of colonial literature.” Boudet perceived his project as synthesis of knowledge on Indochina with a functional use for a wider public of scholars, administrators, students, teachers, and businessmen alike. Each entry included the bibliographic information (author, title, publication, size) as well as a short summary of the contents. Examples of bibliographic entries included the following range of published material:

- J. Ajalbert’s *Les Nuages sur l’Indochine* (Paris, L. Michaud, undated) filed under the category “Indochina > Administration”: a series of articles on the formation of Indochina and directed against the Indochinese Administration.
- J. Lan’s *Cours d’agriculture...* (Hanoi-Haiphong, L’Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1910) filed under the category “Indochina > Agriculture”: a study of botany, plant pathology, entomology, agricultural chemistry, and meteorology.
- L. Dumoutier’s *Le Rituel funéraire des Annamites: Étude d’ethnographie religieuse* (Hanoi, Schneider, 1904) filed under the category “Annam > Ethnography”: Study of the mourning, magical ceremonies, and beliefs underlying the Vietnamese rituals.
- E. Lefevre’s *Un voyage au Laos* (Paris, Plon, 1898) filed under the category “Laos > Voyages”: voyage notes which could also serve as a touristic guide.⁷⁷

Boudet’s essay “To better know Indochina” proposed the creation of another bibliography made especially for colonial administrators.⁷⁸ Boudet explains how his new bibliography would provide a quick reference for colonial administrators to “become familiar with the colony.” The booklet would be brief but would contain all the “necessary” information.

⁷⁵ Just a few decades earlier in 1895, the visionary Belgian father of information science, Paul Otlet together with Henri La Fontaine created the revolutionary “Universal Bibliographic Repertory (RBU).” Rather than organize knowledge by books, authors, and topics, the RBU deconstructed the contents of the books from its form and organized knowledge “atomistically.” Otlet and La Fontaine’s RBU attempted to separate out redundancies and noise by a revolutionary approach to knowledge and authorship. W. Boyd Rayward, “Preface” in Paul Otlet, *International Organisation and Dissemination of Knowledge: Selected Essays of Paul Otlet*, trans. W. Boyd Rayward, FID 684 (Amsterdam; Elsevier, 1990). Pg. 2. Paul Otlet and La Fontaine explain their bibliography in “Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine, “Création d’un Répertoire Bibliographique Universel: Note Préliminaire,” *Institut International de Bibliographie Bulletin* 1 (1896 1895): 15–38.

⁷⁶ Henri Cordier and M. A Roland-Cabaton, *Bibliotheca indosinica. Dictionnaire bibliographique des ouvrages relatifs à la péninsule Indochinoise* [Tome 1 à 4 et Tome Index] [Tome 1 à 4 et Tome Index] (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, E. Leroux, 1912).

⁷⁷ Paul Boudet, *Pour Mieux Connaître l’Indochine Essai d’une Bibliographie; Bibliographie de l’Indochine* (Hanoi-Haiphong: Impr. d’Extrême-orient, 1922).

⁷⁸ Throughout the colonial period Paul Boudet and Rémi Bourgeois continued to publish annual bibliographical lists titled Paul Boudet, *Bibliographie de l’Indochine Française*.

Finally, the bibliography would continue to be updated and strive “to become more perfect.”⁷⁹ Boudet justified the creation of this functional bibliography by explaining the importance of understanding the colony. Drawing a connection between empire and knowledge, Boudet argued that Frenchmen, scholars, and writers are “dangerously” ignorant of even elementary aspects regarding Indochina:

One is amazed to find in every instance ignorance where colonial questions arise, even with the cultured Frenchman: the most elementary geographic concepts, situation of countries, nomenclature of major cities and rivers, are the occasion of resounding blunders still frequent in our time. One easily confuses Laos and Cambodia, Tonkin and Cochinchina.

This ignorance is not without danger. It breeds disinterest in the French with regards to programs emphasizing the commercial, industrial, or social development of our colonies. It estranges the scholars and writers from colonial concerns and problems. It allows for the most perfidious campaigns against our Administration. It discredits the colonial profession and turns people away from taking these already unpopular jobs.⁸⁰

Boudet explained that this ignorance produced a sense of estrangement from colonial concerns and undermined the colonial administration. Drawing parallels to analogous “French indifference” in West Africa, Boudet explained that Georges Hardy, former Director of Education of West Africa, had suggested that a remedy to indifference was the organization of colonial history and documentation. Boudet concluded his essay with the mission of the bibliography: to help “better understand and love the beautiful country of Indochina.” This introductory essay shows the importance of state documentary projects within visions of empire. Documentation projects such as the bibliography were offered as solutions to problems of indifference and ignorance within the colonial administration. Bibliographies could provide an introductory primer for colonial administrators to understand and work in Indochina.

Documentation Tools for a Legible Indochina: Libraries, Archives, Bibliographies, Research Institutions

The organization of knowledge on Indochina was not only a way to combat colonial administrative ignorance, but also was part of the essential responsibilities of the colonial government. The state project of classifying people, places, and property into legible domains was essential to the creation of modern nation states.⁸¹ State naming and counting practices attempted to make the human and physical landscape ‘legible’ and thus more easily standardized for the purpose of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion. The application of statistical data to natural, human, and military resources was a crucial tool and tactic of empire

⁷⁹ Paul Boudet, *Pour Mieux Connaître l’Indochine Essai d’une Bibliographie*, P. 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 1.

⁸¹ James C. Scott, John Tehranian, and Jeremy Mathias, “The Production of Legal Identities Proper to States: The Case of the Permanent Family Surname,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 4–44; James Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

building and control.⁸² As Nicholas Dirks has argued in his work on British colonial India, “colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it.”⁸³

Based on technologies of ‘objective’ science such as data collection, taxonomies, and classification, an information architecture of colonial knowledge emerged with its own set of methods, discourse, and disciplines.⁸⁴ The information architecture of Indochina comprised of institutions such as libraries, archives, and research groups; information tools such as statistics, surveys, research essays, encyclopedia, and maps; and actors such as professional and amateur scholars, translators, administrators, and librarians. The elaborate information architecture of Indochina both defined the body of knowledge on ‘Indochina’ and legitimized French colonialism. For example, according to archive and library administrators, the official documents and everyday archives—correspondence, notes, reports by chief administrators in Indochina—were a precious documentation of “nothing more glorious than the colonial French colonial history of the conquest and development of our influence in the Far East.”⁸⁵

Libraries and bibliographies curated French Orientalist scholarship on Indochina. These categorizations organized colonial knowledge into topics of understanding a foreign and pre-modern ‘Other.’ The production and ordering of Orientalist scholarship reaffirmed the construct of the Orient (East) as putatively opposite to the civilizational superiority of the Occident (West).⁸⁶ For example, bibliographies created an understanding of Indochina following Western categories of knowledge (such as geographic boundaries and disciplines) and the assumption that colonies existed in an alternative, pre-modern category. Paul Boudet’s “Bibliographie de l’Indochine” published in 1922 comprised of 480 entries of French language works on the topic of “Indochina.”⁸⁷ Divided into the sections General Indochina, Annam, Cambodge, Cochinchina, Laos, and Tonkin, each section was further separated into alphabetical topics. These divisions of knowledge followed the geo-political boundary of the five *pays* of Indochina, a French colonial construction of geographic boundary and administration. Furthermore, the 1922 bibliography topics reveals how the scholarship on Indochina followed standard orientalist categories of

⁸² Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge the British in India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); James Louis Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁸³ Nicholas Dirks, Forward to Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge the British in India*.

⁸⁴ Professional orientalists and institutions of colonial knowledge such as libraries and archives defined their discipline and methodologies by emphasizing their practice of “science désintéressée”, a science that was impartial and adhered to a scientific method. Other core aspects of an object science include principles of precision, abundant proof, and analysis. Pierre Singaravélou, *L’École Française d’Extrême-Orient ou l’institution des marges: essai d’histoire sociale et politique de la science coloniale* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999). P. 50.

⁸⁵ André Masson summarizes 10 years of the Directorate, its mission, and the work of Paul Boudet. TTLT1 DABI, Folder 4, Document: André Masson, "La direction des Archives et Bibliothèques de l'Indochine 1917-1927, *L'éveil économique*, Number 506, February 20, 1927.

⁸⁶ Edward Said’s seminal work demonstrates how Europeans have managed, produced, and invented the Orient and the Occident through the development of a scientific and scholarly discourse of the ‘Orient’ (the East) as the antithesis of the civilizational superiority of the ‘Occident’ (the West). Over time, this discourse of the ‘orient’ manifested in institutions, imagery, scholarship, and colonial styles into the formal academic discipline of Orientalism with a set of epistemologies, rational justifications, and scientific explanations that perpetuate a binary between the West and the East. Said argues that since the late eighteenth century, there has been a steady interchange between the imaginative meanings of the Orient and the academic tradition of ‘orientalism’. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁸⁷ Paul Boudet, *Pour Mieux Connaître l’Indochine Essai d’une Bibliographie* (Hanoi-Haiphong: Imprimerie d’Extrême-orient, 1922).

knowledge on non-western societies: ethnography, folklore, geography, history, language, missions, customs, religion, voyages, and iconography. Many of the categories reflected colonial commercial or military interests such as mines and minerology, administration, commerce, law, and military. The bibliographic category of Indochina and its five *pays* reinforced the colonial construct of ‘Indochina’ as a place with a distinctive history, culture, language, and geography. Furthermore, the categories organized knowledge through a Western lens of otherness, considering these societies as not yet modern. Topics of ethnography, folklore, geography, language, customs, religion, and iconography attempted to make legible an exotic landscape and its peoples for Western readers. Furthermore, the bibliography only cited literature on Indochina produced in French language (and other Western languages translated to French) up to 1922. The topics ranged from administration, colonization, and literature to more specific topics of research such as botany, medicine, and linguistics. In other words, the bibliography compiled Western knowledge on Indochina intended for Western readers.

Colonial projects such as bibliographies, archives, libraries, and research schools like the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (French School of the Far East) defined and researched ‘Indochina’ as a geo-political reality with a cultural and linguistic history deemed worthy of study and conservation. Many of the early librarian and archivist administrators, including Paul Boudet worked closely with the *ÉFEO*, and together contributed to the production of colonial knowledge on Indochina. Originating from the 1898 French archaeological mission, the *ÉFEO* defined its primary mission as the study of ethnic groups, language, and all Asian civilizations under the banner of “scientific study of the history, the races, the languages and the religions of Indochina”.⁸⁸ Influenced by the *ÉFEO*’s early mission of archaeology and ethnology, much colonial scholarship on Indochina was oriented towards recovering a “lost antiquity” or intrinsic Indochinese culture. This scholarly mission justified the role of French colonialism as an enlightened ‘protector’ to rescue, discover, and preserve an ‘authentic’ culture of Indochina. Research institutions like the *ÉFEO* and libraries perpetuated a western hierarchy of knowledge— where French colonialism brought modern science and order to a pre-modern Indochina. For example, colonial ethnological projects such as Pierre Huard and Maurice Durand’s *Connaissance du Vietnam* sought to catalog a pure ‘indigenous’ Indochina civilization into legible, ordered categories.⁸⁹ These projects used Western categories of pre-modern civilizations such as rituals, ethnology, language, and customs to understand, research, and document Vietnamese society, culture, and history.

Throughout the French colonial period, libraries and archives were the primary state and social institutions to accumulate, curate, and disseminate colonial knowledge. Through the act of organizing materials on ‘Indochina,’ libraries and archives formalized Indochina through a Western epistemological lens of information science and orientalist knowledge. Indochina was made ‘legible’ via Western technologies of information science (documentation, archives, and

⁸⁸ L’*École Française d’Extrême-Orient* (*ÉFEO* or the French School of the Far East) originated from the 1898 French archaeological mission in Asia (*Mission Archéologique d’Indo-chine*), an initiative led by three members of the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres: Auguste Barth, Émile Senart, and Michel Breal with support of Governor General of French Indochina, Paul Doumer. Based in Saigon at the time, the institution changed its name to l’*École Française d’Extrême-Orient* in 1900 and moved to Hanoi in 1902 the new capital of the Indochinese Federation. The mission of the *ÉFEO* derives from Marcel Mauss. Oscar Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam’s Central Highlanders: A Historical Contextualization, 1850-1990* (University of Hawaii Press, 2003). P. 74.

⁸⁹ This project sought to “popularize the essential facts of the civilization and culture of the Vietnamese” prior to its “submersion” to Western civilization in the twentieth century. Pierre Huard and Maurice Durand, *Connaissance du Viêt-nam* (Hanoi: L’*École Française d’Extrême-Orient*, 1954).

libraries), mapping, concepts of religion and race, and filtered through a Western understanding of civilization.

Symbolic Modernity: The Central Library as an Extension of Civilization and Modernity to Indochina

The Central Library also functioned as a symbol of modernity and the French civilizing mission to bring education and social progress to the colony. Shortly after the opening of the Central Library, Vietnamese librarian Nguyễn Khắc Nguyễn wrote a press release calling for his Vietnamese compatriots to visit the Central Library.⁹⁰ The announcement was published in Vietnamese and French in the pages of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's magazine *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* on September 24, 1919. Emphasizing the public good of the library, he declared "This library is like a higher education establishment for all, from the farmer to the official, to come and learn and improve their professional skills and develop their intelligence." With glowing and earnest praise for the colonial state and libraries, Nguyễn declared,

How fortunate we are to have Governor General Albert Sarraut who always thinks to improve the future of our country. He established many great public works in Indochina, such as the library where you can find all kinds of books. And possibly due to the grace and politics of this good Chief of Colonies, our Annam [Vietnam] stands among the powerful nations of the world. Oh! My dear compatriots, come, let us come in crowds to learn in this library, not to betray the hope of our country and that of the Governor General Sarraut!⁹¹

Alluding to the other public works projects by Sarraut and Doumer such as the Indochinese University in Hanoi (opened in 1906 and reopened in 1917), primary and secondary schools, and roads and railways, Nguyễn situated the establishment of the Central Library within the development of "the future of our country." Addressing the Vietnamese people, Nguyễn exclaimed that the library and education were critical to the advancement of the Vietnamese people. Emphasizing the importance of education for empowerment, he stated, "Today we are ignorant, we do what we can. But when we gain sufficient education, we can better our conditions of existence." Calling the Vietnamese "powerless" and "poor," Nguyễn bids his readers to look to their neighbors, Japan and China, as models of civilizational empowerment through study abroad in the West. "See our neighbors: Japan and China. Why have they sent their children to Europe or America? It is not to spread [their own civilization to other countries] but to collect the seeds of great civilizations from two worlds." Nguyễn concluded with a reminder that the library was truly open for all Indochinese—both Vietnamese and Europeans.

This press release on the library demonstrates how the Central Library was fundamentally important to the colonial project of the civilizing mission and popular education. The Central Library operated as a platform to spread Western ideas and popular education as well as a symbol of the superiority of French modernity and civilization in colonial Indochina. Envisioning the Central Library as an invaluable resource of centralized knowledge, Boudet explained in his 1919 study that the Central Library of Indochina in Hanoi would attract a larger public, specifically the elite intellectual Vietnamese and the youth of the Indochinese University

⁹⁰ ANOM, PB, Folder 48. Nguyễn Khắc Nguyễn, Untitled Article, *Trung Bắc Tân Văn*, 24 September 1919.

⁹¹ Ibid.

in Hanoi.⁹² Boudet explained that with the legal deposit and organization of all works published in Indochina, the Central Library would contribute to creating Hanoi as an intellectual capital of Indochina. Boudet emphasized that the library was vital for academics and the general everyday user. Surrounded by gardens and equipped with adequate lighting, the library reading room offered “workers and simple readers a pleasant and quiet retreat.”⁹³

As seen in the writing of Paul Boudet and Nguyễn Khắc Nguyễn, the discourse of library development used the language of education and civilizational advancement to reaffirm the necessity of French colonialism and a mutually beneficial Franco-Vietnamese collaboration. Colonial reports and cultural periodicals would reiterate the following rhetoric: the French colonial relationship was necessary to guide and develop Indochinese cultural and civilizing projects such as libraries, schools, and conservation initiatives such as archives. According to Boudet, civilizational advancement through such projects as the library carried a “liberalizing and emancipatory potential.”⁹⁴ Yet, this promise of cultural, political, and economic development of Indochina into a modern ‘civilization’ and eventual independence from France was left ambiguous and unfulfilled. From 1917 to 1919, administrators such as Paul Boudet framed and justified library and archives development in Indochina around French library and information science, European Enlightenment concepts of knowledge, and the French civilizing mission to bring modernity, culture, and education to Indochina. However, over time the actual implementation of a centralized system of archives and libraries throughout Indochina became more of an idealistic vision than a colonial reality.

Part 3

The Directorate in Motion: Challenges and Limitations in Library Development throughout Indochina, 1917-1939

Limitations in Documentation of Indochina Print Culture: Legal Deposit and Bibliographies

After subsequent decrees to update and streamline the legal deposit in 1919, 1922, 1924, 1925, and 1928, the submission of publications to the legal deposit improved significantly compared to earlier years. In a 1927 report to the Ministry of Colonies in Paris, secretary to the Governor General of Indochina Monguillot summarized the successes of the legal deposit after the reorganization in 1922: “Effective control has been exercised over the literary production of the five countries [*pays*] of the union. Shipments are made regularly every month to the National Library of France. Every semester, the Directorate of Archives and Libraries publishes in the *Official journal of Indochina* a list of works deposited during the six preceding months.”⁹⁵ The National Bibliography of France included some of these Indochinese publications in its yearly bibliography. Monguillot remarked that the legal deposit and bibliography publications brought

⁹² Boudet, *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l'Indochine*.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Boudet explains the project of the archives and libraries as part of the “same magnificent plan” of educational reform that contributes to Indochina’s “realization of a liberal and emancipatory politics whose success grows each day.” Ibid.

⁹⁵ ANOM, RSTNF Folder 4197 “archives et bibliothèques/ dépôt légal: piéces de principe, listes mensuelles des périodiques paraissant au tonkin (brochure),” Documents: “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du dépôt légal en Indochine,” “Régie du dépôt légal,” Report on the Function of the Legal Deposit in Indochina by Monguillot Secretary of the Governor General of Indochina to the Minister of Colonies, Hanoi June 22, 1927.

international attention to Indochinese literary culture and cited how the New York Public Library, the John Crerar Library of Chicago, the American Geographical Society, the Library of the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia, Library of Brussels, and Library of the Colonial Institute of Rome requested published list of the legal deposits from Indochina.

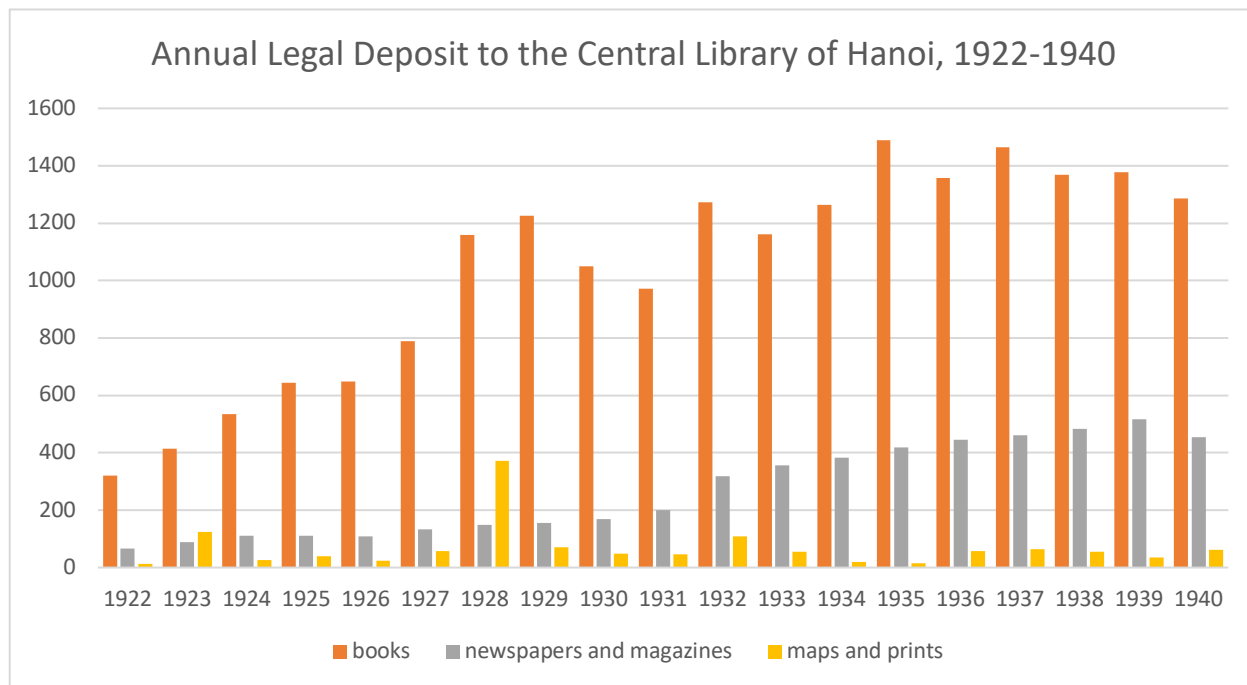


Diagram 1-10. Graph of yearly legal deposit to the Central Library of Hanoi according to format.⁹⁶

However, Monguillot and other higher-level administrative reports might have exaggerated the successful implementation of the legal deposit. Closer analysis of the everyday lower level documentation from the directorate reveals that adherence to the legal deposit continued to function unevenly throughout Indochina. According to official policy, all print culture (books, serials, images, records) was required to be deposited into the colonial legal deposit at time of publication in Indochina. However since 1917, publishers, authors, and printers found the legal deposit to be a “huge inconvenience,” and did not always follow through with the legal deposit policy.⁹⁷ Two levels of delays continued with the legal deposit: first, the failure of printers and publishers to file new publications to the local administrative offices (such as the Superior Resident in Tonkin) and secondly, the delays from the Directorate in Hanoi to send legal deposit copies to France. The directorate sent countless letters to the local administration demanding monthly deposit of newly published works to the legal deposit. However, the local administration often ignored these demands or had to delay response while awaiting submissions from the publisher and printer. For example, in 1926 the Direction of Archives and Libraries sent letters to the Governor of Cochinchina in Saigon, the Resident of

⁹⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1641 “statistiques annuelles de 1922 à 1940 des journaux et revues consultés et prêtés à la Bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi 1922-1940” Document: “Dépôt Legal 1922-1940.”

⁹⁷ ANOM, RSTNF Folder 4197, Documents: “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du dépôt légal en Indochine,” “Régie du dépôt legal,” Report on the Function of the Legal Deposit in Indochina by Monguillot Secretary of the Governor General of Indochina to the Minister of Colonies, Hanoi June 22, 1927.

Haiduong, the Superior Resident in Tonkin, and the Superior Resident in Cambodge demanding the deposit of recent works to the Legal Deposit Service in Hanoi.⁹⁸ The Directorate sent a letter to the Superior Resident of Cambodge on April 7, 1926, and noted that “the legal deposit service has not received any publications from the French and Cambodian printers in Cambodge except for *L'Écho du Cambodge*.”⁹⁹ On June 8, 1926, the Directorate specified to the Superior Resident in Tonkin to submit to the legal deposit several books and periodicals including *Truyện Thuý Kiều* by Trần Trọng Kim and Bùi Kỳ, *Lectures illustrées sur l'histoire de France* by Taboulet and Imbert, *Lục mẫu đơn* by Vũ Đình Long, *Cổ học tinh hoa* by Nguyễn Văn Ngọc and Trần Lê Nhân, and the serial publications of the Chamber of Agriculture, Chamber of Commerce, and *Le courrier automobile*. The request cited legal protocol for the legal deposit “related to the control of Vietnamese printing and the press, which stipulates that all the deposits must be submitted by the end of each month to the Hanoi Direction of Archives and Libraries.” With no response, the directorate followed up on September 4, 1926 with the same request.

The legal deposit and lack of sustained implementation reveals the torpor of colonial policy—without a consistent policy, clear incentive or punishment to adhere to the legal deposit, the legal deposit was an administrative vision and logistical fuss. In an unsigned letter addressed to the librarian at the National Library of France on November 29, 1935, the author expressed that the recent laws in 1925 and 1933 regarding the legal deposit have not yet been applied to Indochina. Instead, even by 1935 the current Indochinese legislation was still based on the French legal deposit law of 1881.¹⁰⁰ On February 21, 1938 Yves Chatel from the office of the Superior Resident of Tonkin sent a circular to the printers of Tonkin demanding printers to adhere to the regulations from 1927 and 1928 on the legal deposit and the press.¹⁰¹ He stated that “it is often observed that new works are put on sale at the time of their publication [rather than first] deposited to the office of administrative authorities in the conditions required by law.” This circular demonstrates the failure of printers to comply to legal deposit law, resulting in delays or gaps in print literature deposited to the central legal deposit in Hanoi. Since printers and publishers as well as local administrative offices failed to implement a consistent legal deposit of new works, documentation on Indochina print culture was far from comprehensive. Legal deposit required local administrative offices to compile monthly lists of new publications, of which the Directorate in Hanoi would generate its yearly bibliography of new works, the *Bibliographie de l'Indochine*.

In 1922, Paul Boudet released the first of a series of bibliographies, the *Bibliographie de l'Indochine* — a comprehensive but also distilled single project that documented all the “essential” works published in Indochina. However, attempts to update and produce a yearly bibliography were inconsistent. In 1929 Paul Boudet and the scholar and librarian-archivist Rémi Bourgeois published a retrospective bibliography, *Bibliographie de l'Indochine Française 1913-1926*. Louis Finot summarized their initiative as an ambitious response to Henri Cordier's

⁹⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 216 “Envoi par la direction des archives et des bibliothèques de l'Indochine des ouvrages au service du dépôt légal,” 1926.

⁹⁹ Ibid. *L'Écho du Cambodge* was a French language weekly newspaper founded in 1922 in Phnom Penh.

¹⁰⁰ ANOM, RSTNF Folder 4197, Document: Letter to Monsieur Dacier, Bibliothèque nationale, 29 Novembre 1935, Paris.

¹⁰¹ ANOM, RSTNF Folder 4197, Document: Letter from Yves C. Chatel of Superior Resident of Tonkin to the Directors of Printers in Tonkin, Hanoi February 21, 1938. Chatel summarized article 3 of

complete but indecipherable *Bibliotheca Indosinica* published in 1912.¹⁰² Finot commended the efforts of Boudet and Bourgeois to make a research tool but criticized the omission of important authors and texts. Finot remarked that the bibliography must be “supplemented by more exhaustive efforts and on the other hand lightened by eliminating works without value. It is necessary that the ‘average reader’ looking for information on a given subject finds an indication of all that is essential on the subject—nothing more and nothing less.”¹⁰³ Later volumes to *Bibliographie de l’Indochine Française* were published sporadically: volume 2 was published in 1931 covering the years 1927-1929, volume 3 published in 1933 focused on one year 1930, and volume 4 covered the years 1930-1935 and was not published until 1943.

The sporadic publication of the *Bibliographie de l’Indochine Française* and failures of the legal deposit demonstrate the limitations of the Directorate to systematically document print culture in Indochina. For the legal deposit, the colonial administration loosely applied French law and then frequently amended it for Indochina. As shown in the evidence above, adherence to the legal deposit was not clearly distributed down to the local administration and publisher and printer level even by 1938. As a result, the directorate could not produce a completely comprehensive bibliography of all works. As evident in the countless boxes of requests, demands, and reports, the directorate and colonial administration dedicated immense efforts to the task of bibliographic control—demanding publishers and printers to follow through with legal deposit, requesting monthly lists of new publications, reiterating and revising legal protocol for the Indochina press and publication. This ‘control work’ was an essential part of government documentation and legibility. As shown in chapter 4, by the 1930s and 1940s ‘control work’ also carried a political purpose to monitor anti-colonial publishing and to promote positive colonial propaganda.

Builders of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina: The Labor of Chartists, French Women, and Vietnamese Personnel

Who were the builders of the libraries and archives? During the French colonial period a cohort of French, “Chartists” (trained at the Grande École de Chartres school for archives and libraries) served general management positions as “curators” or “archivist-librarians” throughout Indochina. Notably, Paul Boudet, Léon Saint-Marty, André Masson, Rémi Bourgeois, and Simone de Saint-Exupéry contributed to building collections, operations manuals, and bibliographies as well as trained indigenous secretaries and archivist-librarians.¹⁰⁴ Léon Saint-Marty served as curator of the library of Cochinchina and deputy director of the Direction of Archives and Libraries. Meanwhile in Cambodia, Jacques Quesnel worked as the curator of the Central Cambodia Library in Phnom Penh and Suzanne Karpelès (1890-1968) facilitated the development of the Buddhist Institute Library and the Royal Library. Throughout the colonial period, only one female, Simone de Saint-Exupéry, and one Vietnamese person, Ngô Đình Nhu,

decree signed on October 4, 1927 and article 1 of decree signed on January 3, 1928 requiring all printed materials except bulletins and commercial circulars, to be filed at the time of their publication by the printer. Two copies must be made for printed material, three copies for stamps and music, and 4 copies for periodical publications.

¹⁰² Louis Finot, “Paul Boudet et Rémi Bourgeois: Bibliographie de l’Indochine Française, 1913-1926,” *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* 28, no. 3 (1928): 500–504.

¹⁰³ Finot, P. 503.

¹⁰⁴ TTLT2, GC Folder 30341 “Dossier Relatif à la Suggestion de Mlle de Saint-Exupéry concernant la Réorganisation de la Bibliothèque et des Archives du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine année 1939,” Document: Letter from Simone de Saint-Exupéry to Governor of Cochinchina (Direction des Bureaux) Saigon, March 7, 1939.

held high management administrative position officially in the Directorate of Archives and Libraries.¹⁰⁵

Simone de Saint-Exupéry (1898-1978) was born on January 26, 1898 in Lyon (Rhône) and was the older sister of the famous writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.¹⁰⁶ Simone de Saint-Exupéry received her diploma as an archivist-paleographer at École nationale des Chartres in 1926 and worked in the Direction of Archives and Libraries in Hanoi since 1928. On February 20, 1937 she was sent to work with the Governor of Cochinchina. Her personnel dossier noted foreign language skills in Vietnamese, German, English, and Italian. Saint-Exupéry spent over 25 years working to develop the libraries and archives in Indochina and was a crucial leader in the decolonization of the directorate in the 1950s.

Ngô Đình Nhu was born into a scholarly mandarin family on October 7, 1920 in Phước Qua near Huế in 1910. Nhu studied abroad in Paris, earned a literature degree, and studied at the l'École des Langues orientales vivantes. In 1938, Nhu was the first Vietnamese to complete a diploma in archives and libraries from Chartres. He completed a thesis on the history of seventeenth to eighteenth century Tonkinese culture (*Moeurs et coutumes des Tonkinois aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles d'après les voyageurs et missionnaires*) which received an honorary prize and mention from the French Ministry of National Education. In 1936 Nhu completed his training as archivist-paleographer in Rouen (where Paul Boudet had worked in 1915). Afterwards, he worked in the Central Library in Hanoi as the deputy curator and contributed to compiling the *Đông Dương pháp chế tôn tập* (Recueil général de la Legislation et de la Règlementation de l'Indochine). In 1942, Paul Boudet tasked Nhu with the creation of an archives and library of Annam in Hue where Nhu would serve as director. During World War II and the removal of French administration in 1945, Nhu served as the director of the Central Library in Hanoi for a short period.¹⁰⁷ Afterwards he served as the leading political administrator to his younger brother, Ngô Đình Diệm, who was the first president of the Republic of Vietnam.

¹⁰⁵ Besides Saint-Exupéry another female worked at a high level in the Directorate, Paulette Techine. Paul Boudet's second wife, Paulette worked at DABI from 1921 to 1934 and ascended to the rank of curator. However, compared to Saint-Exupéry, Techine's name rarely appears in organizational documents, letters, and reports in DABI. For more on the role of French women in Indochina, see Marie-Paule Ha, *French Women and the Empire: The Case of Indochina* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12629 "Dossier Individuel des Personnels en Service à la Bibliothèque du Gouvernement de La Cochinchine Années 1930-1945," Document: "Mme de Saint-Exupéry."

¹⁰⁷ ANOM, PB, Folder 48 "Imprimés Sur Les Archives et Bibliothèques de l'Indochine," Document: Mouvement de la Révolution Nationale, n. 232, April 18, 1956. Diến Đào Thị, "Ngô Đình Nhu - Nhà lưu trữ Việt Nam thời kỳ 1938-1946," *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu và Phát triển*, no. 6-7 (2013): 104-5.



Image 1-11. Portrait of Ngô Đình Nhu, 1940.¹⁰⁸

Throughout the colonial period, most of the libraries and archives were understaffed or the staff were inconsistently trained. The positions of deputy director (of the local regional library) archivist-librarians (1st class, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th class), curators, secretaries, and security guards underwent quick administrative turnover and were underfunded by the colonial state. For example, on November 5, 1924 Director Paul Boudet reported to Director of Public Education of Indochina the lack of libraries and archives management staff throughout Indochina.¹⁰⁹ Boudet reported that the libraries and archives of Indochina needed in total 9 management employees (3 curators and 6 librarian-archivists)—two in Hanoi (alongside the director), two in Saigon, two in Phnom Penh, one in Hue, one in Vientiane. However, Boudet informed that currently there were only 6 employees in total, “an insufficiency causing serious difficulties.”¹¹⁰

To resolve this shortage of management administrators, in 1924 Boudet considered two French trained candidates: Monsieur Jean Bouchot, a student of Chartres and professor at University of Beijing and Mademoiselle Chevet, a professor of secondary education in Indochina. Boudet highly preferred the hiring of Bouchot, especially for the position of the Library of Saigon. Boudet commented on the tentative status of Mademoiselle Chevet who could be considered for “a temporary title in the archives of Saigon or Phnom Penh—where she could certainly provide good services, in the absence of more qualified candidates.” In a subsequent letter on November 14 of the same year to the Director of Public Education, Boudet proposed to

¹⁰⁸ Service Information, Propagande, Presse du Gouvernement Général, *Souverains et notabilites d’Indochine (Partie I)*, Editions du Gouvernement General de l’Indochine (Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1943), p. 62-63.

¹⁰⁹ TTLT2, GC Folder 12629 “Dossier Individuel des Personnels en Service à la Bibliothèque du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine années 1930-1945.”

¹¹⁰ TTLT2, GC Folder 12629, Document: Letter from Paul Boudet to the Director of Public Education of Indochina on November 5, 1924.

replace the interim director Madame Ruffier with Bouchot.¹¹¹ Revealing his prejudices against hiring women, Boudet criticized the female labor force to be unskilled and expensive, comparing the capacity of Ruffier to even “worse than a native employee or clerk.” Boudet challenged what he considered to be the hiring of women on the premise of likeability rather than effective capability: “I firmly resolve to give an unfavorable opinion to all female candidates of this kind, presented much more in the interest of a person than in that of the service.”¹¹² After officially hiring Bouchot on March 19, 1926 for the archives and library in Cochinchina, both Boudet and Saint-Marty glowingly praised Bouchot’s classification of the archives and methodical work in Saigon.

However, on July 27, 1928, the newspaper *La Tribune Indochinoise* published a scathing critique titled “The Bouchot Case” on Bouchot’s behavior and condescending opinion towards Vietnamese.¹¹³ The newspaper admonished Bouchot’s newspaper publications which claimed that prior to French colonialism, Vietnamese did not legitimately rule lower Cochinchina and in fact the French had helped in the conquest of the Mekong Delta.

M. Bouchot pretends to be a learned researcher and invokes Gia dinh thuong chi [Gia đình thành thông chí] of Trịnh Hoài Đức. Nguyen Phan Long and H.H.T. of the newspaper *L’echo annamite* demonstrate the danger of this game to allow any rat to enter the doors of the library: it is only necessary that the person have free time and know how to read; Bouchot happens to meet these two conditions...[Bouchot] would like to find in the history of our country, irrefutable proof of our indignity, probably with the secret goal to expose that the Annamese [Vietnamese] have no legitimate reason to protest French occupation of Cochinchina which does not even belong to them...In this case, on behalf of the Annamites, we ask the Government whether the freedom to write in the newspapers is granted to administrators and includes the right to insult the readers who pay for the newspapers.

Defeated, the Vietnamese, resigned themselves to their fate as subjects. The struggle was difficult, and national independence was the price of defeat. Seventy years after these painful events and at the moment when the French Government seems to want to invite us to throw a veil over the past, to only think of the future, one of its agents comes to throw at the natives, without any apparent reason, the gratuitous but cruel insult lacking courage and thought, in order to make us feel resigned...¹¹⁴

The article concludes with a public call to action for Vietnamese to boycott the library and museum: “With regard to M. Bouchot, we ask our Annamese brothers to declare that as long as he remains in office at the library and the museum, the indigenous press will make an energetic campaign with our compatriots to avoid both [the library and museum] at once. The

¹¹¹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12629, Document: Letter from Quesnel to Directeur des Bureaux on December 11, 1922. Catherine Ruffier was the interim director who replaced Saint-Marty in 1922. In contrast to Paul Boudet’s biting remarks of Ruffier’s work in 1924, a 1922 letter from Quesnel to the Directeur des Bureaux commended Ruffier’s “zealousness, dedication, and competence” that merited an exceptional bonus for January 1923.

¹¹² TTLT2, GC, Folder 12629, Document: Letter from Paul Boudet to the Director of Public Education of Indochina on November 14, 1924.

¹¹³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12629, Document: “Le cas bouchot” *La Tribune Indochinoise*, July 27, 1928 number 292. Signed “T.I.”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Annamese, if they really still want to visit [the library and museum], will refuse to have the slightest contact with this administrator who is not content to pick up their piastres, but has the luxury of insulting them collectively.” “The Bouchot Case” article demonstrates the racial tensions between administrators and the larger Vietnamese public that manifested itself in vivid colonial newspaper debates. The commentary on recent governmental initiatives to look past the colonial conquest also reveals Vietnamese social and political resentments of French colonialism. The final call to action demonstrates how boycott of colonial institutions functioned as a method of strategic resistance to colonial injustice.

Library Budgets and Training of Lower-Level Indigenous Librarians, Archivists, and Secretaries

With a limited budget, libraries balanced the expensive costs of personnel wages, building maintenance, and expansion and preservation of library collections. In the 1930s, the Great Depression caused a cash flow crisis in the French colonial economy and an overall tightening of administrative budgets.¹¹⁵ According to the 1931-1932 report, the Directorate was forced to reorganize its entire staff to deal with the recent economic crisis: “The directorate has focused on increasing the technical training of indigenous personnel in order to reduce the number of European staff to only a few specialists. Until this year, the service budget was heavily burdened by the employment of non-specialist staff, in particular of [French] female librarians. Restrictions were made on the staff, and personnel was reduced to four workers in Hanoi, two in Saigon, one in Phnom Penh.”¹¹⁶ Personnel costs consumed a large majority of the library budget, and the report emphasized the lower costs of employing indigenous staff in the Central Library: “the use of indigenous staff is less expensive. Including indemnities for dependents, a secretary (who performs the duties of a deputy librarian or library assistant) is less than 10,000 francs and an orderly (who replaces a guardian or room manager) costs less than 5,000 francs. This low price of labor is especially sensible for the bookbinding workshop which provides a very inexpensive and excellent functioning.”¹¹⁷ The annual directorate 1931-1932 report shared its revised budget breakdown for the Central Library in Hanoi: out of a total budget of approximately 300,000 francs, 178,590 francs were allocated to personnel and 120,750 francs to material costs (purchasing books, binding, furniture, card catalogs, printing, correspondence and communications, ventilation, uniforms for security guards).¹¹⁸

Budget for Personnel

1 archivist-paleographer, curator – 62,430 francs

Central Library Reading Room

1 indigenous archivist-librarian – 15,300

3 secretaries (catalog and reading room) – 24,960

1 secretary (periodicals) – 10,000

¹¹⁵ Andrew Hardy, “The Economics of French Rule in Indochina: A Biography of Paul Bernard (1892-1960),” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 4 (October 1, 1998): 807–48.

¹¹⁶ Paul Boudet, *Gouvernement général de l’Indochine. Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1931-1932)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1933).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* For a comparative context, the total budget for operating all of Cochinchina in 1930 was 200 million francs. P. Gastaldy, ed., *La Cochinchine* (Saigon: Société des Études Indochinoises, 1931). P. 36.

3 orderlies (distribution of books) – 15,780
1 night watchman – 1,440
Central Library Lending Section
2 secretaries – 20,040
2 orderlies – 9,180
Bindery
1 binder – 5,280
1 apprentice -5,280
Cleaning and heavy work
4 coolies – 4,800

This breakdown of personnel budget reveals important insight into the multiple levels of library staff and their comparative salaries based on their position and race. The report noted that the Hanoi Central Library had almost comparative budgets with France’s Lyon library (staff: 196,915 francs, material: 124,600 francs) and Rouen (staff: 190,800 francs, material: 73,152 francs).

The colonial administration had a financial incentive to train indigenous employees in order to alleviate the burden of higher salaried European staff. On October 25, 1930, the colonial administration issued a decree to train a cadre of lower-level indigenous archivists, librarians, and secretaries.¹¹⁹ From 1930 to 1945, the directorate issued a total of 216 diplomas to students after successful completion of a 6-month internship course, four exit examinations on theory (archives, libraries, book history, administration), and two tests on archives and libraries practices.¹²⁰ Held at the Central Library and Central Archives in Hanoi, these courses trained indigenous secretaries, archivists, and librarians in the following wide range of theoretical and practical skills: to protect the materials from insects and humidity; to understand the Indochinese administration; to communicate the collections to administrators and the public; classification of materials and methodic organization and cataloging; library history (history of libraries in France, America, Britain); types of libraries and libraries organization (practical knowledge of the Reading Room and increasing the library collection through purchases, gifts, legal deposit); and the function of the legal deposit in France and Indochina.¹²¹ By 1932, 16 out of 19 of all the Indochinese administrative bodies were staffed with a secretary trained through the six month

¹¹⁹ Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques, *Arrêtés Portant Organisation du Personnel Indigène de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques et Instituant à la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques des Cours d’application Destinés à Former des Secrétaires-Archivistes Indigènes* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1930).

¹²⁰ Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques, *Arrêtés Portant Organisation du Personnel Indigène de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques et Instituant à la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques des Cours d’application Destinés à Former des Secrétaires-Archivistes Indigènes* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1930). TTLT1, DABI, Folder 430, “Projet d’arrêté Organisant les Cadres du Personnel Indigène de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1928” TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-09 “A.s. organisation des cours de formation des secrétaires archivistes bibliothécaires à la direction des archives et des bibliothèques de l’Indochine à Hanoi. 1954”

¹²¹ Arrêtés Portant Organisation du Personnel Indigène de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques et Instituant à la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques des Cours d’application Destinés à Former des Secrétaires-Archivistes Indigènes. “Programme des cours d’application pour la formation des Secrétaires-Archivistes Indigènes”

directorate training course.¹²² Administrators hoped that these trained personnel would continue to share their organization skills with other government departments, and thus propagate a uniform classification structure throughout the colonial administration and provinces. In 1935-1936, 19 students participated in the training course, 16 received a diploma and 2 earned the certificate of archivist-librarian.¹²³ For the 1936-1937 training session, more than 30 applications were received, but only 20 (the maximum number) could be accepted.



Image 1-12: Photograph of participants for training course for secretaries and archivist-librarians on August 1, 1939 to February 1, 1940. In the front row pictured from left to right are library administrators Giem, Bourgeois, Le, Boudet, Nhu, and Kha.¹²⁴ Other administrators in the photograph work in Laos, Annam, Haiduong, Cochinchina, and Hue.

¹²² Paul Boudet, *Gouvernement général de l'Indochine. Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1931-1932)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1933).

¹²³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1421 "Rapports Annuels sur le Fonctionnement des Services des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine Pendant les années 1935-1936," [Annual report on the function of Archives and Libraries Services of Indochina during the years 1935-1936].

¹²⁴ ANOM, PB, Folder 88 "Dossier concernant les services des archives et bibliothèques de l'Indochine 1939-1940."



Images 1-13 and 1-14. These two photographs show a training course for archivists, librarians, secretaries in Hanoi. (C. 1936-1940) The second image was printed as a postcard.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940.”

Lower-level French women and Vietnamese employees played a significant role in the everyday operations of libraries and archives in Indochina. A 1930-1945 folder of the Cochinchina Library recorded the work of French women such as Agathe Josseline, Claire-Marie About, and Delphine Floyer, who served as lower level librarian-archivists.¹²⁶ An even larger folder of Vietnamese workers documented their everyday contributions, with the added detailed observations regarding “conduct, morality, professionalism, duties, manner of service” to evaluate Vietnamese workers for promotion. For example, Lâm Văn Huê who had by 1922 worked for 18 years in the public service was “a very good official to the satisfaction of a public who often required a very careful and difficult service. He has three years of seniority in the 3rd class and deserves to be promoted to the upper class.” Senior security guard (1st class) Tiêt Linh Phát—an employee of the administration for 17 years—was “dedicated, punctual, and completely hard working. He gives the best services in the archives to the complete satisfaction of his manager. He merits a promotion which will affirm his labor and will function as an effective example for other native employees.” According to these documents, the ideal Vietnamese worker spoke French well, carefully handled the card catalogs, and functioned as good examples to other indigenous workers.

The curator of the Cochinchina Library Saint-Marty extensively praised the work of Tr ầ n Quang Tu ấ t and endorsed him for the Legion of Honor on January 25, 1926. Saint-Marty described the important contributions of Tr ầ n Quang Tu ấ t to the development of the archives and libraries as well as to the propagation of quốc ngữ and French throughout Cochinchina.¹²⁷

Tr ầ n Quang Tu ấ t as his past indicates, is an excellent officer. His equitable spirit, his firmness not undermining his benevolence, has always been appreciated by other Vietnamese administrators. His employment at the library has been completely satisfactory. He has dedicated in his short time new methods not only for himself but also for the colony. His competence in administrative matters is remarkable. I have been convinced in addition to his professional value, his excellent spirit and loyalty. This officer has not yet been proposed for the Legion of Honor because his modesty and timid character have prevented him to be properly valued by other administrative chiefs.

Saint-Marty’s glowing endorsement sheds light on the important contributions of Vietnamese administrators to the everyday tasks of managing libraries and archives.

Vietnamese Librarians: Avid Readers and Problematic Staff of the Cochinchina Library

Vietnamese librarians of the Cochinchina library such as Võ thành Vĩnh, Lê Th ế Vĩnh and Messieurs Thông and Huê were avid readers themselves. From the loan logs, Vietnamese librarians were the most frequent borrowers from the Lending Section. These librarians often

¹²⁶ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12629 “Dossier Individuel Des Personnels En Service à La Bibliothèque Du Gouvernement de La Cochinchine Années 1930-1945.” Both images were part of the collection of materials transferred from Hanoi in 1955.

¹²⁷ Tr ầ n Quang Tu ấ t authored several texts on the following topics: a course on Vietnamese morality and polite manners written in Vietnamese quốc ngữ (1910), a quốc ngữ syllabus on reading and writing (1910), a practical method of reading French for Cochinchina schools (1912), a simplification of quốc ngữ for European study (1912), a Vietnamese grammar book written in French (in preparation).

borrowed up to four books each time covering such topics as arithmetic, morality, and philosophy. For example in 1925, Lê Thế Vĩnh borrowed “*Malherbe*,” “*Précis de Physique*,” “*Grammaire historique de la langue française*.”¹²⁸

At times Vietnamese librarian’s reading behavior interfered with their work, much to the chagrin of French library administrators. On June 14, 1925, curator of the Cochinchina Library Saint-Marty reported to the Office of Personnel the many misbehaviors and failures of Lê Thế Vĩnh: “He reads constantly during hours of the Lending Service. Distracted, he made many errors, forgetting to record certain works borrowed by readers and on the other hand also wrongly recorded works already returned which he had neglected to erase.”¹²⁹ Saint-Marty first assigned Lê Thế Vĩnh to the archives and then transferred him to the Lending Section on April 1925 due to reoccurring issues with tardiness. Over time, Lê Thế Vĩnh became the central object of Saint-Marty’s criticisms of Vietnamese personnel. Saint-Marty described Vĩnh’s neglect of his duties to be so numerous that they “profoundly affected the proper functioning of the [library] service of which the Lending Section is only one part and whose operation is quite simple and must be assured with impeccable attention and goodwill by the official in charge of it.”¹³⁰

Library administrators submitted regular monthly reports on the state of the libraries—from the collections, statistics of reader use and finances, to the performance of library personnel. In the March 1925 report, Saint-Marty evaluated the libraries and archives personnel: “M. Huê has just returned from leave. He seems a little too preoccupied with his personal affairs. Messieurs Tuât and Thông provide satisfactory service. The work of Monsieur Lê Thế Vĩnh in his new job in the Lending Section has a lot to be desired. Bad spirit and lazy. Never at his post. Messieurs Nhung and Võ Thành Vịnh of the archives work well but too slowly.”¹³¹ Saint-Marty’s April 1925 report continued to criticize the poor performance of the Vietnamese staff and especially of Lê Thế Vĩnh:

M. Huê, very affected by heat and fatigue, had to take a few days off. It must be said that the temperature is currently very serious and overwhelming in Cochinchina. We anxiously await the first rains. Messieurs Tuât and Thông provide satisfactory service. Monsieur Lê Thế Vĩnh, to whom I had to reprimand for multiple negligences, is now more careful but is nowhere near perfect. No change in the work of Messieurs Nhung and Võ Thành Vịnh. M. Nhung suffers from conjunctivitis and had to stay at home for a few days. Nothing to report on the service of orderlies. I requested and obtained an increase of one personnel starting from the month of July.

Saint-Marty’s May reports reveal the quick turnover in staff and its impact on training new workers: “Monsieur Thông, who is in charge of typing and organizing the card catalog will soon leave us to begin his business. He will be preplaced by M. Lương, a beginner who has to learn everything. Monsieur Vĩnh, currently in the Lending Section requested several months leave for family matters. He will be replaced and no one will miss his presence in our service. Messieurs

¹²⁸ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11930 “Registre de Prêts des ouvrages de la Bibliothèque années 1920-1925.”

¹²⁹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12634 “Dossier individuel des personnels en service aux Archives et Bibliothèques années 1923-1942,” Document : Letter from Saint-Marty to the Governor of Cochinchina (Office of Personnel) June 14, 1925.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, March-May 1925 reports from Saint-Marty, curator of the Cochinchina Library to the Director of Archives and Libraries in Hanoi.

Tuất and Huê provide satisfactory service. No change in the work of Messieurs Nhung and Võ Thành Vĩnh. The service of the orderlies is satisfactory.” These reports demonstrate the library administrations’ frustrations with the everyday functions of the library personnel—predominantly Vietnamese men, the workers repeatedly took time off, transferred to new departments, and in the case of Lê Thế Vĩnh, became the object of severe criticism for negligence of duties.

By June 1925, Saint-Marty had enough with Lê Thế Vĩnh’s misconduct and fired him from his post. In the letter to the Office of Personnel, Saint-Marty accused Vĩnh of stealing works from the library.

Finally, to conclude, I think I can no longer show him confidence by committing him to the custody of our collections. The number of works which disappeared during this year is greater than that of any other year. Separate from the transgressions already mentioned, Monsieur Lê Thế Vĩnh has been surprised by the several instances where newspapers, magazines, and books were found at his home that he in fact had not recorded into the loan registry. During the closure of the library [for repair], magazines arrived by courier have disappeared, yet a guard has always closed the doors behind the painters and masons and made sure that their hands and pockets were empty. I am morally convinced that the magazines have been taken by someone in the service. The suspicions are naturally directed to the one who has already been at fault for the same issues.¹³²

This case is significant because it sheds light on the reading habits and working culture of Vietnamese library personnel. First, it demonstrates how Vietnamese librarian personnel such as Lê Thế Vĩnh were avid readers of the library material—reading during work and possibly taking books home without officially recording them as library loans. Secondly, Saint-Marty’s extensive reporting and criticisms of Lê Thế Vĩnh—reading during work hours, failures to log library loans, accusations of stealing—reveal the hierarchy of French administrators and their attempts to control the majority Vietnamese staff of librarians, secretaries, orderlies, and security guards. These internal reports on personnel ‘misbehaviors’ also reveal the contradictions between high-level administrator who propose ambitious visions of orderly services and low-level personnel who are tasked with its difficult implementation.

In 1939 Saint-Exupéry conducted an extensive survey of the Cochinchina library and reported the dire state of personnel, buildings, and overall budget. In terms of personnel European personnel, Saint-Exupéry described the staff as “incomparable to Hanoi” and “always insufficient in number.” She commented on the quick turnover in administrators: “first by fortune [we had] the Chartist Madame Mabile, and then Madame About, and then one year the library lacked a curator for three months.” Saint-Exupéry described the state of indigenous staff as “deplorable,” especially in comparison to Tonkin’s regular system of indigenous archivist-librarians.

We receive personnel from the Government Offices or Provincial Services who temporarily take work at the Cochinchina library and archive while waiting for a better position. With excuses such as family, advancement, and health, secretaries leave us, causing a ceaseless coming and going of staff. We have spent years training a secretary

¹³² TTLT2, GC, Folder 12634, Letter from Saint-Marty to the Governor of Cochinchina (Office of Personnel) June 14, 1925.

who was contributing real work. However, the Cabinet or the other offices take him away, resulting in us lacking personnel or replacing him with a negligent laborer who is absorbed by future job prospects.

To remedy the lack of skilled and reliable employees, Saint-Exupéry – in agreement with Paul Boudet—requested the Cochinchina Governor to attach the Cochinchina Library directly to the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in Hanoi. This reorganization would fix the problems with budget and personnel, as well as create a system of indigenous librarian-archivists similar to the framework in France. However, on March 17, 1939 R. Schneyder (Director of the Government Office) denied the request to reorganize the Cochinchina Library, insisting that financial and administrative control remain with the local administration.¹³³ Nevertheless, Schneyder approved and funded Saint-Exupéry’s proposal to create a cadre of indigenous archivist-librarians for Cochinchina like in Tonkin.

Order in the Land of Disorder: Buildings, Climate and the Case of Cochinchina

Many of the administrative documents on the libraries and archives complained in frustration over the disorderly state of libraries—from its overcrowded, poorly maintained buildings and storage facilities to its lack of consistent cataloging and limited collections. An unpublished report dated September 1934 illuminates the dismal material conditions of the Cochinchina library and archives facilities, organization, and collections. The report described the library and archives building as old, poorly maintained, and overrun with pests:

The building is old and dirty. One enters through a vestibule still cluttered with bicycles; the readers do not know where to go, the reading room is on the first floor intended in the past for only the archives, [the reading room] has walls with holes held together by wire netting to assure the ventilation of the documents. These wire nets retain dust and spider webs. The Lending Section is one day next to the stairs, on another day in the gallery crowded by furniture over 2 meters tall which obstructs the air flow and the daylight. This state of ventilation favors the presence of enormous mosquitos and bats which bother and discomfort the readers. [The bats] even go as far as nest on the shelves. Ants crawl all over the walls.¹³⁴

Since 1902, the entire library service had occupied the archives building on Lagrandière street in a tentative state while waiting for a new building dedicated solely for the library. However, even after thirty years the archives and library still shared a cramped building, resulting in a slapdash state of conservation and maintenance.

The report continued to describe the messy and disorderly state of the library and archive offices:

¹³³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 30341 “Dossier Relatif à la Suggestion de Mlle de Saint-Exupéry concernant la Réorganisation de la Bibliothèque et des Archives du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine Année 1939,” Letter from R. Schneyder (Directeur des Bureaux du Gouvernement) to the head of the personnel office in Saigon, March 17, 1939. Schneyder reported that the proposed budget for the library was approximately 30,530 piastres—19,830 for personnel and 10,700 for material costs.

¹³⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1423-01 “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et des Bibliothèques de la Cochinchine en septembre 1934.”

Small shelves are scattered about of which hold the old newspapers, incomplete magazines, and pamphlets not yet cataloged...Periodicals are slipped into a filing cabinet where the duplicates are added without being replaced. The management office room is cluttered with messy books. The secretariat [administrative] office is next to the reading room. Besides the fact that it is not aesthetically pleasing to see this place in disorder, the constant noise of the typewriters discourage the readers and is already the subject of complaints.¹³⁵

The report did not refrain from targeting administrative negligence to “maintain order” in the library collections and to keep up sanitation on the building grounds. “In the storage room, next to the catalogued books are shelves littered with uncatalogued books and pamphlets and a dusty motley of objects: rat traps, rat feces, pieces of wood, old boxes, etc.”

Furthermore, since many of the library and archives personnel resided near or within the building complex, the administration was concerned over proper sanitation, and the budget necessary to sustain living quarters.¹³⁶ The 1934 Cochinchina report criticized the lack of separation between the unhygienic staff living space and the public library and archives services.

The courtyard and two small storage facilities are the domain of the staff who have transformed the space into a “negro village.” Overflowing onto the ground floor of the archives are old clothes, shoes, dirty towels and toiletries including several portable sinks. They cook under the awning, facing the storage building. The wall that separates the courtyard from the registration building is covered in mold and on the verge of ruin. “Boys” lodging quarters, kitchens, and toilets are attached to this wall next to the registration space, and all the smells uncomfortably mix together. The toilet set up for the library is also in very bad condition and very dirty.¹³⁷

The use of the pejorative “boy” and description of staff living quarters as a “negro village” reveal the racial condescension against library and archives staff who were majority Vietnamese. According to this report, the smells and sight of the Vietnamese living quarters seeped into the space designated for registration of library cards and thus interfered with readers’ experience.

Overall this report carried not only an air of condescension towards Vietnamese personnel, but also a critical judgement of the overall state of libraries management in Indochina. Most likely this report was written by a French trained administrator, who used French notions of library management and order to evaluate the Cochinchina library. For example, the report dedicated a significant portion to the poor conditions of the library collection according to “modern libraries,” which in this case implied French library standards of classification, binding, and catalogues. The author of the 1934 report explained: “The classification [structure] has adopted largely that of modern libraries: P (small format), M (medium format), G (large format),

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Many administrative documents debate the “right of lodging”—the requirement for library and archives personnel to reside in or near the services. TTLT1, DABI, Folder 88 “Logement Aux Fonctionnaires de La Direction Des Archives et Des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1921-1949,” Documents: Letter from Paul Boudet to the Governor General on November 5, 1921 and Letter from Paul Boudet to the General Director of Public Instruction in Indochina on February 3, 1926.

¹³⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1423-01 “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et des Bibliothèques de la Cochinchine en septembre 1934.”

H.G. (oversized). There are no separate codes for the collections, periodicals, brochures currently kept in the cartons, which is a grave shortcoming. Most periodicals have not been recorded and cataloged and thus readers are deprived of a valuable resource.”¹³⁸ At the time the Cochinchina library used three types of catalogs organized by 1) alphabetical order according to author’s last name, 2) general topic and 3) keyword of title. The report judged all three methods to be disorderly, inefficient, and backwards compared to cataloging systems of “modern libraries.” French colonial administrators continued to frame Indochina libraries in the context of the larger landscape of French libraries. For example, the 1935 *Manuel d’apprentissage du classement des bibliothèques* [Manual to learn classification of libraries] listed the primary Indochinese libraries alongside French national, municipal, university, and specialized libraries. French libraries such as the National Library of France, the Mazarine Library, the Library of Saint Genevieve, and university libraries were used as a point of comparison to understand the function and role of Indochina libraries.¹³⁹

The 1934 Cochinchina report concluded with a summary of improvements undertaken by June 1935—the building of a garage for bicycles, a new restroom with a modern sink, new furniture and painting for the reading rooms and offices, and the reorganization of collections for improved reader access. Furthermore, the library restructured its catalog adopting the methods from the National Library of France and other large libraries. The new system integrated all the collections into a single catalog—described as “flexible and organized in the manner of a dictionary, in other words, the subject of the book is categorized with the most precise words and not with a general word. For example, a reader wishing to read about coffee will directly search the word “coffee”, and would not search by choosing between different general headings which are more or less decided arbitrarily by the curator: tropical crops, agriculture, food, botany, food plants, etc...” Besides these limited improvements, the author of the report emphasized the tremendous need to continue to improve building facilities, classification methods, conservation and bookbinding of materials, and collections size.

Even by 1939, the Cochinchina Library and Archives still confronted issues with its building space and conservation techniques. Saint-Exupéry reported the dire state of buildings of the Cochinchina Library and Archives.¹⁴⁰ The proposals to create a new building for the library never materialized and both the archives and the library of Cochinchina shared a cramped building originally only designated to house the archives. Saint-Exupéry commented, “Quickly the library and archives have filled up the designated space; the Lending Section of the library had to emigrate to the building on Catinat Street while an abundance of administrative documents cluttered a local warehouse, in deplorable conservation conditions. The Reading Room has become too small for the number of readers who have almost doubled in two years.”¹⁴¹

Uneven Networks of Indochina Libraries: Comparing Central Hanoi Initiatives to Saigon, Phnom Penh, Laos, and Hue

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ TLLT1, DABI, Folder 1276. *Manuel d’apprentissage du Classement des Bibliothèques*, c. 1935

¹⁴⁰ TLLT2, GC, Folder 30341 “Dossier Relatif à la Suggestion de Mlle de Saint-Exupéry Concernant la Réorganisation de la Bibliothèque et des Archives du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine année 1939,” Letter from Saint-Exupéry (Curator of the Government of Cochinchina) to the Governor of Saigon (Direction des Bureaux) on March 7, 1939.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

French colonialism attempted to create a centralized network of administration and taxation, but its power extended unevenly throughout Indochina. Building projects and infrastructure changes relied upon a cadre of Vietnamese lower level administrators, especially into Cambodia and Laos.¹⁴² From 1919 to 1923, the Directorate of Archives and Libraries attempted with uneven success to create a network of libraries throughout Indochina. In 1919 the deputy director of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina, Léon Saint-Marty, embarked on a mission to Saigon and Phnom Penh to reorganize libraries and archives modeled after the technical and administrative organization in Hanoi. From January to April 1919, Saint-Marty closed and repaired many of the Cochinchina library rooms, added new material to its collections, and applied a new alphabetical and topic based catalog to the Reading Room and Lending Section.¹⁴³ Saint-Marty also called for the construction of a Phnom Penh library and archives building, the development of an initial collection of 6,000 volumes, and outlined a budget of 45,000 piastres.¹⁴⁴

On November 17, 1920, *L'opinion journal quotidien pour l'Indochine* [Daily Opinion Newspaper for Indochina] compared the dire and embarrassing state of the Saigon Library compared to the Hanoi Central Library. *L'opinion Journal* article drew attention to imbalanced priorities for library and archive developments in Hanoi rather than other regions in Indochina.¹⁴⁵ The author argued that the Cochinchina Library followed the same model and classification principles of the Hanoi Library, but in reality were far from a 'modern', well organized library. The library and archive buildings and reading rooms did not meet the needs of Saigon, described as a 'modern' commercial center with an increasingly large population "eager to learn and hold in their hands precise documentation." The Colonial Council of Saigon also was eager to build a grand library, a "temple of spirit" worthy of Saigon, the 'Pearl of the Orient,' and had voted on a budget to construct an equally great library as in Hanoi. Emphasizing the Saigon collections were equally if not more precious than those in Hanoi, the article demanded that the new library in Saigon be built without delay so that Saigonese could enjoy the advantages of the Hanoians.

From July to August 1923, Paul Boudet and Nguyễn Khắc Nguyễn from the Hanoi Central Library traveled throughout Indochina to inspect and advise the implementation of the information technical standards, regulations, and library and archives infrastructure projects of the Directorate of archives and libraries.¹⁴⁶ A roundtrip journey by automobile, rivers, and sea, the 4,032 kilometer trip brought the pair from Hanoi to Vinh, Hue, Saigon, Phnom Penh and back to Hanoi. In a letter to the Director of Public Instruction on July 7, 1923, Boudet explained that the focus of his trip was the *advancement* of the library; in particular to advise measures for Hue, the building and personnel of the Saigon library, and the direction of the new library and

¹⁴² Goscha examines the process of building 'Indochina' through the internal colonization of Western Indochina by Vietnamese administrators and the technologies of maps, newspapers, and roads. Goscha, *Going Indochinese*.

¹⁴³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314. "Rapports sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et des Bibliothèques de Saigon, 1919-1926," Document: "Rapport relatif au fonctionnement des Archives et de la Bibliothèque depuis 1919 a ce jour" July 10, 1920, Saigon, signed Saint-Marty.

¹⁴⁴ My research on the Cambodge Library builds off of the research of librarian Helen Jarvis. Helen Jarvis, "The National Library of Cambodia: Surviving for Seventy Years," *Libraries & Culture* 30, no. 4 (October 1, 1995): 391–408. Helen Jarvis points out that the development of the Cambodge Library was distinct from the religious Bibliothèque Royale which was connected to the Buddhist Institute (under direction of Suzanne Karpelès) and the Pali High School.

¹⁴⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4, "L'opinion Journal quotidien pour l'Indochine, par la France" November 17, 1920.

¹⁴⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1242. "Inspection Des Archives et Des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine 1921-1928," March 12, 1921.

archives facility in Phnom Penh.

Central Library of Cambodge (Library of Phnom Penh)

Although the Resident Superior of Cambodia had issued a decree to maintain archives since October 19, 1911, it was not until the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in 1917 that the management of archives and libraries in Cambodia was implemented more consistently. After many delays regarding budget and the collections, the Bibliothèque de Phnom Penh [Library of Phnom Penh, also called Central Library of Cambodge] was opened to the public on December 24, 1924. The Library of Cambodge held the Resident Superior of Cambodge collections and also had a borrowing section and a reading room open to the public. The library was placed under the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina. The official library report praised the ‘modern’ construction and design of the library building which included the following: a façade with Cambodian motifs made by *sgraffito* technique (a method for Italian wall décor); a central reading room able to comfortably fit thirty readers and well-lit by a central light and six stained glass windows; a lending library large enough to house 10,000 volumes, two large offices for librarians, and a large surrounding garden. A Hanoi newspaper also praised the construction of the new library with robust underground, cemented foundations and also its central location in Phnom Penh near sporting grounds.¹⁴⁷ This article also commended the work of the French colonial state, the “protector nation” to build an institution with “all the resources of human thought” for the personal intellectual development of their ‘protégés.’ The newspaper alluded to the comparatively deprived state of libraries development in Phnom Penh compared to Hanoi and Saigon.

At the time the Library of Cambodge opened in 1924 the collection consisted of 2,879 volumes (1,059 from the Resident Superior collection, 1,687 purchases, 133 donations). By June 30, 1925 the library increased its collection to nearly 5,000 works—1,815 in the central Reading Room and 3,000 in the Lending Section.¹⁴⁸ In 1931 Jacques Quesnel was designated as the curator of the library. Pach Chhoeun was one of the first Cambodians to be formally trained in archives and libraries and completed the training course in Hanoi in 1926. When Pach Chhoeun applied to work in the Cambodge library, Paul Boudet commended that Pach Chhoeun would be “a very good auxiliary for you (Quesnel),” and appointed Pach Chhoeun as fourth-class archivist-librarian. Chhoeun was a prominent journalist and founder of the first “modern” non-religious periodicals in Cambodia, *Nagaravatta*, which focused on politics and pro-independence. In the post-colonial period, Pach Chhoeun was named the director of the National Library of Cambodia and the Minister of Information.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Georges Mignon, “Les bibliothèques d’Indochine.” Newspaper clipping [1923?] with no date or bibliographic information in Folder 453 of Archives of Cambodia as cited in Jarvis, “The National Library of Cambodia.” P. 395.

¹⁴⁸ Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques* (1924-1925) (Hanoi: République Française, 1925).

¹⁴⁹ Pach Chhoeun was arrested in July 1942 for his participation in the “umbrella war,” a widespread peaceful demonstration in Phnom Penh to demand the release of the non-violent nationalist Buddhist monks Hem Chieu and Nuon Duong. However, Vichy French authorities judged the demonstration as an anti-colonial movement and arrested the leaders Pach Chhoeun, together with Hem Chieu and Nuon Duong were sentenced to a lifetime of hard labor in Poulo Condore in Vietnam. Pach Chhoeun was freed after the Japanese March *coup de force*. He fled to southern Vietnam where he organized the Free Cambodia movement. He was arrested in April 1946 and sent to France. On October 1951, Pach Chhoeun was freed and named the minister of information and director of the

During the colonial period, the collection of the Library of Cambodge included primarily French language administrative or research documents, such as encyclopedia, annuals, and 77 periodicals for consultation. The Library of Cambodge functioned as a public reference library for administrators and popular education resource for Phnom Penh inhabitants. In the first few months, the Reading Room received approximately only 7 visitors a day, while the Lending Section received 15 readers a day. Over time the Library of Cambodge continued to expand, and by the 1938-1939 annual report, it contained 18,438 books, 81 periodicals from the metropole and colonies, and averaged 173 readers per month to both the Reading Room and Lending Section.¹⁵⁰ Construction of a separate Cambodge archives building began in 1925 with plans to store the archives of the Resident Superior of Cambodge, provincial archives, and the archives and library service.¹⁵¹



Image 1-15. Exterior of Library of Cambodge, undated.¹⁵²

National Library of Cambodia [Bibliothèque Nationale]. Jarvis, p. 399. I rely on this article for most of my historical narrative on Pach Chhoeun.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1937-1938)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1938).

¹⁵¹ Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1924-1925)* (Hanoi: République Française, 1925).

¹⁵² ANOM, PB, Folder 52 "photographies du service des archives et des bibliothèques à l'Indochine." Note the European museum-like structure which combines neo-classical architecture, portico entrance, and Italian style wall



Image 1-16. Reading Room of Library of Cambodge, undated¹⁵³

design of Cambodian motifs. For a study of colonial architecture see the following scholarship: Caroline Herbelin, *Architectures du Vietnam colonial: Repenser le Métissage*, (Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 2016), and Gwendolyn Wright, "Chapter 4: Indochina: The Folly of Grandeur," in *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁵³ Ibid.



Images 1-17 and 1-18. Photographs of Lending Section of Library of Cambodia, undated. Note the reoccurrences and the body language of the readers in the photography of the Lending Section and the Reading Room that suggests that these photographs were posed to convey a public and engaged image of the Cambodge Library. Most of the readers in the photographs are French or European and also include a number of women and children.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

The Royal Library, Buddhist Institute, and Lao Libraries

The development of the Royal Library, Buddhist Institute, and Lao libraries reveals how the creation of libraries relied heavily upon the initiatives and vision of local administrators, religious leaders, and scholarly community. On February 15, 1921, a Cambodian royal ordinance called for the creation of a “national library” in Cambodia which was responsible for “conserving all works in the Cambodian language or written by Cambodians.”¹⁵⁵ This library would henceforth be referred to as the Royal Library and was distinct from the administrative Central Cambodia Library. A subsequent royal ordinance on January 15, 1925 formally created the Royal Library in Phnom Penh to conserve manuscripts and build a collection for the intellectual community in Phnom Penh rather than depend on scholarly collections in Bangkok.¹⁵⁶ French colonial ethnologist Jeanne Cuisnier (1890-1964) claimed that the mission of the Royal Library was to bring together East and West, to remedy “the ignorance and present mutual contempt between races,” and to “aid in knowledge and penetration” through gathering Cambodian books and European orientalist works.¹⁵⁷ Scholar Penny Edwards argues that the Royal Library and other cultural institutions, education, and publishing initiatives contributed “to construct a body of national literature, so that folk tradition would become generalized into the history of a nation.”¹⁵⁸

However, the Royal Library received limited high-level administrative support; instead the founder and director Suzanne Karpelès initiated the scholarly development of the Royal Library. For example, on November 27, 1925 Suzanne Karpelès wrote to the Governor of Cochinchina, requesting donations of books, periodicals, and extra legal deposit copies to build up collections of the Royal Library of Cambodia.¹⁵⁹ Suzanne Karpelès transformed the landscape of “Khmer” Buddhism through her groundbreaking scholarly, curatorial, and publishing work in Indochina. In 1890 Karpelès was born in Paris to a wealthy family of Hungarian-Jewish origin. Dedicated to the study of Asian religion and language, Karpelès became the first woman to earn a degree in Oriental languages from the *École des hautes études*

¹⁵⁵ Article 1, Ordonnance royal no. 12 “Fondation à Phnom Penh d’une bibliothèque nationale,” 15 February 1921 in *Recueil des actes du gouvernement cambodgien, 1st supplement, 1920-1921* (Saigon: Imprimerie nouvelle Albert Portail, 1922), p. 52.

¹⁵⁶ ANOM, GGI Folder 65502 RSC Report, First Trimester 1925, April 17, 1925 as cited in Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007), P. 191. Penny Edwards, “Making a Religion of the Nation and Its Language: The French Protectorate (1863-1954) and the Dhammakay,” in *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 63–84. P. 74.

¹⁵⁷ Jeanne Cuisnier (1890-1964) was a French orientalist and ethnologist specializing on Malay language and the Mư̄ng in Vietnam. She studied under Marcel Mauss and Paul Rivet. She completed her field work on culture and customs in Kelantan. Cuisnier published a research book titled “Dances magiques de Ketalan [The Magical Dances of Kelantan]” in 1936 and “Les Mư̄ng: Géographie humaine et sociologie [The Mư̄ng: Human Geography and Sociology]” in 1946. Jeanne Cuisnier, “La Bibliothèque de Pnom-Penh,” in *Revue Des Arts Asiatiques* Vol.4, ed. Edmond Jaloux (Paris: La Librairie des arts et voyages, 1927), p. 105–109.

¹⁵⁸ Edwards. P. 91.

¹⁵⁹ TTLT1, DABI Folder 216 “envoi par la direction des archives et des bibliothèques de l’Indochine des ouvrages au service du dépôt légal 1926.” On April 14, 1926, the Governor of Cochinchina wrote back to Karpelès request from November 27, 1925 and confirmed that Cochinchina would ship copies of the periodical *Revue Indochinoise* from 1921 to 1925, the bibliography of Indochina, and a small number of books.

pratiques and the first woman to join the ÉFEO in 1922.¹⁶⁰ She also studied Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, and Nepalese under the guidance of leading orientalist and ÉFEO scholars Louis Finot, Sylvain Lévi and Alfred Foucher. She published translations of Sanskrit and Tibetan texts in the *Journal Asiatique*. Karpelès arrived in Hanoi in 1923, and in 1924 she worked in the National Library of Bangkok under the curators George Coedès and Prince Damrong to inventory the collection's Thai manuscripts. In 1925 she moved to Cambodia and dedicated herself to the management of Khmer cultural institutions and religious publications until her departure in 1941. As director of the Cambodia Royal Library from 1925 to 1941, Karpelès developed the collections to include Khmer tales, historic texts, and publications from the École Supérieure de Pali.¹⁶¹ The Royal Library followed a simple organizational scheme: works placed in alphabetical order and by size demarcated by the letter “G” for Grand [large], “M” for Moyen [medium] or “P” for Petit [small].¹⁶² Besides books, Cuisnier remarked that Karpelès included a small museum of Buddha statues, objects of worship, and textiles in the Royal Library in order to cultivate for Cambodian visitors both a “taste of familiar arts” and “books, which are literary and philosophical things.”¹⁶³ By 1926, Karpelès also initiated Cambodia's first Khmer-language journal *Kambuja suriya* [Cambodia Sun] which produced approximately 65,000 copies in 1941.

From January 19 to February 17, 1928, Karpelès embarked on an educational mission to visit ethnic Khmer populations in western Cochinchina (Khmer Kraom) accompanied by Buddhist monk and intellectual Venerable Huot Tath and an orderly named Chy.¹⁶⁴ The group visited lay and religious groups and Tath explained the role of the Royal Library and the École Supérieure de Pali. After each visit Karpelès, Tath, and Chy donated a copy of *Kambuja suriya*, engravings, and Parabhava sutta prints. In more populous regions, the group donated print media to develop a small library collection. Karpelès commended the religious dedication of the “fervent Buddhist” Khmer in Cochinchina. However, she observed that every pagoda hung a portrait of the king of Siam and proposed that “the Royal Library should spread Cambodian

¹⁶⁰ I draw biographical information on Suzanne Karpelès from Jean Filliozat, “Notice Nécrologique : Suzanne Karpelès (1890-1968),” *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 56 (1969): 1–3; Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007), Chapter 8 and Penny Edwards, “Making a Religion of the Nation and Its Language: The French Protectorate (1863-1954) and the Dhammakay,” in *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 63–84. P. 74. Edwards' extensive scholarship on the Buddhist Institute and cultural heritage provides a crucial foundation for my research on Cambodia.

¹⁶¹ Karpelès also served as chief publications officer for the École Supérieure de Pali during the entirety of her life in Cambodia from 1925 to 1941.

¹⁶² Jeanne Cuisinier, “La Bibliothèque de Pnom-Penh,” in *Revue Des Arts Asiatiques* Vol.4, ed. Edmond Jaloux (Paris: La Librairie des arts et voyages, 1927), p. 107.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Cuisinier summarized the museum of Buddhist objects to include Cambodian and Siamese images of the Ramayana or familiar Buddha scenes, Buddha statues, traditional fabrics, and cultural objects which “constitute a group of monks recognizable by all; they remind men of their obligatory place in the pagoda, to women they are associated with the festivals of ordination of their brothers and sons.” Cuisinier also went into detail the textures, materiality, and writing of the manuscripts and Buddhist sutras.

¹⁶⁴ Karpelès traveled through Tra Vinh, Bac Lieu, Rach Gia, Can Tho, Soc Trang, Long Xuyen, Chau Doc, Ha Tien, and Tay Ninh. TTLT2, GC Folder 47556 “Dossier Relatif à La Mission de Mlle Karpelès Conservateur de La Bibliothèque Royale Du Cambodge Années 1927-1928.” Chuon Nath and Huot Tath were important Buddhist monks, reformers, and intellectual intermediaries who transformed the study and teaching of Khmer Buddhism. Both studied under Louis Finot and also worked closely with Karpelès. Tath also taught Sanskrit at the École Supérieure de Pali. For a detailed study of reformist monks Chuon Nath, Huot That, Um-Sur, see Anne Ruth Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

influence and must print portraits of the King of Cambodia to permit the monks of Cochinchina to have at least a Cambodian image...A portrait of the King Sisowath Monivong in his coronation costume will be, I believe, greatly appreciated by the Cambodians.”¹⁶⁵ On December 1928, Karpelès also requested the Governor of Cochinchina for a budget of 500 piastres to expand the Royal Library collection since “Cochinchina is currently concerned with the intellectual development of Cambodians, especially of the monks...”¹⁶⁶ Karpelès pursued on the ground education initiatives to build the Royal Library collections, disseminate its Buddhist publications, and reorient Phnom Penh as the Buddhist center of Indochina.

Karpelès furthered Buddhist centralization initiatives with the creation of the *Institute indigène des études du bouddhisme du petite véhicule* [Indigenous Institute for the Study of Buddhism of the Little Vehicle] or the *Institute bouddhique* [Buddhist Institute] in 1930 in the Royal Library building. Karpelès initially served as general secretary and then later as director until 1941. With its headquarters in Phnom Penh, the Buddhist Institute focused on Pali education and Buddhist publications in order to promote a centralized notion of a revived “Indochinese Buddhism” in Cambodia, Laos, and Cochinchina.¹⁶⁷ Throughout the 1930s, Karpelès continued Khmer Buddhism education initiatives in the Khmer Kraom communities in Southwest Cochinchina to combat the rising influence of the Cao Dai Movement.¹⁶⁸ The Buddhist Institute also created a network of smaller religious libraries, Buddhist museums, and schools throughout Cambodia and Laos.¹⁶⁹ In 1931 a Buddhist Institute section was opened in Vientiane, in Luang Prabang in 1933, and in Pakse in 1943. The Phnom Penh headquarters of the Buddhist Institute received significantly more administrative support and budget (35,000 piastres in 1938) compared to the Lao sections (2,500 for both the Vientiane and Luang Prabang sections).

According to the Bulletin of the ÉFEO, the Buddhist Institute will “publish only religious books, the Royal Library will undertake the publication of secular texts, Cambodian tales and historical texts.”¹⁷⁰ The Buddhist Institute and Royal Library worked closely together under a joint direction by Suzanne Karpelès to collect and distribute texts throughout Cambodia.¹⁷¹ The Royal Library published and sold many texts to other research institutions including the Buddhist Institute. The Royal Library also coordinated a network of book distributors, selling approximately 13,000 volumes in 1930.¹⁷² Penny Edwards describes how the centralization, collection, and publishing of print media by the Buddhist Institute and Royal Library “would consolidate the transition from a scribal to a print culture in Cambodia” and also provided “vital

¹⁶⁵ TILT2, GC, Folder 47556 “Dossier Relatif à la Mission de Mlle Karpelès Conservateur de la Bibliothèque Royale Du Cambodge Années 1927-1928,” Document: Letter from Karpelès Curator of the Royal Library to the Minister of the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, March 5, 1928.

¹⁶⁶ TILT2, GC, Folder 30807 “Dossier relative à la subvention à la Bibliothèque royale de Phnom Penh” Letter from curator Suzanne Karpelès to the Governor of Cochinchina, ca. 1928.

¹⁶⁷ Gregory Kourilsky examines French attempts of building of “Indochina Buddhism” to counteract Siamese Buddhism through the creation of the Buddhist Institute, establishing monastic education, and reforming the sangha. Gregory Kourilsky, “The Institut Bouddhique in Laos: Ambivalent Dynamics of a Colonial Project,” in *Theravada Buddhism in Colonial Contexts*, ed. Thomas Borchett (New York: Routledge, 2018), 162–86.

¹⁶⁸ For the relationship between Caodaism, Buddhism, and religious-cultural initiatives between Cambodia, Laos, and Cochinchina, see Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007), Chapter 8.

¹⁶⁹ Kourilsky, “The Institut Bouddhique in Laos: Ambivalent Dynamics of a Colonial Project.”

¹⁷⁰ “Chronique,” *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 30, no. 1 (1930): 185–227. P. 212.

¹⁷¹ According to the decree of the Buddhist Institute the general secretary of the institute should also function as the curator of the Royal Library.

¹⁷² “Chronique,” *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 30, no. 1 (1930): 185–227. P. 212.

arenas for the formulation and circulation of emerging ideas about Buddhism and nation...¹⁷³ Karpelès worked closely with Cambodian Buddhist leaders such as the Venerables Chuon Nath and Huot That. Over time, Karpelès gained the trust of Buddhist monks who decided to donate manuscripts and ritual objects to the Royal Library and Buddhist Institute for safekeeping or as part of ritual practice.¹⁷⁴ In this way, Karpelès' collaborative work to collect, publish, and teach Buddhist works contributed to building a print based legacy of Buddhism and scholarly community.¹⁷⁵

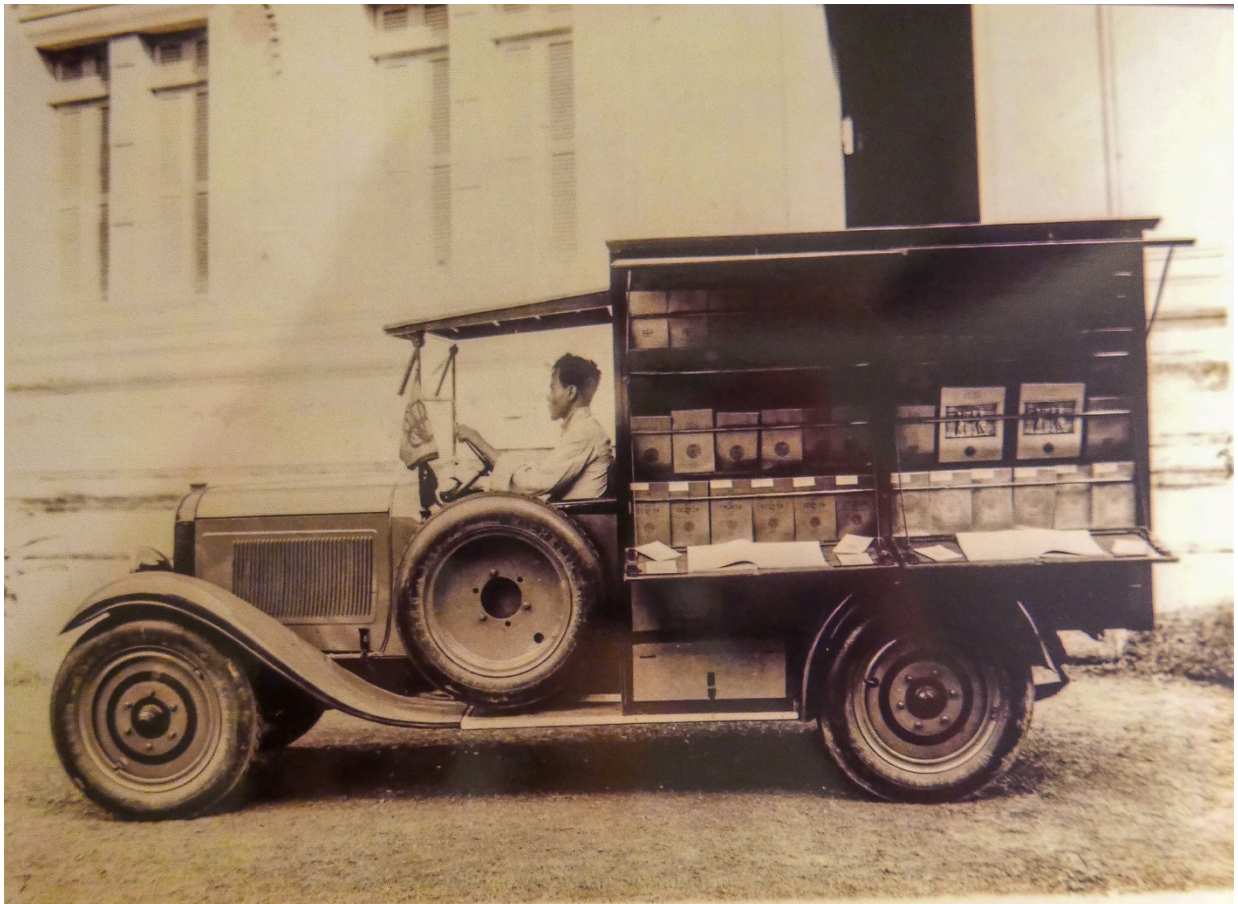


Image 1-19. Photograph of a van distributing Royal Library texts. The caption behind the photograph reads “Camionnette de propagande bibliothèque royale. [Royal Library Propaganda Van]” C. 1936-1940.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Edwards continues to argue that these cultural and religious institutions allowed “Finot, Tath, Karpelès, and Nath to translate their beliefs and ideas about the true and proper shape of Khmer Buddhism into a coherent body of thought and literature that, by the 1930s, had emerged as the authentic, national model of Khmer Buddhism.” Edwards, *Cambodge*. P. 188

¹⁷⁴ With a tone of emotional exoticism, Cuisinier chronicles the ritual practice of donating ritual objects to the Royal Library, the ceremonial carrying of donations between pagodas, and the final reception at the Royal Library in Phnom Penh. Jeanne Cuisinier, “La Bibliothèque de Pnom-Penh,” in *Revue Des Arts Asiatiques* Vol.4, ed. Edmond Jaloux (Paris, La Librairie des arts et voyages), p. 109.

¹⁷⁵ Edwards. P. 189.

¹⁷⁶ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940.” Undated photograph.

Colonial development of libraries, archives, and publishing in Laos were significantly limited in scope, budget, and administrative support compared to those in Tonkin, Cochinchina, and Cambodia. In 1918 the Commisar of Government Meillier and King Sisavong Vong (1904-1959) created the Royal Library of Luang Prabang which collected manuscripts from the area. The Royal Library was located in the Département des Cultes, managed by the Lao curator Chao Citammarat, and organized within the ÉFEO. According to reports, the Royal Library was used by monks, civil servants, and inhabitants of the Luang Prabang area.¹⁷⁷

On June 21, 1922 the Directorate of Public Instruction in Vientiane reached out to the Director of Public Instruction in Hanoi asking for a budget of 250 piastres to create a “Vientiane scholarly and public library” for use by former students and indigenous administrators.¹⁷⁸ These eager readers wished to consult scholarly library catalogs and the proposed budget could help purchase this initial collection. On July 4, 1922 the director of Public Instruction in Hanoi accepted the terms of the budget for building a collection, but asked the follow up questions: “Would the library function as a borrowing library or a consultation library? Could this new library also extend to the European readers in Vientiane? Could the local budget also provide support for this library?” After this initial discussion, a gap in planning documents suggests that the project was temporarily abandoned. The history of the Cambodia Library and public library in Vientiane reveals the limitations of a centralized top-down directorate of archives and libraries to standardize regional government and public libraries in Cambodia and Laos. In comparison, cultural institutions such as the Royal Library, its Lao branches, and the Buddhist Institute developed through collaborative work between Buddhist leaders such as Nath and That, the scholarly direction of Suzanne Karpelès, and local communities. These religious and cultural heritage institutions proliferated a vision of religious community through concurrent publishing initiatives, the preservation of Buddhist texts and relics, and the expansion of pagoda education in Cambodia, Laos, and Cochinchina. Furthermore, institutions of cultural heritage and libraries coincided with Indochina-wide standardization efforts and cultural projects of building a French Indochina regional and political identity.

Hue Library and Initiatives from Scholarly Associations

Many newspapers and internal reports criticized the limited budget and lack of sustained efforts to library development in Indochina. Often the population’s demands for libraries in Indochina could not be met quickly enough through a top-down official building project through the directorate of archives and libraries. Instead, associations such as Associations of Friends of Old Hue [l'Association des Amis du Vieux Hue] and the Society of Mutual Education, played a large role in providing reading material to the intellectual and reading community of Hue. On January 13, 1934 the newspaper *Tiêu Long* announced that the long awaited new Hue Library (also called the Bảo Đại Library) would begin construction.¹⁷⁹ Although smaller in comparison to the “great libraries of Tonkin and Cochinchina,” this new library would realize the “dream for

¹⁷⁷ Archives de l'ÉFEO, “Rapport de Chao Sithammarat [Tiao Citammarat],” Luang Prabang, January 10, 1924 as cited in Gregory Kourilsky, “The Institut Bouddhique in Laos”, p. 163.

¹⁷⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 328. “Création d’une Bibliothèque Scolaire et Publique a Vientiane (Laos) 1922,” June 21, 1922. [Creation of a Scholarly and Public Library in Vientiane, Laos].

¹⁷⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 585 “A.s Projet de Création d’une Bibliothèque de Hue 1934,” January 13, 1934 [On the Project to Create a Hue Library].

the intellectual population of Hue” and to satisfy the vibrant intellectual life of writers, thinkers, and important figures in Hue.¹⁸⁰ The only other existing library in Hue was a simple administrative library of the Superior Residence of Hue which only had a collection of 1,507 volumes in 1929. The yearly reports of the directorate of archives and libraries had often remarked the absence of a public library for French and indigenous, described as “an indispensable instrument of progress” in the capital of Annam.¹⁸¹

However, according to a letter from the Superior Resident of Annam to the Directorate in Hanoi, on April 9, 1936, by 1936 a public library for the intellectuals of Hue was not yet realized.¹⁸² The letter noted that the President of the association League of Friends of Annam [Ligue des Amis de l'Annam] was in the process of creating a new library in Hue for Vietnamese youth and elite and French in Hue—a resource currently lacking in Hue. The letter requested the Directorate in Hanoi to send over documentation of library functions, reading room regulations, and borrowing procedures to serve as a model for the new Hue library. On May 1, 1936 the Hanoi Directorate responded with a copy of the reading room and borrowing section rules of the Central Library in Hanoi. The Hanoi Directorate also applauded the work of the League of Friends of Annam and encouraged the League to find sustainable resources to enrich the collections and competent personnel. This letter exchange demonstrates the important role of quasi-independent cultural and scholarly associations in the development of civic and public institutions such as libraries. These initiatives from associations supplemented the limited governmental capacity to carry out proposed projects such as the Hue Library project. Library development was not simply a top-down project stemming from official decrees, policies and priorities from the Governor General or decisions from the Directorate of Libraries and Archives. Instead, libraries often emerged through independent networks of associations who then later sought technical or budgetary assistance from the government and official channels.

Landscape and Classification of Indochina Libraries

In 1935 the directorate created an instruction manual on classification and organization of the library collections titled *Manuel d'apprentissage du classement des bibliothèques* [Manual to learn classification of libraries]. In addition to specific rules on library services, *Manuel* also surveyed the existing landscape of Indochinese libraries, its functions, and its classification techniques.¹⁸³ Summarizing the development of libraries thus far, the report stated that a ‘modern’ library did not exist until 1917 with the creation of the Directorate of the Archives and Libraries of Indochina under Sarraut. By 1935 the list of libraries in Indochina included the following:

¹⁸⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 643 “A.s. Création des Bibliothèques à Hue et Nghe An,” November 30, 1863 [On the Creation of Libraries in Hue and Nghe An].

¹⁸¹The administrative library continued to grow slowly through purchases and donations, and annexed the library of the École des Hautes Etudes (1,514 works) in 1939, bringing the total number of works to 2,269. Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1928-1929)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1929). Rémi Bourgeois, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1938-1939)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1939).

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1276. “*Manuel d'apprentissage du Classement des Bibliothèques*,” ca. 1935

1. Central Library (in 1935 this library was renamed the Pierre Pasquier Library).¹⁸⁴ Initially built from the collections of the Superior Residence, Tonkin Popular, and Franco-Vietnamese Libraries, by 1935 the Pierre Pasquier Library Reading Room collection contained 78,000 works (periodicals and non-periodicals) with a daily reader average of 260. The borrowing section had 11,500 works. The Pierre Pasquier Library also managed the Bibliography of Indochina and the Central Legal Deposit and worked closely with the Central Archives of Indochina.
2. École Française d'Extrême-Orient Library - This specialist library for the School of Far East had its origins since 1899 and contained over 50,000 books in Chinese, Japanese, Pali, Vietnamese, Tai, Burmese, Khmer and many rare manuscripts. Throughout the colonial period, the ÉFEO maintained the second largest library collection for researchers in the region (after the Central Library). The main ÉFEO library was located in Hanoi, but the ÉFEO also had offices in Saigon, Hue, and Phnom Penh.
3. Saigon Library – (Cochinchina Library) Inherited from the administrative Admirals-Governors library, this library was reorganized in 1920 following the Pierre Pasquier library and expanded the Reading Room in 1935. From this library a circulating library was created in March 1936 to bring a collection of 832 books to nine provinces of Cochinchina. Plans to construct a new library and archives building continued throughout 1935-1938, with frequent pauses due to limited budget. Due to the limited space, the Reading Room could not increase its collection size, which by 1935-1936 grew to 33,000 volumes, 27,217 readers that year (nearly 100 daily reader visits).¹⁸⁵ Reports comment that at times readers were denied entry into the reading room due to lack of space.¹⁸⁶ In comparison during the same year, the Lending Section continued to increase in popularity and size (38,269 volumes) with over 21,357 loans and 25,143 reader visits from 1935 to 1936.
4. Library of Cambodge (Phnom Penh Library)- Opened in 1924 and developed from the collection of the Superior Residence and People's Library of Phnom Penh. This library and archive served as the regional and governmental Cambodge branch of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries.
5. Royal Library of Cambodia – Opened in 1925 and managed by Suzanne Karpelès, this library collected works in Cambodian, Siamese, Lao, Burmese and Buddhist studies manuscripts. Furthermore, the Royal Library published and distributed thousands of publications on Buddhism throughout Cambodia, Laos, and southwest Cochinchina. The

¹⁸⁴ The Central Library was renamed the Pierre Pasquier Library in a highly publicized series of events, exhibitions, commemorating Pierre Pasquier, a liberal and social reform minded Governor General of Indochina (1928-1934) who died suddenly in an airplane crash. TTLT1, DABI, Folder 598 “Changement du Nom de la Bibliothèque Centrale de l’Indochine à la Rue de Trang Thi - Hanoi au Nom de Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier 1935,” January 16, 1934 [Name Change of the Central Library of Indochina on Trang Thi Sreet, Hanoi to the Pierre Pasquier Library]. At the inauguration and renaming of the Central Library as the Pierre Pasquier Library, Pierre Pasquier was praised as a “protector of the letters and arts.” ANOM, PB, Folder 66 “inauguration à la bibliothèque pierre pasquier à hanoi (photographes).”

¹⁸⁵ TTLT2, GC, Folder 1626 “Statistiques de l’accroissement des Collections des Ouvrages à la Bibliothèque de la Cochinchine. 1923-1941.”

¹⁸⁶ According to the 1938-1939 report “The educated public continues to frequent the Central Library [Cochinchina Reading Room] regularly and during some sessions, readers are denied entry to the room due to lack of space.” By this year the number of readers increased to 36,371 compared to 29,523 the previous years, averaging about 133 readers per day. Rémi Bourgeois, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1938-1939)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1939).

Royal Library had branches in Laos and also worked closely with the Buddhist Institute and École Supérieure de Pali.

6. Hue Library - Throughout the 1920s, the Library of Hue was an administrative library annexed to the Superior Residence of Annam.¹⁸⁷ This administrative library consisted of a room for reading and consultation of newspapers and a collection of contemporary and ancient maps. From 1934-1936 the Associations of Friends of Old Hue, Society of Mutual Education, and League of Friends of Annam attempted to develop a larger public library for Hue intellectuals. However, it is unclear if the projects came to fruition.¹⁸⁸
7. University of Hanoi Library – Between 1932 and 1938, the University of Hanoi worked together with the Director of Public Instruction and the Directorate of Archives and Libraries to centralize the collections and services of all the major universities in Hanoi.¹⁸⁹

From 1924 to 1939, the Direction of Archives and Libraries published an annual summary of the archives, libraries, legal deposit, and bibliography. The 1935-1936 report noted the importance of this year for the development of libraries: in Hanoi, the expansion of the reading room in the Pierre Pasquier library (Central Library) and the transfer of the Lending Section into the previous building of the Department of Agriculture; in Saigon, the development of plans for a new building for the archives and libraries of Cochinchina in the square of P. Pages; in Cochinchina, the establishment of circulating libraries with the help of a bibliobus.¹⁹⁰ Between 1935 and 1937 several book vans provided a limited number of books to the provinces around Hanoi and Saigon. These initiatives from the Directorate of Archives and Libraries was connected with state initiatives to control publishing and access to information and will be the subject of Chapter 4 on publishing, propaganda, and popularization. Furthermore, chapter 4 will discuss the role of the bibliobus between Phnom Penh and south west Cochinchina intended to spread Buddhist influence and literacy into Khmer Kraom territories.

¹⁸⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 321 “A.s Classement Des Archives et la Bibliothèque de Hue 1921-1923,” August 1921 [Classification of Hue Archives and the Library].

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 599 “Établissement de la Bibliothèque de l'Université indochinoise 1938” The regrouped collections included materials from the following libraries: Bibliothèque de l'université, Bibliothèque de l'École de Médecine, the École de Pédagogie, École de Commerce, École de Droit, École d'Agriculture, École des Travaux Publiques, École Vétérinaire, École des Beaux-Arts, and Collection Jabouille.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1935-1936)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie G. Taupin & Cie, 1936). However, according to 1938-1939 report, many of the proposed projects to construct new library and archives buildings in Hanoi, Saigon, and Hue had been stalled due to lack of funds. Rémi Bourgeois, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1935-1936)*.

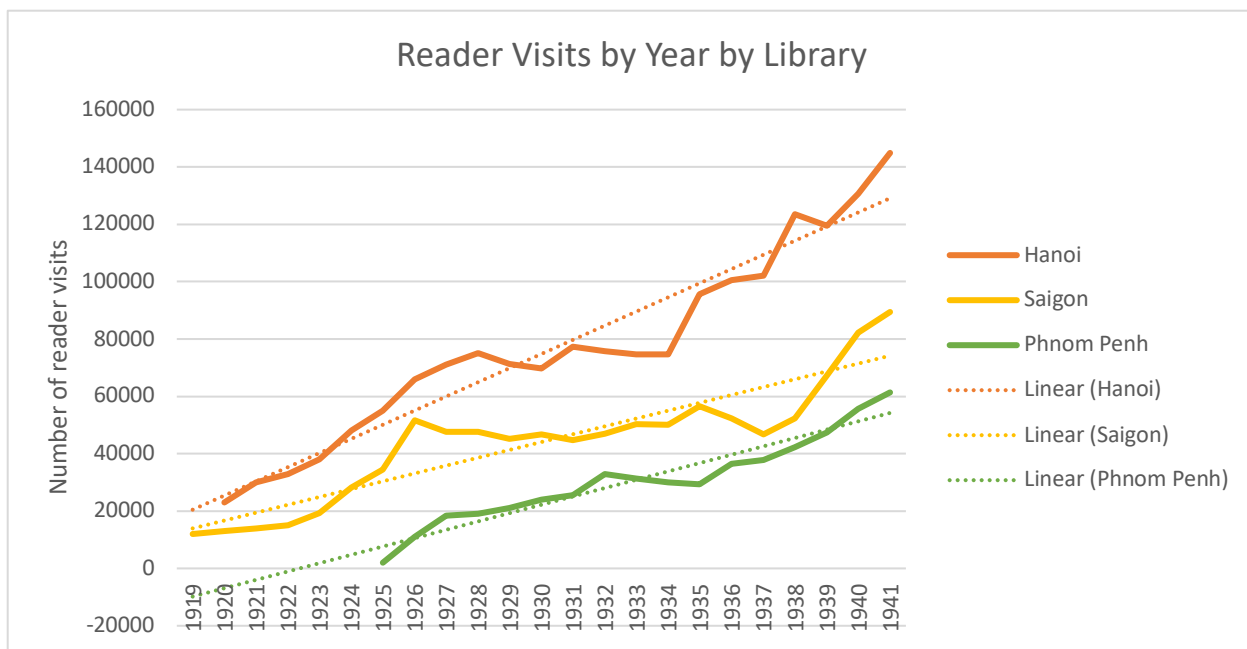


Diagram 1-20. The Directorate also recorded the total number of reader visits to the libraries in Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh from 1919-1941. This comparative chart shows the relatively high number of reader visits to the Hanoi library compared to Saigon and Phnom Penh. The higher numbers for Hanoi was due to the relatively higher literate population size, more developed library collections and facilities. However, analyzing the rate of growth (dotted line) of the individual libraries based on number of reader visits is more insightful to reveal the development of the library reading community in Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh. Based on the yearly data for reader visits, the Hanoi library had an average growth of 5,805 increased readers each year, compared to Saigon's 3,520 readers and Phnom Penh's 3,711 readers. Even with a comparatively smaller collection and city population, Phnom Penh's average yearly growth in reader visits is impressive, exceeding even Saigon's average growth rate.¹⁹¹

Conclusion: Building the Library and a Changing Mission to Serve the Public

This chapter examined the history of state libraries from the beginning of French encroachment to Cochinchina in 1858 until 1939. It argued that building libraries was an essential part of building the colonial state. In the early stages of French colonialism, the libraries developed autonomously throughout the five 'pays' territories (Cochinchina, Tonkin, Annam, Cambodia, and Laos) and focused on serving governmental administrators. By 1917 under Governor General Albert Sarraut, the Directorate of Archives and Libraries centralized colonial documentation throughout Indochina in an attempt to standardize the technical and administrative procedures as well as to define a core mission to the archives and libraries. The first director, Paul Boudet, defined many of the initial visions for archives and libraries and used the new Central Library in Hanoi (1919) as a model of a modern, comprehensive, encyclopedic, rational, and standardized library.

¹⁹¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1632 "Statistiques Annuelles de 1919 à 1941 des Lecteurs fréquentés dans les Bibliothèques de Hanoi, Saigon, et Phnom Penh, 1919-1941," [Annual statistics from 1919 to 1941 on Reader Visits to the Library of Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh].

From 1917 to 1939, many libraries and archives were only idealistic visions of centralization rather than implemented realities. The failure to realize the proposed projects for libraries and archives was rooted in a conflicting fundamental mission of the library: who does the library serve? Prior to 1917 colonial documentation primarily served the state—archives and libraries recorded colonial history and provided resources such as maps, statistics, and news for colonial administrators (primarily French, Vietnamese, and Khmer). With the creation of central government libraries through the local government branch in Hanoi, Saigon, Hue, and Phnom Penh, an Indochina-wide network of libraries sought to consolidate governmental documents, create reference collections for administrators, and record new publications through the legal deposit. In principle, these libraries functioned as a storehouse of all works published in Indochina and curation of ‘essential’ world literature. In practice many of these libraries struggled to acquire trained personnel who could implement rigorous French library science principles of organization, recordkeeping, and implementation of legal deposit rules. These government libraries also failed to serve the larger reading public of Indochina and their changing literary tastes and reader demands for public spaces. With education reforms and increased urbanization in the 1920s and 1930s, a larger literate public of Vietnamese students, scholars, administrators, journalists, and teachers actively used the libraries for study, research, work, and socializing. In the case of Cambodia and Laos, the Royal Library and Buddhist Institute branches served multiple interwoven functions to preserve cultural heritage, translate and popularize literacy in Khmer, publish and disseminate Buddhist texts throughout Cambodia, Laos, and south west CochinChina.

In 1927 libraries and archives administrator André Masson published a summary of the first ten years of the directorate of archives and libraries in the newspaper *L'éveil économique*. He remarked that in ten years, the directorate successfully created a centralized institution and built the magnificent Central Library in Hanoi.¹⁹² The Central Library “Salle des Fêtes” reading room was well-ventilated, surrounded by a peaceful garden and “offered in the middle of the city a pleasant asylum that the French and Vietnamese often frequented.”¹⁹³ The Reading Room offered an extensive collection of fiction and non-fiction contemporary and classical works to consult on-site. The reading room was open without pause from 9 in the morning to 10 in the evening, and the reading halls were never empty. The number of volumes quickly doubled and the daily average of readers rose from 33 in 1920 to 150 to 200 in 1927.¹⁹⁴ According to another report by Henri Lemaître the Inspector of the *Revue des Bibliothèques*, each month the central library had 2,300 readers (800 French and 1,500 Vietnamese) visits consulting a total of 1,800 volumes and 900 periodicals.¹⁹⁵ The report added that by the end of 1925, the Reading Room of the library collection had nearly 40,000 volumes of carefully selected books.

Furthermore, the Lending Section offered a more curated popular collection of works for Lending readers to borrow and read at home. According to Lemaître’s records, the lending section had about 10,000 volumes and 5,000 readers registered with borrowing cards.¹⁹⁶ Each year approximately 60,000 requests for loans were submitted, averaging out to 12 volumes of

¹⁹² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4, André Masson, "La direction des Archives et Bibliothèques de l'Indochine 1917-1927, *L'éveil économique*, Number 506, February 20, 1927.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 442 "Articles du journal "Annam Nouveau" sur le fonctionnement des Bibliothèques en Indochine 1932-1936" [Articles from the newspaper New Annam on the function of Libraries in Indochina] Henri Lemaître, “Les bibliothèques en Indochine,” *Dépêche coloniale*, October 23-24, 1927.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

books borrowed by each reader a year.¹⁹⁷ Masson compared these numbers to the great libraries in France, of which have far smaller frequentation numbers. Masson described the diverse groups of readers in the Central Library Reading Room and Lending Section: professors and scientists researching a specific technical question or relaxing with a novel or Vietnamese wishing to understand Western science. As demonstrated in these statistics and reports of the Central Library in the 1920s and 1930s, the library was quickly transforming into a space beyond the visions of colonial modernity and the civilizing mission.

The next chapter will demonstrate how libraries transformed into a cultural space of 'modern practices' such as self-learning, social reading, and access to contemporary ideas from other countries. While this chapter focused on the builders, the next chapter focuses on library users, changing reading practices, and the materiality and movement of reading matter in the 1920s-1930s. Who were the readers? How and what did they read? What was the practice of reading and 'mis-reading' in the colonial library? What was the role of the library for the increasing majority of readers -- Vietnamese intellectuals and students of the library?

¹⁹⁷ According to Masson's records the Lending Section was highly popular and from August 1, 1925 to June 30, 1926 and recorded 55,000 instances of works were borrowed home.

CHAPTER 2

The Social Life of Reading: Collections, Readers, and Colonial Hierarchies of Access and Knowledge, 1908-1941

The colonial library was never quiet. Readers flooded the Central Library to escape the heat in the summers and lovers huddled in corners during the unforgiving Hanoi winters. Library patrons complained loudly to library staff and the press about the lack of chairs for readers and unfair borrowing privileges for Vietnamese compared to Europeans. Everyday conflicts between workers and readers, French and Vietnamese, are scattered throughout the internal library documentation. Occasionally cases of violent and contentious library dramas occurred: a slap to the face, a lifetime revocation of library privileges, and a mysterious death reported as a suicide.¹⁹⁸

The colonial library was never ‘orderly.’ Library administrators struggled to make sense of the uncategorized and poorly maintained library collections and to figure out why certain works kept disappearing. Was it clerk Lê Thế Vĩnh who regularly showed up late to work, was caught reading during working hours, often forgot to log book loans, who was to blame for the missing materials in the Cochinchina Library? Was the uneven application of ‘modern, Western, scientific, and standardized’ library classification systems the reason for the confused state of Indochinese library collections? Was there a lack of library regulations or culture of public use which dissuaded the return of library books?

This chapter examines the practice of ‘reading’ in libraries during the French colonial period in Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh. Who were the readers? What did they read? How did they read? Reading was not just a passive act, but a contentious, changing practice. This chapter demonstrates how reading was shaped by a combination of institutional, intellectual, cultural, and technological forces. Building from the work of Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier, this chapter moves away from treating books simply as objects of knowledge and reimagines them as elements of changing historical practice. Robert Darnton’s attention to the life cycle of a book—from author to public—emphasizes the social life and multifaceted industry of book production and consumption.¹⁹⁹ Chartier argues that books have no fixed universal meaning but are reformulated and distorted through processes of reading. Chartier engages with Michel de Certeau’s idea of the ‘*espace lisible*’ [readable space] and examines how texts are given meaning through various acts, spaces, and habits.²⁰⁰ According to Chartier, the ‘art of reading’ is a dialectic between the underlying ‘order of books’—the meaning and structure intended by

¹⁹⁸ Pierre Lelièvre recounts the several dramatic anecdotes by André Masson on working at the directorate of archives and libraries in Hanoi. The stories include the suicide of an archive clerk the day after Masson reprimanded him and an account of when a French nun threw a penny down to the ground to avoid touching the hand of a Vietnamese attendant. Pierre Lelièvre, “À propos d’un cinquantenaire pour André Masson,” *Bulletin Bibliothèque de France* 39, no. 5 (January 1, 1994): 56–59. P. 58.

¹⁹⁹ Robert Darnton explores the material and institutional production of books within the following works: “What Is the History of Books?,” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (July 1, 1982): 65–83; “Toward a History of Reading,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 13, no. 4 (October 1, 1989): 86–102; *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979).

²⁰⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), P. 174 and Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), P. 2.

authors and libraries—and the practice of reading and ascribing new meaning to books. In this way, Chartier and Darnton’s approach to reading emphasizes the reader as an active agent of interpretation, subversion, and reformulation.²⁰¹ The emphasis on reading as a process offers a more critical lens to understand libraries as a space where knowledge and diverse communities of reading were created. This approach inspires a bottom-up understanding of books not simply as a one-directional delivery object of knowledge, but rather as a social mode of communication involving both builders and users of libraries.

This chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1 describes the biography of a library user (also referred to as a patron or reader) through examining reader demographics, privileges, and access to the Hanoi Central Library and Saigon Cochinchina Library. By analyzing library rules, restrictions, and reader’s petitions, this part highlights the racial tensions and power dynamics between French and Vietnamese library administrators and readers in the library. This chapter focuses primarily on Vietnamese readers and libraries in Hanoi and Saigon, but also makes comparisons to the Cambodia Phnom Penh Library. Part 2 examines the value of printed matter, the development of library collections, and the mission of libraries to circulate and conserve reading matter during the colonial period. By closely exploring prison libraries and the Tonkin protectorate library, this section sheds light on the political, economic, and cultural forces which shaped library collections. Part 3 compares reader use, literary preferences, and reading habits in the Hanoi Central Library and Saigon Cochinchina Library during the 1920s to 1940s. This close analysis of the Reading Room and Lending Section reveals insight on the rise of public reading among urban Vietnamese students in the Hanoi Reading Room, literacy shifts in French and Vietnamese quốc ngữ [Romanized Vietnamese], and the important role of the library for popular education and access to global knowledge. Furthermore, this chapter contributes new and innovative analysis of never-before compiled data on reader reception, library behavior, library collections, and newspaper commentary to understand a social and cultural history of Vietnamese reading.

By examining the sociology, politics, and economics of reading in colonial Indochina, this chapter offers the following arguments: Library reading was a practice of ‘modern’ self-directed learning, public leisure, and urban life. Reading contributed to the formation of ‘imagined communities’ across geographic distances and within shared public spaces.²⁰² Reading was a market of commodified exchanges determined by the high costs of books, materials, storage, transportation, and conservation. Reading was also a political act. The French colonial government-controlled access to libraries, collections, and proper norms of library behavior based on a regime of Western science and modernity.

Part 1

The Biography of a Library User: Privileges, Access, and Control

To be a library user indicated several privileges. First, library users needed to know how to read. From the beginning of French colonial conquest in Indochina in the 1860s through to the 1920s, this meant that the individual needed to be literate in French or Chinese. By the 1920s the colonial administration invested in more education and publishing initiatives to spread literacy in

²⁰¹ Chartier, *The Order of Books*. P. viii.

²⁰² Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

quốc ngữ, Romanized Vietnamese. New media forms and genres such as serials, translations, short stories, novels, and educational primers permeated throughout the Vietnamese print market in French, Vietnamese, and Chinese.²⁰³

Second, employment determined reader access. Many of the initial libraries in Indochina including the Governor General of Indochina Library, Resident Superior of Tonkin Library, the Cochinchina Library, and the Hue Library, were initially founded to serve French and Vietnamese government administrators. However, as the library grew in size and the number of literate individuals increased in cities, non-administrators such as students, teachers, and commercial workers demanded access to valuable library collections. With the development of the Directorate of Libraries and Archives in 1917 and the opening of the Central Library in Hanoi in 1919, the concept of a ‘public’ library became more pervasive in the Indochinese setting.

Third, permission to access libraries depended upon residence and age. Libraries emerged first in colonial administrative centers and urban environments such as Hanoi, Saigon, Haiphong, Phnom Penh, and Hue. In order to apply to a library card in most cases, readers must be over the age of 18 (age 16 for French readers), reside in the city of the library, and submit an application with their name, profession, address, and proof of residence in the city or province of the library. Many libraries permitted on-site reading only; for those with a separate Lending Section for borrowing works to read at home, a separate more extensive application process was required.

Access Determined by Employment and Race: Applications for a Reader or Lending Card

Public access to libraries changed over time and policies varied widely by location. Policy and practice often diverged. For example from its founding in 1865, the Cochinchina Library was intended to function as a consultation library for government administrators.²⁰⁴ However, archival evidence of reader personnel files from 1903 to 1919 reveal that a diverse group of administrators and non-administrators, French and Vietnamese readers had gained access to the library through case by case requests and petitions; some readers even held special permission to borrow books to read at home. Furthermore, library restrictions varied for administrators, non-administrators, Europeans and Asians. In the case of the Cochinchina Library, non-administrators required a guarantor who was either an administrator or an existing registered library reader to vouch for the non-administrator reader applicant.²⁰⁵ The guarantor verified the identity of the library applicant and also served as a liability in the case of damaged

²⁰³ Estimates of functional literacy in the 1920s and 1930s range from 5-10% of the total urban and rural Vietnamese population.

²⁰⁴ The borrowers included such administrators as Nguyen An Linh Secretary from Saigon (1904), Larousse Baptiste supervisor of an arsenal in Saigon (1904), Lê Văn Ki ều secretary at a Saigon laboratory (1906), Madame Jidore an accountant at a manufacturing company (1905), Nguyễn Văn Hiến Secretary of the cabinet of the Lieutenant General in Cholon (1904), Đỗ Văn Giáp teacher at the primary school in Dakao (1905), and Frank George lieutenant of a defense vessel in Saigon (1904). TTLT2, GC, Folder 11894 “Fiches personnelles des emprunteurs à domiciles (A-L) de la bibliothèque années 1903-1906” [Personnel slips of borrowers to read at home (A-L) of the Library 1903-1906]. Document: “Prêt des livres fonctionnaires 1903-1906.”

²⁰⁵ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11974 “Dossier relatif aux renseignements sur les archives locales conservées en Cochinchine, à la création et l’organisation du service des archives, d’un emploi de bibliothécaire, d’un atelier de reliure, Au règlement intérieur de la Bibliothèque, Catalogues Méthodiques des ouvrages, par ordre alphabétique des auteurs années 1905-1917” [Folder regarding information on local archives conserved in Cochinchina, the creation and organization of Archive services, the employment of a librarian, the binding workshop, interior regulations of the library, methodic catalog of works by alphabetical order of author name 1905-1917].

or lost library works. With a guarantor, special permissions to borrow books home were granted to diverse non-administrator readers such as the pilot Auguste Lernange (1913), the assistant mechanic Louis Georges (1911), the law clerk Võ Thành Long (1916), and students of the secondary school Collège Chasseloup-Laubat Dương Văn Lầu and Nguyễn Văn Phú (1919 presented by Trần Thế Khải of Controle Financier).²⁰⁶

According to the Saigon Library regulations on May 7, 1902, the library opened during all regular secretariat administrative hours and Monday and Friday night from 8:30-10:30 PM.²⁰⁷ Borrowing permissions were granted to readers from the city of Saigon, Cholon, and Gia Dinh, but privileges differed between European and Asian readers.²⁰⁸ European readers were permitted to borrow three books at once with a required deposit of 10 piastres (or one book for 4 piastres) for a period of 15 days. Asian readers were only allowed to borrow one book at a time and had to leave a 4 piastres deposit in order to borrow a book for a maximum of 8 days. The restriction on number and duration of book loans prevented Vietnamese readers from actively using the Cochinchina Library. Furthermore, considering that daily average wages for Vietnamese was less than 1 piastre a day, the requirement to leave a 4 piastres deposit was a financial obstacle for the majority of the Vietnamese population.²⁰⁹

With the founding of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in 1917 and the opening of the Central Library in Hanoi in 1919, the director Paul Boudet sought to standardize library access, procedures, and privileges throughout Indochina. Spearheaded by Boudet, the Central Library regularly created, issued, and updated official library regulations, procedure manuals, and reader guides. Other libraries such as the public libraries in Saigon and Phnom Penh were expected to follow the general procedures and regulations of the Central Library in Hanoi. To apply for a reader card for colonial libraries, the newly issued general rules stipulated the following: readers must be over the age of 16, reside in the city of the library, and submit an application with their name, profession, and address.²¹⁰ However, each library adapted its own versions of these regulations, often restricting access based on the vision of the ideal reading public for that library.

According to the regulations in 1935, the Central Library of Hanoi specifically listed several imagined types of readers permitted access to its Reading Room: “1) Europeans over the

²⁰⁶ Special permissions to borrow materials home required a different application. Additionally, the applicant must be presented by an existing registered reader at the library. TTLT2, GC, Folder 11886 “Demandes d’inscription à la Bibliothèque sur la Liste des Personnes Jouissant de la Faveur du Prêt à Domicile Années 1907-1919” [Applications requesting privileges to borrow works home, 1907-1919].

²⁰⁷ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11974, Document: “Règlement intérieur pour la Bibliothèque.”

²⁰⁸ In the early years of the Cochinchina Library, many of the library policies were soft rules and many administrators and researchers made special requests to borrow materials home.

²⁰⁹ Throughout the 1930s, the average daily wages were approximately .3 piastre for North Vietnam and .6 for the Saigon-Cholon region. Women’s salaries were often 20%-30% less than that of men’s. This calculation is based off of Le Manh Hung’s analysis of *Annuaire Statistique de l’Indochine* 1941-1942, p. 209. Manh Hung Le, *The Impact of World War II on The Economy of Vietnam 1939-45* (Eastern Universities Press, 2004), p. 80.

²¹⁰ The Cochinchina Library permitted all readers over the age of 16 to enter the Reading Room. Note that prior to 1935 Central Library readers must be over the age of 18 to access the library. Although these were the official rules, rare exceptions were made through an extensive case by case evaluation by the director of the library. TTLT1, DABI, Folder 234 “Desir de fréquentation de la bibliothèque centrale des élèves du lycée d’Hanoi 1922.” In 1922, the Lycée de Hanoi directly requested Director Paul Boudet for their high school students to access to the Central Library reading room. Boudet approved the exception to the age requirement of 18 in this case. However, a racial distinction still existed between French and Vietnamese students. French students under the age of 16 could use a recommendation letter from their parents while Vietnamese must receive a recommendation letter from their teacher or administrator.

age of 16, 2) Vietnamese teachers, 3) High school students and 4) Vietnamese and Asians over the age of 18 who after investigation have proven that they are sufficiently educated or are agents of various Indochinese administrative departments.”²¹¹ Vietnamese and Asian readers in the last three categories were required to submit a formal application with their name, profession, home address with supporting documentation, and two photographs. Readers to the Central Library were required to submit separate applications for the ‘Reading Room’ and ‘Lending Section.’ In applications for the Lending Section at the Central Library, Europeans only needed to submit a simple form with their name, profession, and proof of address demonstrating residence in the city or neighboring provinces. Asian applicants required additional material compared to their European counterparts; Asian applicants had to submit an additional photograph and a certificate or letter confirming their employment and proof of home address. If the reader was a Vietnamese university student, the application required a letter from their director confirming their student status.

Similar unfair requirements were demanded from Cambodians in the Phnom Penh Library. According to the 1924 regulations, the Phnom Penh Library was open to Europeans over the age of 16, Cambodian teachers, and Cambodians and Asians over the age of 18 with evidence and verification of sufficient level of education (this clause included agents of Indochinese administrative departments or merchants).²¹² Like the Hanoi Central Library, Asian applicants required an additional formal application with their name, profession, home address, and supporting documentation from an administrator or school to act as a ‘guarantor.’

The racial discrimination perpetuated by French colonialism extended into library regulations and access. Racial differences were explicit in reader card applications and library policies, requiring more documentation and guarantors from Asian reader card applicants. This additional documentation levied against Asian readers functioned as a liability guarantee in cases if reading matter was damaged, lost, or stolen. Asian readers were considered a ‘risk’ to the library and archives collection, and thus additional restrictions and guarantees were placed on their admission to the library. This assumption of Asian readers as delinquents shaped colonial library regulations for access as well as everyday social interactions between library administrators and readers.

Cases of racial inequality between indigenous and European in the library were reported to the higher administration and appeared in the press. For example, on May 24, 1933, the Tonkinese Fraternity Lodge complained to the Hanoi Central Library about unfair privileges for Vietnamese and readers of certain professions.²¹³ The letter claimed that not all high school students and university students could access all the materials in the Central Library reading room. Furthermore, Vietnamese commercial workers did not have the same privileges as

²¹¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1276 “Manuel d’apprentissage du classement des Bibliothèques” c. 1935, chapter VII “Communication of Books to the Readers”. The reference here to “Asians” most likely refers to other literate Asian populations in Saigon such as the large population of ethnic Chinese Vietnamese.

²¹² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 428 “Règlement de la bibliothèque du Cambodge 1924” [Regulations of the Cambodia Library] September 20, 1923. In this case, the reference to “Asians” could refer to other Asian populations in Phnom Penh besides Cambodians such as Chinese and Vietnamese.

²¹³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2313 “Modification à la réglementation des lecteurs indigènes à la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi, 1933” [Modification of the rules for indigenous readers at the Central Library of Hanoi]. Letter number 504 from LAN at La Fraternelle Tonkinoise to Paul Boudet on May 24, 1933. Rooted in eighteenth century European Republicanism, Freemason Lodges spread throughout Southeast Asia since the early twentieth century. For a study of freemasonry and its influence in Southeast Asian civic life, see Lewis, Su Lin, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism Southeast Asia, 1920-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

government administrators and students. The letter exclaimed, “Would it not be possible to make absolutely free the access to the reading room and the choice of books to any 18-year-old regardless of profession, as long as he holds a reading card issued by the library?” In terms of the Lending Section, the letter requested for permission to borrow home the popular books on science, history, and geography in order to benefit readers and reduce crowds in the library. The letter concludes with a request to extend the borrowing privileges to inhabitants of the provinces outside of Hanoi and demands for more libraries in the provincial capitals. The director of the Central Library in Hanoi, Paul Boudet, swiftly responded to this letter, denying that the library discriminated against readers based on race or profession.²¹⁴ In a more publicized case of racism, the author of issue number 505 of *L’Annam Nouveau* (December 15, 1935), complained that libraries in other countries were more accessible to the public than the Central Library in Hanoi.²¹⁵ The author claimed that the Central Library discriminated against Vietnamese readers: On entry to the library the front desk demanded an identification card from Vietnamese readers, but never from French readers. These incidents characterize the underlying racial tensions in the colonial library and discrimination against readers based on race, age, profession, and residence. Additionally, these cases reveal how readers debated and argued for fair and public access to the Central Library in Hanoi.

I Pledge to Follow these Rules: Controlling Reading, Controlling the Reader Body

Library card registration usually included a list of rules and regulations that the applicant must pledge to obey in order to have access to the library. The general rubric included requirements for access to the library, how many books and for how long a reader could consult or borrow at once, and fines for damages and lost books. However, many of these rules also determined ‘proper’ reader behavior: the reader must be respectful, trustworthy, courteous, and most of all, quiet. In order to enter the space of the library, readers were required to comply to a kind of social contract of proper behavior outlined by explicit library room regulations. In order to access the Government Secretariat Saigon Library in 1905, readers were required to pledge to recognize that the library was a “public good” and acknowledge that when a book is checked out, it would deny someone else the public good of reading that book.²¹⁶ In other words, the rules emphasized the interconnected relationship between individual reader decisions and the greater public good of the library. The curbing of individual and selfish desires was also implicit within the detailed rules regarding overdue fees, damages, and loss of library books. According to the same set of reader rules, readers were permitted to only borrow three books at once for a period of 15 days. If the book was overdue, the reader must pay twice the price of the book. If there were any damages to the binding or tears to the pages, the reader was responsible to immediately report the issue to the administration and then proceed to make amends. The reader must replace the book or pay an expensive replacement fee: twice the cost of the book or series of books if the work was part of a volume series.

²¹⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2313. Paul Boudet sent a quick response on June 29, 1933 to La Fraternité Tonkinoise.

²¹⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 442 "Articles du journal "annam Nouveau" sur le fonctionnement des Bibliothèques en Indochine 1932-1936" [Articles from the newspaper *New Annam* on the function of Libraries in Indochina], *L’Annam Nouveau*, Number 505, December 15, 1935.

²¹⁶ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11894 “Fiches personnelles des emprunteurs à domiciles (A-L) de la bibliothèque années 1903-1906” Document: “Règlements en vigueur à la Bibliothèque du secrétariat du gouvernement” [Regulations enforced at the government secretariat library].

Explicit regulations governing library behavior outlined expectations for a ‘modern’ and ‘public’ space and the individuals who belonged to that space. A modern public library and their readers pledged to honor the following: a code of shared and mutually beneficiary resources, transparency of reporting faults, and a protocol of consequences and recompense. These social codes manifested themselves in rules and expectations for readers to maintain ‘order’ in the library—a notion that extended to keeping orderly the reading matter and public space, following library rules, or else accept the consequences of losing library privileges. In this way, library rules contributed to a vision of implicit norms of behavior in ‘modern’ and ‘public’ spaces. Library regulations defined proper reading practices through forbidding improper behavior. Yet as the later part of this chapter on reading and ‘misreading’ will reveal, actual reading behavior strayed from or even directly violated prescribed regulations.

Upon successful registration for a reading or lending card, a reader had access to read books on-site in the Reading Room or could borrow works home if the library had a Lending Section. The Reader Guide for the Central Library (1933) and the Reader Guide for the Cochinchina Library (1939) outlined the following procedures for reading at the libraries.²¹⁷ The Central Library was open everyday for extensive hours, from 9 in the morning to 10 in the evening except Sunday afternoons, Monday mornings and holidays. Usually during mid-June to mid-July the libraries closed for one month to inventory, organize, catalog, and account for the collections. By 1933 the Central Library in Hanoi held over 60,000 volumes, 400 of which were current periodicals and 900 discontinued periodicals. Spanning a diverse and important selection of materials “on all of human knowledge,” the Central Library also built its collections from the Legal Deposit, which required publishers to deposit one copy of newly published material to the Central Library. For those who sought more specialized studies on archaeology, medicine, and sciences, the Reader Guide advised readers to consult special libraries of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (ÉFEO), School of Medicine, and Geological Service.

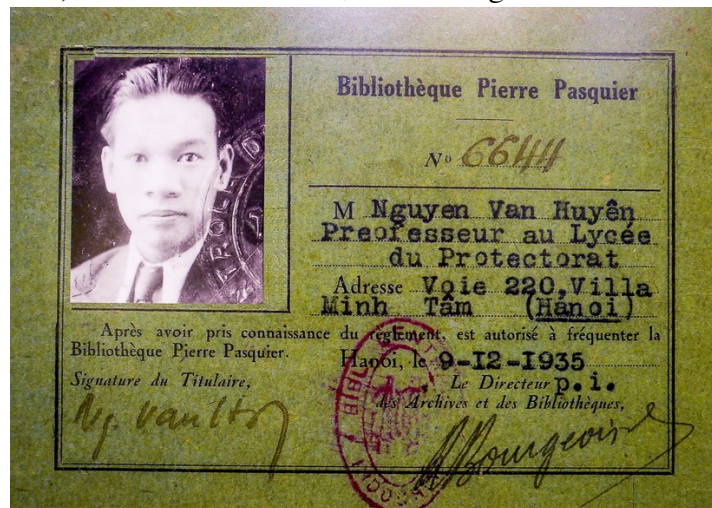


Image 2-1. Hanoi Central Library Reading Card of Nguyễn Văn Huyền, 1935. For examples of Vietnamese reader applications to the Lending Section, see Appendix A.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Direction des Archives et Bibliothèques de l'Indochine, *Guide du lecteur à la Bibliothèque centrale de l'Indochine* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1933). Archives et bibliothèques du gouvernement de la Cochinchine, *Guide du Lecteur à la Bibliothèque du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine* (Saigon: Imprimerie C. Ardin, 1939).

²¹⁸ Nguyễn Văn Huyền (1905-1975) was a prominent Vietnamese scholar, professor, and later became the Minister of Education of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from 1956-1975. Source: Nguyễn Văn Huyền Museum, Lai Xá, Hoài Đức, Hanoi Vietnam 2018.

On entering the library, readers presented their reader identification card to the service desk. In order to consult materials, readers consulted a catalog and submitted a request form for each work. Readers could peruse an alphabetical card catalog organized by author [*catalogue d'auteurs*] or an analytical catalog compiled by topic [*catalogue analytique de matières*]. The analytical catalog compiled all the important library materials related to a specific topic on one card. Modeled after the catalogs in the National Library of France, the analytical catalog followed a complex system of categories and nested sub-categories for important and general topics. For example, "law" was divided into sub-topics with separate catalog cards such as administrative law, canon law, colonial law, commercial law, etc. This catalog system sought to divide all the essential knowledge into encyclopedic categories and provide individual topic cards with a list of all the library books available related to that category.

To request a book from the card catalog, readers completed a request form with their name, library card number, title, and the book's call number, and submitted the form to the librarian. After approximately half an hour, the reader received the work to read in the Reading Room. A limited number of reference works such as periodicals, dictionaries, and encyclopedias on art, law, geography, history, language, philosophy, religion, and science were available on the open shelves along the two sides of the reading room for readers to freely browse.

If the library had a Lending Section, readers consulted a separate catalog of works and submitted a request to consult the materials. Some lending sections also offered a section of reading matter for free perusal such as popular novels, periodicals, and reference works. If readers decided to borrow a book to take outside of the library, the reader had to leave a deposit worth one to two times the value of the book. For most libraries, readers were permitted to borrow two to three works at one time from a Lending Section for the period of two weeks.

According to the Central Library Reading Room regulations in 1935, any damages made to the books, periodicals, maps, and library materials were subject to punishment under Articles 254, 255, and 257 of the Penal Code, subjecting the reader to fines or prison.²¹⁹ Furthermore, the Reading Room librarian must ensure that readers adhere to the library's code of proper behavior. The librarian was responsible for enforcing absolute silence in the reading room and "responding politely to reader questions and guiding readers in their search for materials from the library catalog."²²⁰

The Cochinchina library followed the same rules of the Central Library in Hanoi, besides for a difference in operating hours: the Cochinchina library opened from 9 to 11:45 in the morning and 3 to 10 in the evening except for Sunday afternoons, Monday mornings, and the inventory month. By 1939, the Cochinchina collection comprised of 30,000 volumes as well as periodical collections covering the topics of colonialism, the far east, law, sociology, and history.

The Library of Cambodia in Phnom Penh modeled its reading room regulations after the Central Library in Hanoi. According to the 1924 reading room rules for the Library of Cambodia the purpose of the library was to conserve collections of printed or manuscript works from all "levels of knowledge. In particular, it will focus on bringing together books and documents that may be of current or future interest to Cambodia."²²¹ Given the smaller size and budget, the Cambodia Library Reading Room and Lending Section had more restricted hours: 9 to 11:30 in

²¹⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1276 "Manuel d'apprentissage du classement des Bibliothèques" c. 1935, Chapter VII "Communication of Books to the Readers".

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 428 "Règlement de la bibliothèque du Cambodge 1924" September 20, 1923.

the morning, 4 to 7 in the evening, and closed Sunday afternoons, Monday mornings, and holidays.

Like the Hanoi and Cochinchina Libraries, the Library of Cambodia included extensive regulations about proper physical behavior. However, compared to Vietnamese reading room rules, additional regulations explicitly forbade certain behavior such as spitting, smoking, and interacting with the security guards of the libraries. The regulations even outlined a protocol to report misbehavior from the security guard: “In a case of the security guard’s misbehaviors or negligence, submit a complaint to the director or the deputy.”²²² These explicit regulations defined the library reading room as a series of permitted ‘modern’ practices: adherence to order, authority, a code of consequences, and a mutual respect for a shared space and reading material. However, many of these regulations focused more on prohibiting improper behavior than on encouraging clearly outlined proper behavior. Specifically targeting indigenous readers, the rules focused on the indigenous body—considered uncivilized and uncultivated according to Western notions of modern and public spaces. Library regulations are important sources to understand the relationship between builders and users, contending visions of library use, and the library’s role as a civilizing space of sociability and modern behavior. However, codes of conduct were not simply top down administrative declarations of the French civilizing mission. They were often contested, defied, and revised based on context and effectiveness.

Builders and Users, Bureaucracy and Sympathy: The Value of Reading and Petitions for Library Cards, 1920s-1930s

Vietnamese readers highly valued their library cards and reading privileges. On May 15, 1923, Phạm Thế Ban wrote to Director Paul Boudet and requested access to the Central Library in Hanoi.²²³ Ban described his passion for reading and the importance of reading for his education:

I am one of those who love reading. Having acquired some notions of complementary studies, I have come to understand that which is called reading, the advantage it offers and the pleasures one experiences while reading. I want to expand my understanding with new knowledge, which is why I devote myself to reading. However, interesting books are not at my disposal...I ask you, then, to allow me to visit the central library and to borrow the books by making me an entry card and a lending card.

Ban attached his birth certificate and a certificate of morality to his letter. A few weeks afterwards, the Central Library returned his certificates and provided him with a reader card and a lending card.

If library borrowing privileges were revoked due to violation of library rules, readers begged library personnel to reinstate their library cards. Some readers emphasized that the Central Library served the important role of continuing their education through self-learning and reading. Đoàn Thanh Chúc noted that reading at the Central Library was his only educational

²²² Often the security guard was the lowest position at a library or administrative building and occupied by an indigenous, uneducated male. Ibid.

²²³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 302 “Demandes de carte de prêt à la Bibliothèque centrale présentées par Pham The Ban, Dang Tran Coc, Pham Thi Giec, Pham Gia Hanh, Do Duc Khoi, Do Duc Nguyen, Le Van Phuc et Roger” Document: Letter from Pham The Ban to the Director of the Central Library, May 15, 1923.

option given his limited access to formal classroom learning.²²⁴ Over the course of two years, reader Đoàn Thanh Chúc from 24 Rue des Radeaux, Hanoi submitted at least three pleas to the library staff of the Hanoi Central Library to forgive his violation and reinstate his library card. On October 22, 1922, Đoàn Thanh Chúc begged Director Paul Boudet to have compassion for his situation. In his letter directed to Paul Boudet, Chúc wrote in French and described himself as the “best reader” in the library, frequently consulting works at the library in a respectful manner. He mentioned that his small mistake in 1920 resulted in the severe revocation of his library privileges—a swift and brutal “cut to his path of self-study.”

In a second personal letter sent on October 22, 1922 but addressed to Vietnamese library staff Nguyễn Khắc Nguyễn, Chúc explained in Vietnamese his situation in the hopes that Nguyễn would petition library administrative superiors on his behalf. Chúc emphasized the importance of library access for his self-study:

The administrator will not let me go to the Library any longer, a situation which makes me very sad. In my life, I was not able to study in schools alongside my friends, but instead I was able to substitute this learning with the books [in the library]. [My revocation of library privileges] was due to a small mistake that occurred very long ago. In the past, I relied on the help of Boudet, but now I hope that you sir can help me. I send my highest level of gratitude to you.

On the back of the letter to Nguyễn, Chúc also requested the help of another library worker Tham Liên to petition the administration for the reinstatement of his library privileges. Chúc concluded with the plea, “From our experiences, we know that life is difficult and the journey of learning is also difficult and tumultuous.” On October 23, 1923, the administration responded to Chúc’s request with a brief rejection stating that exceptions to rules were impossible. The letter stated, “I politely respond to your letter from the 22nd of this month regarding your request to return [to the library]; I inform you that the decision [to revoke your privileges] had been made following events of exceptional seriousness. It is thus impossible for me to accept your request.”

Đoàn Thanh Chúc’s case was not exceptional but part of a larger pattern of petitions—Vietnamese readers begged administrators to have sympathy for their situation, but library administrators often responded with a cold, systematic rejection, citing library policy. The contrast between emotion and logic, individual and a bureaucratic system is strikingly apparent in the style and tone of the letter exchanges. The appeals to reconsider library regulations express with emotional tenacity, the importance of the library and explain in detail why the readers had violated library policy. Detailed explanations include the story of a hospitalized reader Nguyễn Xuân Tạo, Accounting Secretary at Maison Chanson & Thibault, unable to return overdue books (October 23, 1922); the misuse of the library card of Nguyễn Đờng Thăng, Secretary of the Judicial Service 3, Châu Yến Street, Hanoi by Thăng’s younger brother; and the accusation of handwriting in borrowed books by Nguyễn Văn Đờm Secretary of the Forestry Department at 68 Rue des Teinturiers in Hanoi (December 16, 1922).²²⁵ These passionate appeals from Vietnamese readers to reinstate their borrowing privileges were often met promptly with a

²²⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 484 “Demande de carte d’entrée à la Bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi présentées Par Hoang Van Khang, Doan Thanh Chuoc et Nguyen Khac Nguyen,” August 18, 1922.

²²⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 303 “Confiscation des cartes de prêt de Nguyen Van Diem, Nguyen Dong Thang et Nguyen Van Tao à la Bibliothèque Centrale en 1922” [Confiscation of Lending Cards of Nguyen Van Diem, Nguyen Dong Thang, and Nguyen Van Tao of the Central Library].

concise rejection. For example, the bureaucratic response to Nguyễn Xuân Tạo's story regarding his hospitalization read, "Sir, I politely respond to your letter on the 23 of this current month, to inform you that the facts which have motivated the decision to revoke your library privileges were determined as serious; thus your request to return [to the library] does not permit me to favor your request."

These appeal cases are significant because they showcase the social life of the library—the relationship between readers and library staff, the significance of reader privileges for Vietnamese, and the ways in which library rules were defined, defied, and enforced. The reader card was important to readers, for example for Nguyễn Văn Điền who needed access to the library to complete his professional work. Readers dedicated time and energy to submit these appeals, and some such as Đoàn Thanh Chuốc, committed over two years to petition his case. Vietnamese readers submitted long pleas of personal dilemmas and statements regarding the importance of library and reading for their educational development; meanwhile the administration responded with a cold, methodic reiteration of library policy.

Furthermore, racial tensions ensued between Vietnamese library staff and French readers. On November 17, 1922 Vietnamese library worker T. Phuc reported to Director Paul Boudet of a verbal and physical altercation between him and a French library patron Monsieur Guy Maurice.²²⁶ Phuc detailed the event, witnesses, and begged Paul Boudet to stand up for Phuc's rights and reprimand Maurice:

...last night, Thursday November 16, 1922 at 7:15PM at night, I was [working] alone in the Central Library (Lending Section).

M. Guy Maurice (80 Bis Boulevard Rousseau), head accountant also by the name of G.M.R. approached me with 4 books tied together. He had chosen 4 other books and put them on the desk and said "Here are 4 books to return and 4 books to borrow." I said to him: "Do you want to return the books?" He answers: "The books to return are tied up." That is when M. Guy implied that I myself had to untie the package of books. [But since] I was very busy and working alone, I was busy with the responsibility to record the books returned and those to loan; I could not waste my time on the useless task of untying the bundle of books.

M. Guy proclaimed that in fact it was my job and insulted me. He took the 4 books not yet checked out and then left. After a minute he returned with the interpreter Monsieur Vinh of the Central Library. On returning he pointed me to Vinh and said that I am "an imbecile, an idiot, country bumpkin (nhà quê)... and that one day I would see you on the streets..." After that, he slapped me two times and threw the bundle of books in the presence of all the readers to witness. The witnessing readers are M. Nguyễn Xuân Vinh (secretary of the directorate of Finances), Bùi Văn Minh (secretary of the Government General), Nguyễn Trường Đức (Secretary of the Government General), M. Nguyễn Văn Lan (Teacher at a school on the street of the Chinese Hospital). Afterwards, he forced me to register the books and finally he called the orderly in a loud voice to tie up his package.

²²⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 27 "Insulte de Phuc, secrétaire de la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi commise par Guy Maurice, 1922"

Insults, attacks, I bring these facts to your knowledge, for all practical purposes, to protect my legal rights. Please, Mr. Director, accept my most respectful sentiments.

Your very humble and obedient servant.

T. Phuc

This report is significant because it shows the underlying racial tensions in the library between French patrons and Vietnamese lower-level personnel. In this instance, Guy the French patron approached the Vietnamese librarian Phuc with an air of entitlement, expecting Phuc to provide full and immediate attention to him as a French reader. Guy's angry verbal and violent response to Phuc's refusal confirms his racist discrimination against Vietnamese. In response, Phuc seeks justice for this public insult and physical altercation through legal and bureaucratic methods. Phuc cites four Vietnamese readers as witnesses. The readers are a diverse group of Vietnamese men, governmental secretaries, and teachers. Phuc also writes directly to Paul Boudet calling upon him to stand up for Phuc's legal rights. However, there were no archival documents which show any legal action or the reprimand of Guy Maurice for his behavior.

These exchanges demonstrate the conflicting definitions of 'justice' among builders and users, Vietnamese and French. The appeals read as personal and passionate confessions, where Vietnamese declare 'injustice' in the cases of public insult against Phuc and the suspension of library privileges. In the case of petitions for library cards, the library would reply with a standard, impersonal, and bureaucratic response. Without compassion or consideration, these response letters represent the implementation of bureaucratic structure and legal protocol of the colonial period. The frequent contestations and pleas from Vietnamese readers and staff reveal important insight into colonial civil society and relationships between builders and users, French and Vietnamese. The library was a contested political and social space—builders and users debated over meanings of public, access, and fair implementation of library rules. Builders created a framework of library administration, bureaucratic protocol, and reading room regulations, but readers were also active agents to call out bureaucratic injustice and to demand reform of the library.

Part 2

Life Cycle of a Book: Collections, Materiality, and Circulation

Mechanisms of the Market: Reading as Provincial Cosmopolitanism

A 1929 Saigon newspaper listed the number of foreign-authored books that Vietnamese readers borrowed from the Central Library in Hanoi and the Cochinchina Library in Saigon. In the five month period from November 11, 1929 to April 30, 1930, Vietnamese readers checked out Alexander Dumas 931 times, Arthur Conan Doyle 427 times, and Balzac 272 times.²²⁷ In a 1935-1936 yearly report of popular books checked out from the Lending Section of the Hanoi Central Library, the report summarized that in general, Vietnamese read literature, French read

²²⁷ "Người Nước Ta Thích đọc Sách Gì?," *Trung Lập*, October 11, 1929. Following the top three authors, other number of loans by author include: Gyp (381), A. France (336), Leroux (331), Bordeaux (288), H. Wells (256), LeBlanc (254), Hugo (247), Prevost (245), Maupassant (238), Victor Marguerite (223).

young adult books, and women voraciously read the romance novels by Delly. The report exclaimed that “rarely do these [Delly] books remain on the shelves!”²²⁸

What did people read from the library? Vietnamese and French read voraciously and broadly – from nineteenth and twentieth century French classics to ‘lowbrow’ fiction for youth and women; from administrative bulletins, French literary reviews, and maps of Indochina to science encyclopedia and language primers. Previous studies on Vietnamese print culture only briefly comment on the boom in printing, publishing, newspapers, and the formation of a ‘public sphere’ of Vietnamese intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s.²²⁹ However, no systematic study has analyzed the intricacies of library reading – as a market dependent upon costs of books, transportation, storage; shaped by changing demands of reader tastes and literary trends; and embedded within a network of exchanges between the institutions of libraries, booksellers, printers, and publishers.²³⁰

Peter Zinoman characterized the development of Vietnamese intellectual life and interpretations of modernity as ‘provincial cosmopolitan’, a “random and uneven mode of engaging with global modernity.”²³¹ Tracing the intellectual, literary, and political influences of Vũ Trọng Phụng, Zinoman reveals the filtered logic of Phụng’s cultural politics—layered interpretations of intellectual and political movements resulting in an eclectic intellectual worldview of anachronistic “putatively opposite impulses.”²³² Zinoman aptly identifies that Vietnamese intellectuals such as Vũ Trọng Phụng had filtered access to French and global modernity, but does not thoroughly examine the mechanisms of information access and exchange.

This section expands upon Zinoman’s concept of ‘provincial cosmopolitanism’ by investigating further the complex economic, political, and technological factors that shaped what people read in the colonial libraries. Drawing from Robert Darnton’s comprehensive approach to history of the book, this section traces the ‘life cycle of a library book,’ in order to understand the development of library collections and changing practices of reading. This process-driven approach to reading illuminates the mechanisms of *how* library collections came to be and what type of books Vietnamese readers consumed in the library. In order to understand reader consumption in the libraries, it is necessary to understand the development of library collections and library protocol to conserve and circulate its collections to readers. The collections often reflect a complex history of the underlying logistics, finances, and administration of a library. From this multi-tiered understanding of library collections and availability of reading matter, this section contributes a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms behind Vietnamese literary

²²⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1421 “Rapports annuels sur le fonctionnement des services des archives et des bibliothèques de l’Indochine pendant les années 1935-1936,” [Annual report on the function of Archives and Libraries Services of Indochina during the years 1935-1936].

²²⁹ Shawn McHale’s *Print and Power* (2004) and Philippe Peycam’s *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism* (2012) are the only books that directly address the rise of print culture in modern Vietnam. These books focus either on the religious community or the journalistic public sphere, but do not discuss the role of libraries in the development of Vietnamese print culture.

²³⁰ Martina Nguyen weaves together the important logistical, social, and institutional dimensions of publishing in her comprehensive study of the Tự Lực Văn Đoàn [Self-Reliant Literary Group]. Martina Nguyen, “The Self-Reliant Literary Group (Tự Lực Văn Đoàn): Colonial Modernism in Vietnam, 1932-1941” Ph.D. dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

²³¹ Peter Zinoman, “Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vũ Trọng Phụng’s Foreign Literary Engagements,” in *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 126–52. P. 127.

²³² Zinoman. P. 145

consumption.

The Value of Books: The Library Mission to Conserve or Circulate

The collection of books, newspapers, documents, maps, and images in Indochinese libraries was a palimpsest of administrator dreams and fiscal realities. The state offered a limited and unpredictable budget for the development and maintenance of libraries and archives. Library budgets had to cover the expenses of salaries, building maintenance, furniture, as well as the high costs of purchasing print media to build the library collections. Books, newspaper subscriptions, maps, and printed reading matter were expensive to purchase, transport, and store. Additionally, library materials circulated to the larger public which subjected the materials to additional costs related to damage, theft, and lost works over time. The library struggled to carry out its essential two missions: to conserve or to circulate?

Books were valuable and libraries struggled to circulate books while preserving their condition for future users. Libraries posted extensive rules requiring library patrons to treat books with care: "...for the benefit of the public good, do not write on or fold back pages, damage the binding by opening up the book too widely, or throw books around."²³³ If books were to be taken from the library, patrons had to leave a pecuniary insurance for each book removed: 2 to 4 piastres were left to insure that the book was returned in the same condition, or else the patron would lose their deposit and be subject to the heavy fines of twice the value of the book. Prior to checking out a book, patrons were responsible for noting the material state of the book. Patrons must report all damages such as missing or folded pages, handwriting, and damaged binding and have the damages confirmed by the library staff.

Bookbinding extended the shelf life of a book or periodical by protecting its pages from damages due to overuse and climate. Library binding sewed together the pages, reinforced the spine, and added a soft or hard cover board to protect the internal pages from fraying. This method extended the life of the book as well as kept together periodicals or series in one bound volume in an easier to access complete collection for readers. Bookbinding was expensive, requiring staff and equipment which the libraries in Indochina did not often have. In 1907, the M. Exiga, former head of the shared bookbinding department [atelier de reliure] in the Saigon Cochinchina Library and the Colonial Printer [L'imprimerie coloniale] presented to the Lieutenant-Governor of the Second Bureau the greatest challenge of a library: how to circulate books *and* to conserve them for posterity.²³⁴ In 1907 there were a total of 24,304 visitors to the Cochinchina library. During that year, 12,381 library visitors borrowed a total of 28,519 books to read at home. The more a book was checked out, the more a book became worn and damaged. Describing bookbinding capacities as a "regrettable state of affairs," Exiga demanded the hiring of three to four more indigenous workers, investment in equipment, and the formal creation of a bookbinding department for the four offices of the Government Secretariat of Cochinchina and for the library.

Bookbinding was not only a technology of conservation. Bookbinding also reflects the priorities of the library and reader consumptive practices. Works selected to be bound signify importance— the library administration prioritized binding of the most 'valuable' works (in price or limited availability) for long-term conservation as well as the most popular and worn works in

²³³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11974 "Dossier relatif aux renseignements sur les archives locales conservées en Cochinchine..."

²³⁴ Ibid.

need of repair and reinforcement. On August 12, 1925 the Cochinchina library submitted the budget and priorities for soft binding and hard cover binding.²³⁵ This list ranked the priorities of reading matter for binding in the following order: 1) all newspapers needed to be soft-bound, afterwards, the following was hardbound and repaired 2) in-quarto large books, illustrations, official newspapers and budget works 3) in-octo official bulletins and magazines 4) small books with illustrations 5) in-12 and in-6 novels, reference books, 6) miscellaneous repairs 6) biographies. Luxury and limited-edition works were also bound and added to the special collections. Some of the books sent to the bindery according to this 1925 list included world literature that was translated into French such as Ferdynand Ossendowski's *L'homme et le Mystère en Asie* (*Man and Mystery in Asia* published in 1923 by Polish writer on books about Lenin and the Russian Civil War), Walter Scott's *L'abbé* (*The Abbot* by Scottish historical novelist originally published in 1820); French classics such as Alexandre Dumas' *Le Trois Mousquetaires* and *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, French novelist Léon Frapié's *Le aîné précieux* and *La figurante*, and Émile Nolly's *La barque annamite* (a novel about the Tonkinese customs first published in 1910). This list demonstrates how the libraries prioritized newspapers, administrative works, books with illustrations, and luxury limited editions.

Furthermore, conservation of library materials was a continual process. As bound books circulated among readers over time, they had to be rebound. A 1934 report of the Cochinchina Library emphasized the rigorous work of bookbinding for long term conservation and circulation: "Thanks to a donation of 500\$ from the Governor of Cochinchina, a number of books had been bound in both the Cochinchina Library Reading Room and Lending Section. As mentioned above, periodicals of prime importance, like *Le bulletin économique de l'Indochine*, *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, *La revue Indochinoise*, must be bound again—since the setting up of the booklets have been entrusted to an orderly who was not equipped to carry out this work [in the past]. Rigorous control must be exercised on the books given to the bookbinder, but it is with great difficulty to obtain the necessary materials" to replace the bad quality papers and binding.²³⁶ Libraries continually monitored the material conditions of books and determined if they should be bound, rebound, repaired, donated, or destroyed.

Control Work: Monitoring Lost and Stolen Books

Libraries actively engaged in 'control work'—the detailed documentation of its readers and collections. Since library collections were highly valued, librarians carefully monitored book loans, returns, or if the materials were overdue, lost, damaged, or stolen. An archive folder extensively recorded cases of lost or stolen books from the Cochinchina library between 1907 and 1919.²³⁷ These cases document readers who left Saigon or returned to France and did not

²³⁵ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12028 "Dossier relatif à l'organisation, fonctionnement et comptabilité des archives et bibliothèque années 1919-1934," Document "L'entreprise de brochage, reliure, et réparations des ouvrages 1926 [Proposal for the Cochinchinese Government Local Service for 1926 binding from the Conservator of Archives and Libraries, Saigon August 12, 1925]"

²³⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1423-01 "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et des Bibliothèques de la Cochinchine en Septembre 1934."

²³⁷ This archive folder included envelopes labeled "Case of (Reader name)." Inside the envelope were records such as a summary of the issue, complete reader's borrowing record, and copies of requests from the library to return checked out materials. TTLT2, GC, Folder 11886 "Demandes d'inscription à la bibliothèque sur la liste des personnes jouissant de la faveur du prêt à domicile Années 1907-1919" [Applications requesting privileges to borrow works home, 1907-1919].

return borrowed library materials. For example, the folder “Chazot Case” summarized the library investigation into several books checked out to Monsieur Chazot: “Monsieur Chazot had embarked for France without returning the volumes he had kept. We have written to the General Le Recureau praying to send our letter of complaint to Chazot. This official had replied that he had sent these volumes to Monsieur de Glostka, who after receiving our letter, returned the volumes in question by parcel post.” Some of the books were returned while other cases spanned several years and were left unresolved. For example, the lost books of the “Crozel Case” never were returned nor did Monsieur Crozel compensate the library with double the value of the lost books.

Each year, the Central Library in Hanoi and the Cochinchina Library in Saigon closed its services to patrons for one month during the summer in order to assess its collections. During this inventory month, the library updated its catalogs with new materials, accounted its monthly statistics of readers and consultations, and evaluated the material state of its collections such as damages, overdue materials, lost and stolen works. The library generated many of its annual reports and statistics during this month. For example, in 1923, the Hanoi Central Library created a detailed inventory and statistics of its lost materials from the Lending Section.²³⁸ The lost works included Moliere’s *Oeuvres (Tome II)*, Raspail’s *Manuel de la Santé*, and Dumas’ *La Princesse Flora*. The list recorded the borrower’s name who lost the book and if it was replaced with another book of equal value or submitted the fine of twice the value of the lost book. From August 1922 to July 1923 (11 months of operations), approximately 29,499 European readers and 6,274 indigenous readers used the Lending Section, and 5,832 volumes were reported as missing.

Geography of Library Reading Matter: From Center to Periphery

Libraries in Indochina connected to the global market of reading matter in an inconsistent manner based on administrative connections and financial costs. Libraries acquired diverse and contemporary materials through library exchanges of reading matter (a book for a book), book purchases and subscriptions primarily from France and throughout Vietnam. Boxes of exchanges in the archives show the complex network and working relationship between libraries, bookstores, and publishers with the Central Library in Hanoi and Cochinchina Library in Saigon starting as early as the 1890s. By 1919, a list of subscriptions for the Cochinchina Library to French newspapers and reviews spanned themes on the colonial administration, metropole and colonial news, literature and culture.²³⁹ Besides book exchanges between colony and metropole, Indochina libraries were enmeshed within seemingly sporadic networks with other colonies, neighboring countries, and large publishers and libraries throughout the world. Beyond a metropole-colonial relationship, a 1921 folder documents the working relationship of book exchanges between the Hanoi Central Library and Japan, China, Siam, the Philippines, the Raffles Library of Singapore, and the Ministry of Public Works and Communications in

²³⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 331 “Inventaire des livres perdus de la section de prêt de la Bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi 1923.”

²³⁹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12044 “État de Relevés des dépenses engagées, de remboursement, Inventaire du matériel en service, Livres condamnés et perdus, Ouvrages en quốc ngữ...de la Bibliothèque années 1920-1927,” [State of invoiced expenses, reimbursement, inventory of equipment in service, condemned and lost books, works in quốc ngữ...of the library].

Mexico.²⁴⁰

Many of the collections of Indochina libraries developed initially out of donations of leftover, unwanted or already damaged works from other libraries. For example, most of the early collections of the Library of Cochinchina were built from donations from the French departments of War and Interior who shipped old and discarded classic and scientific works.²⁴¹ A 1921 report of the Central Library in Hanoi collections recorded that 4,724 of its works were gifts from the following libraries: French-Vietnamese Library (300 volumes), Governor General Library (500), Library of Superior Resident in Tonkin (3924).²⁴² Between 1919 and 1921 the Central Library in Hanoi also purchased 8,012 old or duplicate works from French libraries such as the Popular library, Guillot Library, Leduc, Barbotin, Tragon, Chavin, Bonnemain, Debeaux, Saint-Chaffray and Morice libraries.

In the newspaper article “Bibliothèques Publiques [Public Libraries]” published in *Courrier d’haiphong* on September 20, 1918, the author lamented over the poor literary and educational quality of the collections of public libraries in Indochina:

The quantity [of materials] exists; but the quality is something else. We were well aware that the main objective was to create these establishments [libraries], to entertain the reader, and that it was desired that everyone could find a book to their taste. However, we have too often forgotten the literary concerns and the use of funds has not always been very judicious. Fantômas, the works of Ponson du Terrail, of Dubut de Laforest, have cost hundreds of francs that could have been much more judiciously used, because a public library must always have an educational value. We do not build a library collection by buying bits and pieces of stock novels that we bound and number. It is important first to build up a collection, and this has been completely neglected here.²⁴³

The author criticized the lack of curation in library book purchases. As a result, many library collections were overcrowded with what the author considered as popular, lowbrow, novels, and general works rather than classical and modern works of value. “We understand that to satisfy the taste of the public, we make a very large effort to stock the contemporary novel. But could we also leave space for our classics? They are worth the trouble, however...and one finds on re-reading that Racine is far more powerful than Bernstein, that most of our modern novelists have written nothing that compares to *La Princesse de Clèves*, and [Pierre de] Marivaux is far superior

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹TTLT1, *DABI*, Folder 614, “Notice sur les archives et les bibliothèques de l’Indochine et des imprimeries du Gouvernement de la Cochinchine à l’époque des amiraux, 1863-1908” [Notice on the Archives and Libraries of Indochian and the Printers of the Government of Cochinchina during the Admirals Era, 1863-1908], Document 1867: November 30, 1863.

²⁴² TTLT1, *DABI*, Folder 115 “Composition de la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1919-1921,” [Formation of the Central Library Hanoi].

²⁴³ This list of authors include some of the most popular French authors at the turn of the twentieth century, and thus their works were widely available in republished editions and volumes of collected works. Fantômas was a popular character in the twentieth century French crime fiction series created by Marcel Allain (1885-1969) and Pierre Souvestre (1874-1914). Pierre Alexis Ponson du Terrail (1829-1871) was a French novelist known for his fictional adventure and fantasy character Rocamboles. Jean-Louis Dubut de Laforest (1853-1902) was another popular French novelist, playwright, and his works were often serialized in newspapers. TTLT1, *DABI*, Folder 4 “Archivage des articles des Journaux dans la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques à Hanoi 1918,” [Archive of newspaper articles on the Direction of Archives and Libraries], Document: “Bibliothèques Publiques” *Courrier d’haiphong*, September 20, 1918.

to all his successors and imitators.”²⁴⁴ The author proposed a more meticulous and “rational method” of book purchases—collections should prioritize “serious” materials and different categories of works such as “encyclopedic works, dictionaries, history, geography, French literature, foreign literature, ancient and modern literature, grammar, fine arts, and science.” The author hoped that the new Directorate of Archives and Libraries would take a leadership role and provide detailed instructions and methods to public libraries regarding purchases and classifications of the collections. This article highlights the importance of the genres and ‘quality’ of library collections, criticizing haphazardly formed libraries without a methodic direction and leadership.

Based off of donations, library exchanges, and purchases, the most recently published, popular, and good conditioned works generally followed a geographic pattern moving outwards from center to periphery. Large and relatively well-funded central libraries such as the Central Library in Hanoi and the Cochinchina Library in Saigon received sporadic donations from metropole libraries and delayed purchases from French and Indochina bookshops; moving outwards to the provinces, the library collections of smaller reading rooms developed from leftover books from Hanoi and Saigon, and lastly the reading rooms in hospitals and colonial prisons comprised old, discarded, worn, or cheap editions of books and periodicals.

The geography of library collections relied upon three market hubs for production of reading matter—Paris, Hanoi, and Saigon. Earlier governmental libraries in Indochina at the turn of the twentieth century depended more heavily on donations and book purchases from Paris. However, by the 1920s and 1930s, the Indochina printing and publishing market developed in Hanoi and Saigon, producing and circulating more and more reading matter such as French translations of popular classics and contemporary world literature, Vietnamese quốc ngữ translations of Chinese novels, and the rapidly growing body of Vietnamese vernacular literature and serials. Besides French publishers and bookstores, the Cochinchina Library also subscribed to an equally long list of Vietnamese periodicals in 1919; the library purchased works from Vietnamese language publishers and bookstores in Hanoi and Saigon such as Nam Tân, Tân Dân Thư Quán Hanoi, Librarie Nam Kỳ, Haovin & Co, and J Nguyễn Văn Việt.²⁴⁵ These subscription lists reveal a vibrant Vietnamese publishing industry of newspapers and bookstores.

Analyzing the history of a library collection brings to light how builders envisioned, created, and maintained a library collection. The creation of collections depended upon compromises between visions of ‘good reading’ and fiscal constraints. While library administrators envisioned the Indochinese libraries to be modern and include new and important literature from the metropole and around the world, the reality was often far from this. With limited library budgets, changing library administrators and regulations, the priorities of library collections often fell into maintenance rather than development. The libraries of Indochina struggled to maintain basic operations such as cataloging its existing works, new donations and legal deposits. Furthermore, Indochina libraries failed to regularly record library use by readers. Data on collections and readers was fragmentary, sporadic, and at times, approximated.

²⁴⁴ *La Princesse de Clèves* was written by Marie-Madeleine de la Fayette and was published anonymously in 1678. It is regarded as one of the first French historical novels. Pierre de Marivaux (1688-1763) is known as one of the most important French playwrights of the eighteenth century. Marivaux wrote for the national theater, Comédie-Française, and his plays were one of the most frequently performed (second only to those by Molière).

²⁴⁵ TLT2, GC, Folder 12044 “État de Relevés des dépenses engagées, de remboursement, Inventaire du matériel en service, Livres condamnés et perdus, Ouvrages en quốc ngữ...de la Bibliothèque années 1920-1927,” [State of Invoiced expenses, reimbursement, inventory of equipment in service, condemned and lost books, works in quốc ngữ...of the library].

Catalogs demonstrate the administrative logic of the builders, not necessarily the literary preferences and consumptive practices of library readers. What was most available was not always what people read the most. Since detailed circulation information is difficult to find, to understand library reader consumption requires a contextualized and close reading of sources on both readers and collections. Some libraries maintained an uneven but important paper trail of its readers—check-out records, statistics on overall reader registration, demographics, and letters to the administration. Other reports on the material conditions of the collections (damages, binding, lost books), purchase records, and administrative decisions can also shed light upon reader demands. Analysis of these records can provide insight into the complex questions of reading culture such as reader tastes, demands, and usage.

Furthermore, it is important to read along the grain and understand the function of statistics for institutions. These statistics of collection size and reader usage were crucial to justify the importance of the library, petition for government funding, as well as internally evaluate the effectiveness of the library to serve its targeted readers. The following close analyses of reading lists in prison libraries and the French-Vietnamese library demonstrate the administrative logic of builders, literary demands of users, economic constraints of library material circulation, and the functions of reading for the colonial state and its readers.

Prison Reading: Discarded Books and Leisure Reading for Prisoners, 1887-1936²⁴⁶

A few official libraries existed in prisons throughout Indochina and French colonies since the late nineteenth century.²⁴⁷ Although these early libraries were directed towards prison administrators, some Vietnamese prisoners were able to gain access to the administrator library books and read, summarized, and spread them to other prisoners.²⁴⁸ The sparse but important libraries and reading matter in colonial prisons demonstrates the economic costs and logistics of the book trade, the limited state social programs for prisoners, and the social role of reading for prisoners.

²⁴⁶ As Peter Zinoman has shown in his extensive study, the colonial prison system was a coercive prisoner of war camp to suppress colonial dissent. The French colonial state built a decentralized network of prisons and penitentiaries throughout Indochina and other French colonies and territorial possessions such as New Caledonia and French Guiana. Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²⁴⁷ TTLT2, GC, Folder 502 “Dossier relatif aux ouvrages pour la Bibliothèque de la Prison Centrale et Envoi au Cap Saint Jacques des prisonniers pour la route reliant la baie des cité à la fausse baie année 1887.” In 1887, an administrator at the Saigon Central Prison wrote a letter to the Director of the Ministry of Interior explaining that it was essential to provide the library of the prison with more books. Attaching a book list, the Central Prison requested the following practical as well as theoretical reading matter: “Manuel des Prisons” by Grillet-Wammy (on the historical, theoretical practices of the penitentiary system); “Code des Prisons” by Inspector General of Prisons Moreau Christophe (laws, decrees, and ministerial instructions); “La petite Roquette” by Corne (study on the correctional education of detained youth); and “Les établissements pénitentiaires en France et aux Colonies” by Vicomte d’Haussonville. This list provides evidence of one of the first functioning libraries in the central prison (maison centrale) for prison administrators since the late 19thth century.

²⁴⁸ In Pham Hung’s memoir of his time imprisoned in the Central Prison in Hanoi “In the Death Cell,” Hung explained how he was able to access the books from the French prison library. He described, “In the Central Prison there was a library for the French. I borrowed some books and after reading them, summarized the stories for the other prisoners. To their delight, we read *Les Misérables* by Hugo and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* by Dumas.” *In the Death Cell* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960) p. 75, as cited in Peter Zinoman, “Reading Revolutionary Prison Memoirs,” in *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 31.

Prisons in Indochina and the French colonies were notorious for its harsh conditions and poor funding for basic necessities. With a limited to non-existent budget, the library collections in prison libraries developed from donated and discarded books from other libraries. As the last stage in the donated book cycle, the prison library collection reveals the popular but worn out reading matter of the time in colonial Indochina. In 1903 and 1907 the Cochinchina Library in Saigon sent books to the Saigon Maison Centrale prison library. In the 1903 shipment to the prison, a diverse genre of books such as popular novels, plays, history and romance genres punctuate the reading list.²⁴⁹ From the 1903 list of 69 books, the most common authors and their works rank as follows:

1. 10 (14.4%) works by Alexandre Dumas (*Un cadet de Faille, Rocambole en prison, Onze pitou, Les bonds du Rhin, Les louves de Machecoul, Salvator*)
2. 9 (13%) books by nineteenth century fantasy adventure novelist Pierre Alexis Ponson du Terrail, known for his fictional character Rocambole (*Les drames de Paris, Les misères de Londres, Les exploits de Rocambole*)
3. 6 (8.7%) copies of works by romantic Belgian writer Léopold-Goswin Stapleaux (*Les compagnons du Glaire* volumes II-VII).
4. Other authors included were single works by detective fiction writer Émile Gaboriau, master of short story Guy de Maupassant, serial novelist Eugène Sue, and father of science fiction Jules Verne.

In comparison, in 1907 the Cochinchina Library sent 44 discarded books to the Saigon Maison Centrale.²⁵⁰ This list also included popular novels by Alexandre Dumas (*Le fils du forcat, Les compagnons de Jehu, La reine Margo, Les Blancs et les Bleus, Les deux Dianes*), Émile Gaboriau (*L'affaire Lerouge, Mariages d'aventure, La montagne d'or*), illustrated works by writer and caricaturist Sybille Riquetti de Mirabeau who went by the pseudonym “Gyp” and “Bob” (*Les gens chics, Les séducteurs, Mademoiselle Loulou, Pauvre petite femme*), as well as other works by Victor Hugo.

The 1903 and 1907 lists of works sent to the Saigon Central Prison provide insight into the popular reading tastes and availability of reading matter in Saigon at the turn of the twentieth century — nineteenth century French novels, new genres of fiction (detective, fantasy adventure, science), and illustrated works. Considering that these 113 books were discarded and donated by the Cochinchina Library, this suggests that the works were the most popular and plentiful in the colony. Libraries often chose books for removal based on their condition (worn out due to overuse and over-circulation), and their quantity or value (cheap, popular, outdated or the library already had multiple editions).

With the rise of the Popular Front Socialist party in France in 1936, many protests challenged the existing prison conditions and called for prison reform and rehabilitation. Possibly to appease these calls for reform, the colonial government welcomed more attempts to improve prison social conditions through reading and building library collections such as in the

²⁴⁹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11874 “Dossier Relatif Aux Activités de Bibliothèques Années 1912-1917,” Document: “Liste des ouvrages envoyés à la Prison Centrale, 1903.”

²⁵⁰ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11974 “Dossier relatif aux renseignements sur les archives locales conservées en Cochinchine...” Document “Liste des livres envoyés à la Prison Centrale (suite a la lettre n. 108D en date du 27 Mai 1907”

case of the Vietnamese prisoners in the penitentiary in French Guiana.²⁵¹ In a letter from the Minister of Colonies to the Governor General of Indochina on November 6, 1935, the minister reported that libraries had been established in various penitentiaries in the colony French Guiana, located in the northeast coast of South America.²⁵² The minister of colonies requested books written in indigenous languages to “place in the hands of convicts of Indochinese origin” currently in prison. Following this request on February 1, 1936, Brasey the governor of Cochinchina submitted to the Governor General (Service of Indigenous affairs) in Hanoi a list of 48 books (a total of 102 volumes) to send for the Indochinese currently sentenced to prison in French Guiana.²⁵³

The majority of the titles on this list were in Vietnamese quốc ngữ (64.6%) while 16.7% titles were in French (such as *Candide*, *Gil blas de Santillane*, and *Les Misérables*) and 18.7% of the list were Chinese titles (or possibly re-adaptations of Chinese classics into Vietnamese). The list included popular and diverse works of the time such as Vietnamese translations of Molière’s plays, Vietnamese works by Nguyễn Công Trứ and Trương Vĩnh Ký, Khái Hưng’s modernist short story “Anh Phải Sống,” general books on Confucianism, literary criticism, songs, and novels. The envoy included one to two copies of these popular works.²⁵⁴ In comparison, the following was transported to French Guiana in multiple copies and editions: six copies of Hồ Biếu Chánh’s *Nam Cực tinh Huy* (published in Saigon, 1924), six copies of the Chinese classic *Tâm quốc diễn nghĩa* [Romance of the Three Kingdoms] and 21 copies of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*.²⁵⁵ The comparatively higher number of copies of these three works reveals the dynamism of the reading market in 1930s Vietnam: adaptations and translations of Chinese classics, Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, and new genres and Vietnamese quốc ngữ literature by prolific Vietnamese literary giants permeated the reading matter at the time.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ Historically the area shifted between a designation as a territory, a department of France, and a penal colony. Since 1867, many of the prisoners at the French Guiana South American penal colony were Vietnamese or Algerian. In 1925, France created the territory of Inini, extending over Guiana and designated three ‘Special Penal Establishments.’ Many Indochinese prisoners from the prisons from Hanoi, Paulo Condore were sent to Guiana and sentenced to work and develop the land. In 1931 the French National Assembly designated Inini exclusively for Indochinese prisoners. Hy V. Luong, *Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925-1988*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), p. 117. From 1852 to 1952, a total of 70,000 prisoners were stent to French Guiana. French Guiana was also notoriously known as a “hellish prison,” a “dry guillotine [guillotine sèche]” with torturous conditions likened to a slow death. Many ethnic Chinese Vietnamese were also sentenced to French Guiana, as highlighted in the Lorraine Paterson’s study on exiled Chinese Vietnamese political prisoners and transcolonial mobility: Lorraine M. Paterson, “Ethnoscaapes of Exile: Political Prisoners from Indochina in a Colonial Asian World,” *International Review of Social History* 63, no. S26 (August 2018): 89–107.

²⁵² TTLT2, GC, Folder 18846 “Dossier relatif aux créations des Bibliothèques Pénitentiaires à la Guyane année 1936,” Document: Letter from the Minister of Colonies to the Governor General of Indochina on November 6, 1935.

²⁵³ Ibid. Document: Letter from Governor of Cochinchina Brasey to the Governor General of Indochina (Services affaires indigènes) Hanoi titled on February 1, 1936.

²⁵⁴ Developments in printing technologies, economic interwar boom and the rise of cities and literacy produced a reading, publishing, translating sphere, offering a more plentiful supply of secondhand and cheaper editions of popular works, especially of *Les Misérables*.

²⁵⁵ Hồ Biếu Chánh (1884-1958) was a prolific twentieth century Vietnamese writers from the South, who wrote over 100 works of poetry, short stories, novels, translations, and literary criticism in his lifetime.

²⁵⁶ Since the turn of the twentieth century, translations of popular Ming and Qing Chinese fictions to Vietnamese flooded the Vietnamese reading market. Translations and readapted, serialized versions of the following popular Chinese works permeated Vietnamese bookstores, reading rooms, and libraries such as the late sixteenth century historical adventure saga Romance of the Three Kingdoms (*Sanguo zhi yanyi* 三國志 演義) and Chinese monk Xuangzang’s journey to India Journey to the West (*Xiyouji* 西遊記).

The ubiquity of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* demonstrates the tremendous popularity of this work in colonial Vietnam. *Les Misérables* maintained a significant role for Vietnamese prisoners in particular. As Peter Zinoman has argued, the narrative of the prison became fundamental to Vietnamese revolutionary writing during the French colonial period and continued throughout the post-colonial communist state.²⁵⁷ The genre of prison memoirs, prison writing, and the theme of collective struggle functioned to build morale and a history of struggle and perseverance. During the French colonial period, a 'cult of incarceration' developed within Vietnamese radical writing, which intersected with the powerful romanticism of nineteenth century French novels of struggle, comradeship, and perseverance such as in the works of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas. Vietnamese writers such as Hồ Biểu Chánh and Nguyễn H ồng adapted the plot lines and themes of escape, survival, and confinement from *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Les Misérables* to the Vietnamese stories "Châu T ầu Kim Quy [The Ship Master of Kim Quy Island]," "Ngọn Cỏ Gió Đùa [Blades of Grass in the Wind]" by Hồ Biểu Chánh, and "Cửa Biển [The Ocean's Mouth]" by Nguyễn H ồng. The heroism, determination, and perseverance of the main character Jean Valjean fed into the 'cult of incarceration' and French romantic heroism. Described as "the most beloved writer in the colony," Victor Hugo had been translated, serialized into newspapers, and integrated into French-Vietnamese educational curriculum since 1913. The exponentially higher number of copies of *Les Misérables* also shows the significance of Victor Hugo's heroic prison novel for Vietnamese prisoners of Inini Special Penitentiary in French Guiana in 1936.

On August 1936, the Governor of French Guiana sent another letter to the Governor General of Indochina to report that the first shipment of books, especially those written in quốc ngữ "were received with enthusiasm by the men of the Special Penitentiary Establishments."²⁵⁸ Speaking to an interpreter at the prison, the governor submitted to the Governor General of Indochina a request for "theatrical plays in order to diversify the repertoire of reading—currently the prisoner's favorite Sunday amusement." The governor requested two copies of each text (as long as there was no objection in content of the book), emphasizing that the works translated into quốc ngữ were most appreciated by the prisoners (while the Chinese language works only interest a very small number of them)." The popularity of Vietnamese quốc ngữ reflects a shift in the 1930s book market in Vietnam to Vietnamese, as well as the increase in quốc ngữ literacy and preferences for Vietnamese over French, the official language of the Indochina administration.

In response to the request for Vietnamese plays, Professor Georges Taboulet (from the Education Service in Cochinchina) confirmed the availability of most of these works, available for purchase at the L'imprimerie Đức Lưu Phương on 158 Rue d'Espagne in Saigon.²⁵⁹ The plays requested included such works as Vietnamese Cải lương [opera], translated Chinese classics and popular novels such as *Mạnh Lệ quân* [Mulan], *Tây Du* [Journey to the West], *Tiễn Nhơn Quý Chinh Đông*, and *Tiễn Nhơn Quý Chinh Tây* (the famous classic Chinese tale translated by Tô Chấn).

²⁵⁷ Peter Zinoman, "Reading Revolutionary Prison Memoirs."

²⁵⁸ TTLT2, GC, Folder 18846 "Dossier relatif aux créations des Bibliothèques Pénitenciaires à la Guyane année 1936." Document: Letter from Interim Governor of French Guyane (Inini Territory) to the Governor General of Indochina on August 31, 1936.

²⁵⁹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 18846 "Dossier Relatif Aux Créations des Bibliothèques Penitenciaires à la Guyane Année 1936." Document: Letter from Georges Taboulet (Local head of Education Service in Cochinchina) to Head of Second Office of Government of Saigon on December 23, 1936.

This case is significant for three reasons: First, it demonstrates the vast political geography of French colonial control throughout its colonies and penal territories; Second, it shows the availability of reading matter during the French colonial period; and Third, the case demonstrates the reading matter available to and demanded by Vietnamese prisoners. Reading was a rare and limited privilege for prisoners in the French colonies. Nevertheless, demands for reading matter humanizes and diversifies the punitive narrative of prison regimes and instead reveals the important role of prisoner social and intellectual life. In this case, administrators also recognized that reading offered important ‘Sunday leisure’ for prisoners.²⁶⁰ This exchange suggests that some feedback communication channels existed between prisoner and administration, especially in the context of 1930s Popular Front socialist inspired social reform. From these documents, we can see the significance of popular novels, plays, and songs and the increased demand for quốc ngữ reading matter from prisoners by the mid 1930s. The reading list reveals insight into popular works and genres at the time: an increasing demand for genres such as Vietnamese novels, music, plays, Chinese classics in quốc ngữ and a decreasing emphasis on French classics outside of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*.

Close Analysis of the French-Vietnamese Library of the Protectorate in Tonkin 1907-1921: Collections and Consumption of ‘Good’ Civilizing Reading

The organization of the French-Vietnamese Library points to how the colonial state attempted to civilize and control its Vietnamese subjects through reading, education, and literacy. As early as 1906, administrators of the Resident Superior in Tonkin, Governor General, and Director General of Public Instruction began to build a “French-Vietnamese Library” in the former building of the École Normale next to the Maison du Petit Lac on Jules Ferry Street in Hanoi.²⁶¹ Designated as one of the first exclusively “indigenous libraries,” the library welcomed Vietnamese interpreters and employees in the administration or commercial sector with the ultimate goal: to “offer the population a means to complete their education by reading Chinese and Vietnamese books and to introduce French books, especially those popularizing (vulgarizing) books that are often too expensive for indigenous to acquire.”²⁶² Officially opened on March 9, 1907, the French-Vietnamese Library contained a collection of 500 carefully selected books in French, quốc ngữ, and Chinese characters. The report emphasized that these library books did not exist in typical Vietnamese bookstores and were carefully selected for the educational development of Vietnamese readers. Recognizing that not all Vietnamese were literate in French, the report explained how simple French books were initially chosen for the

²⁶⁰ Although libraries for prisoners were rare, these cases were not exceptional. Later evidence shows another envoy of 400 books (collected from the Cochinchina circulating libraries) loaned to prisoners at the Central Saigon Prison in 1943. TTLT2, GC, Folder 52693 “Prêt d’ouvrages des Bibliothèques aux détenus de la Maison Centrale de Saigon Année 1943.”

²⁶¹ TTLT1, RSTAF, Folder 74181 “Création à Hanoi d’une Bibliothèque Franco-Annamite,” 1906-1916 [Creation of a French-Vietnamese Library in Hanoi]. TTLT1, RSTAF, Folder 57827 “Demande d’occupation du local de la Bibliothèque sis à la Rue ‘Jules-Ferry-Hanoi’, Formulée par l’Association pour la Formation Intellectuelle et Morale des Annamites,” 1908-1926 [Request to use the location on Jules Ferry, Hanoi for the library. Request from the Association for the Intellectual and Moral Formation of Vietnamese]. Various names of the library: *la bibliothèque franco-annamite du protectorat, la bibliothèque franco-annamite, bibliothèque franco-annamite de vulgarisation*

²⁶²TTLT1, RSTAF, Folder 74181 “Création à Hanoi d’une Bibliothèque Franco-Annamite,” 1906-1916. Documents: Letter from the resident superior of Tonkin to the Governor General of Indochina dated August 30, 1906, and letter addressed to the general director of public education in Indochina dated October 3, 1906.

library, and over time the collection would include more complex French language books. The library was funded by the local budget and was placed under the authority of the Resident Superior of Tonkin. A supervising committee oversaw the function and book purchases and consisted of a member from the office of the Resident Superior, the chief of secretary for public education, a member of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, a professor of education, treasurer of the civil service of the resident superior, an indigenous instructor, the president of the Mutual Education Society, and an indigenous worker of the protectorate.

The library was primarily intended for on-site consultation. A small selection of books could also be borrowed home for 15 days with a one piastre deposit. The report described the new institution as a civilizational and linguistic resource for Vietnamese readers:

With one mere piastre which will be returned to him, an intelligent and studious Vietnamese would be able to read all the works of this library—[a collection of works] specifically chosen for the interest and instruction on sciences, literature, geography, history, etc...he will not have to go and look for these books in a bookstore where he would not even find them. He will also have at his disposal a number of dictionaries which will make it easier for him to understand the texts. [At the library,] he will certainly find a good and instructive book, not too difficult to read but enough to instruct and amuse. The great distinction of this library: the books were chosen for the readers. Most of the Vietnamese students cannot yet understand all of the French works, especially those dealing with science: that is why we judiciously chose the books in the collection.²⁶³

A rare 1907 borrowing log from the Franco-Vietnamese Library provides insight into the types of books consulted as well as reader demographics at the turn of the twentieth century in Hanoi. The list recorded the names of readers, their employment, the title of each work that the reader consulted, and observations regarding the readers' background. The list records 178 instances of books borrowed from 57 different Vietnamese readers of the library. From Vietnamese interpreters, secretaries, teachers, and students, the readers and their preferred reading material of libraries were extremely diverse. Reading matter spanned the eighteenth and nineteenth century French classics, Chinese morality and science books, as well as the popular nineteenth and twentieth century genre of selected 'collected works' on a popular author or topic. The top six books borrowed were popular eighteenth century French classic novels, short stories, domestic hygiene and morality guidebooks, and Chinese science books. The top six books included the following:

1. *Paul et Virginie* (Paul and Virginia), a novel by Jacques Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre published first in 1788
2. *Tu seras chef de famille: Livre de lecture sur la morale domestic* (You will be head of the household: A reading book on domestic morality) published in 1891
3. *Les aventures de Télémaque* (The adventures of Telemachus) a novel by Archbishop of Cambrai Fénelon published in 1699 and republished in 1717
4. *Contes du Lundi* (Tales of Monday) is a collection of short stories by Alphonse Daudet published in 1873
5. *Tu seras prévoyant* (full title: You will plan ahead: advice from Father Vincent) is a

²⁶³ In 1930, one piastre equaled approximately ten francs.

guidebook on saving and retirement published in 1899 by Paul Matrat

Of 112 unique books borrowed, 15 (13.4%) were Chinese works, many of which were encyclopedias, collected works, and books on science, history, travel, and politics. The borrowing log included the Chinese title and translated the title into French such as the following works: *Hygiène domestique* [Domestic Hygiene], *Robinson Crusoe*, *Petit encyclopédie des sciences* [Little Encyclopedia of Sciences], *Régime politique des divers états* [Political Regimes of various states], *Traité de physique* [Treatise on physics], and *Hygiène de la femme* [Women's hygiene]. The range of Chinese language works and translations points to the influence of Chinese modernist and scientific literature on Vietnamese reading matter at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁶⁴ The Chinese language texts available and most borrowed by Vietnamese readers covered a range of topics such as domestic hygiene, political history, physics and chemistry, and novels.

Over a quarter of the 112 books on the list were excerpts of a larger work or collected works on a topic. The excerpted works included selections from the great French literary writers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jules Claretie, Pierre Loti, Émile Zola, Voltaire, Bossuet, Chateaubriand, Balzac, Madame de Sévigné, Michielet, Alfred Musset, René Bazire, and Paul Bourget. The list of borrowed works suggests an interest in a digestible introduction to French literature and also works related to practical application and techniques. Of the 57 Vietnamese readers, approximately half were labeled as students from the new Indochinese University in Hanoi. 31.6% of the readers were interpreters for the Resident Superior, while the remaining numbers were from the college of interpreters, Chinese language teachers, or secretaries for departments such as the General Government, Public Works, and Department of Agriculture.

Although this reading list is incomplete, it provides a glimpse of the intellectual, linguistic, and literary universe of works available to Vietnamese readers at the turn of the twentieth century. From this curated collection of works, Vietnamese administrators, teachers, and students read a wide variety of topics in Chinese and French: 1) Popular eighteenth and nineteenth century French literature and compiled collections of 'great writers' and 2) Applied sciences and morality guides. By 1908, the library welcomed over 60 Vietnamese readers daily and renamed itself the popularizing library [Bibliothèque Franco-Annamite du Vulgarisation]. This data set does not represent all of Vietnamese reading preferences, but points to how Vietnamese readers engaged with the library's selected collection of 'civilizing' good works.

The case of the French-Vietnamese Library reveals the ways in which the colonial state used the library and reading matter to define 'modernity' and reinforce a civilizational hierarchy. The colonial administration carefully selected the library collection to provide 'good', 'modern', functional reading such as the non-fiction subjects of history, sciences, and maps and excerpts from classic French fiction authors. The French colonial state saw itself as a benevolent civilization with the responsibility to guide, cultivate, and improve its protégés. The hierarchical racism of this colonial relationship is implicit not only within the library collections and discourse of civilizing education, but also in the reading room rules. In 1908 detailed reading

²⁶⁴ The intellectual modernist movements in China produced extensive new concepts about modernity and nationalism as well as translated Japanese, French, and American ideas into Chinese. These texts were brought and smuggled into Vietnam, influencing a generation of intellectuals (most notably Phan Boi Chau, and 1910s and 1920s intellectuals of the Dong Du and Tonkin Free School).

room rules were posted throughout the library in French, Vietnamese, and Chinese.²⁶⁵ Reading room rules crafted a vision of a ‘modern, civilized’ reader, who was quiet, clean, courteous, and careful. The rules forbade Vietnamese from betel nut chewing and smoking; this prohibition labeled Vietnamese as barbaric and unacceptable in the public space of the reading room. In other words, the reading room of the French-Vietnamese Library attempted to create a new space in which the Vietnamese traditional mannerisms were left at the door. Inside the room was permitted a new, civilized, Vietnamese—someone who was respectful, intelligent, and eager to learn and unlock civilizational enlightenment through access to the valuable French colonial curated collection.

However, the colonial project to develop the French-Vietnamese library for “civilizing” Vietnamese appeared to be more of an idealistic project than a popular resource among Vietnamese readers. By 1918, newspapers such as *Courrier d’haiphong* commented on the “lamentable” state of the French-Vietnamese Library.²⁶⁶

The inauguration of this library was a celebration for our indigenous students; thus a fund is provided every year to the budget of Tonkin for the maintenance and conservation of this library. However, for the last two years, the absence of electric lighting has forced the librarian to close the doors of its establishment [the library]. Furthermore, during the siesta (afternoon) hours, only a few readers visit the library. Given the ridiculously low number of library users for some time now, we wonder why the administration has not dreamt to do away with [the library] in order to reduce costs [from the overall government budget].

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the colonial state envisioned the French-Vietnamese Library as a modern educational space according to French notions of the civilizing mission. However as shown in the case of the French-Vietnamese Library, a purely top down French colonial fantasy of a civilizing, modern library was unsuccessful. The library’s collection and mission did not meet the literary and educational needs nor interests of Vietnamese readers. With the rapid growth of a Vietnamese reading community in Hanoi and Saigon in 1920s and 1930s, Vietnamese readers demanded, defied, and defined new meanings and functions of the modern library.

Part 3

Reading in the Hanoi Central Library and Saigon Library: A Space of Vietnamese Sociability and Alternative Modernities, 1919-1940

²⁶⁵ On June 29, 1908, the library published an official list of everyday functions and rules, and required the rules to be displayed in French, quốc ngữ, and Chinese throughout the library. Not only did the library regulations explain reading and borrowing privileges, operating hours, and reader cards, but also carefully laid out rules regarding reader behavior. Vietnamese readers were forbidden to smoke and chew betel nut in the reading room. All Vietnamese were permitted into the reading room as long as they carry their identity card. There were no open shelves, but books could be consulted by speaking with the librarian. Books must be treated with the greatest care and not be written in. All Vietnamese who seek to borrow a book home must submit a request to the librarian in the morning, pay a deposit of one piastre, and have the Treasurer of the committee authorize the request. Violation of these rules could result in a ban from the library.

²⁶⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4, Document: "La Bibliothèque franco-annamite de Hanoi" *Courrier d’haiphong*, March 20, 1918.

The Vietnamese Library Population: From Temple and Storehouse of European Knowledge to Public Space of Vietnamese Modernity and Sociability

On November 6, 1920, the Governor General of Indochina, Monsieur Cocnacq, the General Inspector of Public Instruction, Captain Bernard, and Madame Long visited the Central Library. The newspaper *Courrier d'haiphong* reported their highly publicized visit: “Guided by the young and learned archivist Paul Boudet, the group visited the various library departments, marveling in the simplicity, good taste, and ingenuity of the classified, arranged, and well-integrated collections—all of human genius unified with religious care by Boudet.” Described as a model for other libraries, the Central Library of Hanoi had “great reading rooms with comfortable chairs, large tables, good lighting, and quiet fans to help the studious readers overcome the tropical temperatures.”²⁶⁷

Written a few years after the creation of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in 1917, this commentary expressed the visions of a model, modern public library represented by the Central Library in Hanoi – an intellectual center, a temple, and ‘storehouse of knowledge’ connecting European modernity to Indochina. The article emphasized the mission of the modern library to provide an intellectual resource and oasis away from the tropical temperatures for French residents in the colony. “The colonialist who seeks to join the study of European intellectual movements but could not find it here... will be grateful to this young, audacious and artistic young man [Paul Boudet] for building in the heart of Tonkin a small temple consecrated for the cerebral efforts. [The library] serves as a storage of the historical treasures of the colony and thus permits the French in exile to connect with the spirit of universal knowledge.” The article framed universal knowledge as Western, and thus the goal of the modern library was to connect European knowledge to European readers in the colony. Both the *L’opinion journal* and the *Courrier d’haiphong* articles conceptualized the Indochina libraries as temples of European knowledge serving European (primarily French) readers. Although the article exaggerated the pristine state of the Hanoi Central Library, this commentary sheds light on the popular sentiment of the importance of libraries. The Hanoi library served as a symbol of French ‘modernity’ and functioned as an intellectual oasis especially for French expatriates to continue their European learning and remain connected with European intellectual movements.

However, this article was completely out of touch with the everyday reality of the Central Library—the majority of the reading public was not French, but Vietnamese. By 1920s Vietnamese readers increasingly became the overwhelming majority of library users in Hanoi and Saigon. Vietnamese became the most vocal agents demanding development of the library and proclaiming the importance of the library for education. The demographics of library users had changed by the 1920s. Firstly, the Indochina European (predominantly French) population was relatively tiny compared to the ethnic Vietnamese population. According to historian Christopher Goscha’s estimates, the total number of Europeans never surpassed more than 35,000 throughout Indochina—approximately 17,000 French lived in Saigon, 6,000 in Hanoi, 2,000 in Haiphong, and the remaining number in smaller towns.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ TILT1, DABI, Folder 4 “Archivage des articles des Journaux dans la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques à Hanoi 1918,” January 11, 1918 [Archive of newspaper articles on the Direction of Archives and Libraries]. Document: “L’opinion journal quotidien pour l’Indochine, par la France” November 17, 1920. The article references another report of the visit of the Governor General of Indochina to the Central Library published on November 6 and 8, 1920 in *Courrier d’haiphong*.

²⁶⁸ Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016). P. 123.

Secondly, the majority of library readers were urban. With the interwar economic boom in the 1920s, cities were developing in Saigon-Cholon, Hanoi, Haiphong. The concentration of people, wealth, and ideas in cities ushered in new concepts of urban space, identity, social relations, and practices of modernity and symbolic capital. In the 1930s, Saigon-Cholon had a total population of around 300,000, Hanoi had 150,000, and Haiphong had 200,000.²⁶⁹ In particular, the regional rice trade influenced the rapid growth of the city of Saigon throughout the colonial period. At the beginning of French colonialism in Cochinchina, the population of Europeans in Saigon in 1864 was only 577 (of which 80 were female), and less than 8,000 total inhabitants.²⁷⁰ By 1930 the population of the city of Saigon grew to 12,000 Europeans and 160,000 indigenous (primarily Vietnamese).

Thirdly, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed an increase in education and overall literacy particularly in urban areas in Vietnam. Under the Franco-Indigène education policy, more primary, upper primary, and secondary schools, as well as professional schools developed throughout Indochina. In 1910 there were only a total of 37,000 public school students in Cochinchina. By 1930, there were a total of 138,330 public school students and 32,543 private school students, 1,591 public schools, 250 European teachers, and 3,800 Vietnamese instructors, in Cochinchina. According to calculations, public education had significantly expanded and increased the total number of students by nearly 375%.²⁷¹

With the increase in the population of literate, educated, and urban Vietnamese, the public of the Central Library in Hanoi became predominantly Vietnamese. In 1920, the Central Library Reading Room and Lending Section recorded 14,000 French visits and 9,000 Vietnamese reader visits.²⁷² By 1928 the total number of Vietnamese readers consulting materials in the Reading Room and Lending Section of the Central Library was quickly surpassing that of French readers. In a period of 13 years, Vietnamese reader visits more than doubled the number of visits by French readers — from 35,815 Vietnamese reader visits in 1929 to 102,704 in 1941. Meanwhile from 1929 to 1941, the total number of French reader visits remained stagnant at around 40,000. In the context of Hanoi's city population of around 150,000, a significant number of people frequented the Central Library.

²⁶⁹ E. Teston & M. Percheron, *Indochine Moderne: Encyclopédie Administrative, Touristique, Artistique, et Économique*. (Paris: Librairie de France). P. 454, 537, 543.

²⁷⁰ P. Gastaldy, ed., *La Cochinchine* (Saigon: Société des Études Indochinoises, 1931). P. 32.

²⁷¹ Georges Taboulet, "L'enseignement en Cochinchine," in *La Cochinchine*, ed. P. Gastaldy (Saigon: Société des Études Indochinoises, 1931), 93–102. P. 94.

²⁷² This folder contains a series of statistics on reader visits, consultation numbers, reader race between 1920 and 1941. However, the Central Library approximated the statistics of reader visits from years 1920-1928. The numbers shown in the above diagram approximate the use of the library – the number of times a reader enters or visits the library, not the number of readers registered for the year. TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1627 "Statistiques Annuelles de 1920 à 1941 du Nombre des Lecteurs, des Livres Prêtés et Consultés à la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1920-1941," Document: "Fréquentation de la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi – Salle de lecture et section de prêt réunire."

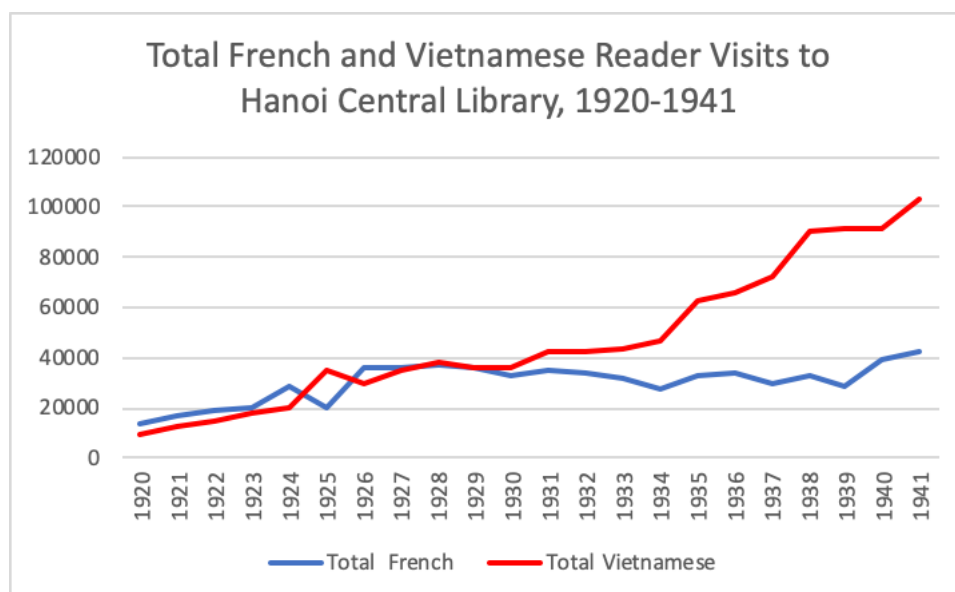


Figure 2-2. From 1919 to 1927, the total number of French reader visits to the Central Library Reading Room and Lending Section was always greater than the number of Vietnamese readers (except for the year 1925). However, beginning in 1928 the number of Vietnamese reader visits (38,000) to the Central Library began to consistently surpass that of French readers (37,000). Note that these numbers include French and Vietnamese visits to both the Reading Room and Lending Section.²⁷³

Throughout the colonial period, the Reading Room and Lending Section of the Hanoi Central Library was crowded and heavily used, even comparatively more than many French libraries in France. For example, in 1931, the Hanoi Reading Room recorded 51,932 book consultations in one year (both French and Vietnamese readers) out of a collection size of 70,000 works. With over 50,000 book consultations, reader use of the Hanoi Reading Room was an astonishingly high amount, especially when compared to the number of consultations in large French cities such as Lyon (63,362), Rouen (30,545), and Marseille (25,000).²⁷⁴ The report continued to commend the Central Library Lending Section’s popularity in comparison to French libraries,

For the Lending Section, we only have very fragmentary statistics of French libraries, but we doubt that its small number can reach the number of [the Central Library Lending Section]. The [Hanoi Central Library records] 60,000 annual loans with a circulating collection of 10,000 volumes; each volume is checked out on average six times each year. This brilliant result and enthusiasm of the public, especially the indigenous of the library, is due to the existence of the great facilities provided for the readers. The library is open

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Excluding Paris, the Central Library ranked second in budget after the Lyon library, and also ranked second in book consultations. Paul Boudet, *Gouvernement général de l’Indochine. Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1930-1931)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1931).

all days from 9 in the morning to 10 in the evening the Lending Section is open everyday from 9 to 8 in the evening without interruption, except for its closure Sunday morning.²⁷⁵

Hierarchy of Knowledge: “Leisure Readers” versus “Serious Readers” in the Reading Room of the Hanoi Central Library

Vietnamese patrons formed the vast majority of the Reading Room of the Hanoi Central Library throughout the late colonial period. In 1929, the visit numbers of French patrons to the Reading Room started to decline each year while the numbers of Vietnamese patrons increased exponentially, approximately doubling in number every 5 years. In 1929, 25,815 Vietnamese users visited the Reading Room, increasing to 55,888 in 1936, and 87,397 in 1941. In comparison, in 1929 French visits to the Reading Room numbered 10,549, decreasing to 7,028 in 1936, and only 3,860 in 1941. The library administration collected a series of statistics documenting the monthly number of French visitors to the Reading Room from 1920 to 1941.²⁷⁶ Detailed statistics on the racial breakdown of readers hints at the library administrations’ concern over the gradual decline of French readers to the Hanoi Central Library Reading Room.

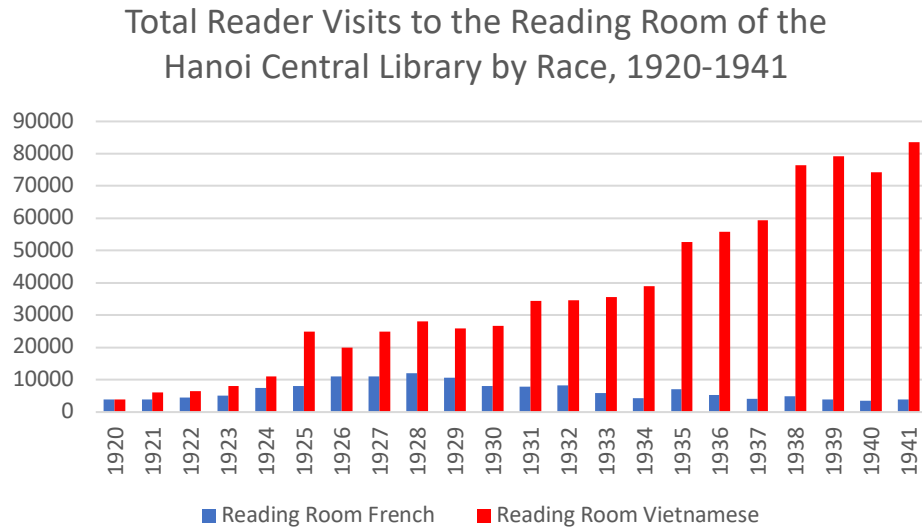


Figure 2-3. French visits to Reading Room decline from 1929 to 1941 while Vietnamese visits to the Reading Room exponentially increase from 1924 to 1941.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1930-1931)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie d’Extrême-Orient, 1931).

²⁷⁶ TLLT1, DABI, Folder 1631 “Statistiques du nombre des lecteurs indigènes et européens fréquentés à la Bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi, 1920-1941” According to these handwritten records, the number of Vietnamese readers was determined by deducting the number of French readers from the total number of readers. This suggests that compared to French readers, Vietnamese reader numbers were not as accurately recorded.

²⁷⁷ TLLT1, DABI, Folder 1627, Document: “Fréquentation de la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi – Salle de lecture et section de prêt réunire.”

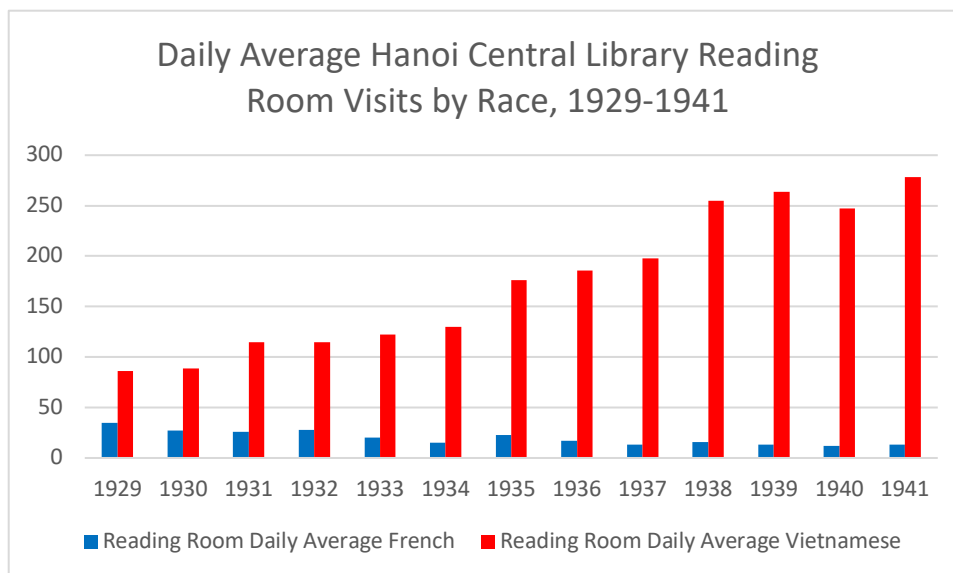


Figure 2-4. Daily averages of Vietnamese visits to the reading room reached 89 in 1930, 186 in 1936 and 278 in 1941. In comparison, French daily averages to the Reading Room slowly dropped from 27 in 1930, 17 in 1936, and 13 in 1941.²⁷⁸

One possible reason for the decreasing number of French readers to the Reading Room could be due to the limited space of seating, taken up by Vietnamese readers who staked out space and used the library for socializing. In the *L'Annam Nouveau* article titled “Bibliothèques Publiques [Public Libraries]” published November 28, 1935, the author argued that ‘civilized’ people loved to read, but in Indochina readers were not using the library to read. “A civilized people are a people who love to read... We know from the example of Japan, the number of readers is considerable and increases rapidly.” Drawing the direct connection between civilization and reading, the author compared the handful of public libraries in Vietnam to the spectacular number of libraries and readers in ‘civilized’ Japan.²⁷⁹ According to this report, in 1912, 54 libraries with nearly 4 million readers existed in Japan and by 1925, the numbers increased to an unbelievable 4,725 libraries with over 28 million readers. Furthermore, the author critiqued Vietnamese reader behavior as uncivilized and uninspired: “...in the Central Library Reading Room in Hanoi, one rarely finds an empty seat. Unfortunately it is because many have come to the library...to do nothing; Some come to the library because they are bored at home, others come because they want to find in the library not books but fans in the summer, and in winter a place a little less cold than their house. Lovers also rendezvous in the library.”

The author references the chronicles of an anonymous reader, “N.D.,” who reported on the everyday habits of library readers in the subsection “At the Central Library”: “Readers often come to the library, stake out their seats by placing a book there and leave to lunch. There is nothing more shocking than to see a great number of unoccupied seats [due to readers staking them out], while other readers are forced to stand next to windows or the lockers due to lack of space.” N.D. added that many people enter the library without a library card, seeking warmth in the winter and fans in the summer and take up the limited seating from ten in the morning to the

²⁷⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1627, Document: “Statistiques des lecteurs.”

²⁷⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 442, Document: “Bibliothèques Publiques” *L'Annam Nouveau*, Number 500 November 28, 1935.

evening. Many of these criticisms against popular reader behavior revolve around the notion of public shared space and a hierarchy of ‘leisure readers’ and ‘serious readers.’ The *L’Annam Nouveau* articles criticized the limited seating of the reading room and inappropriate behavior by ‘leisure readers’ who come to the library not for the materials but for socializing. With an increasing number of literate, educated, urban Vietnamese who sought out the Central Library, library administration confronted the question: who was the public that the library served? French, Vietnamese, administrators, teachers, students, leisure readers, researchers, or scientists?

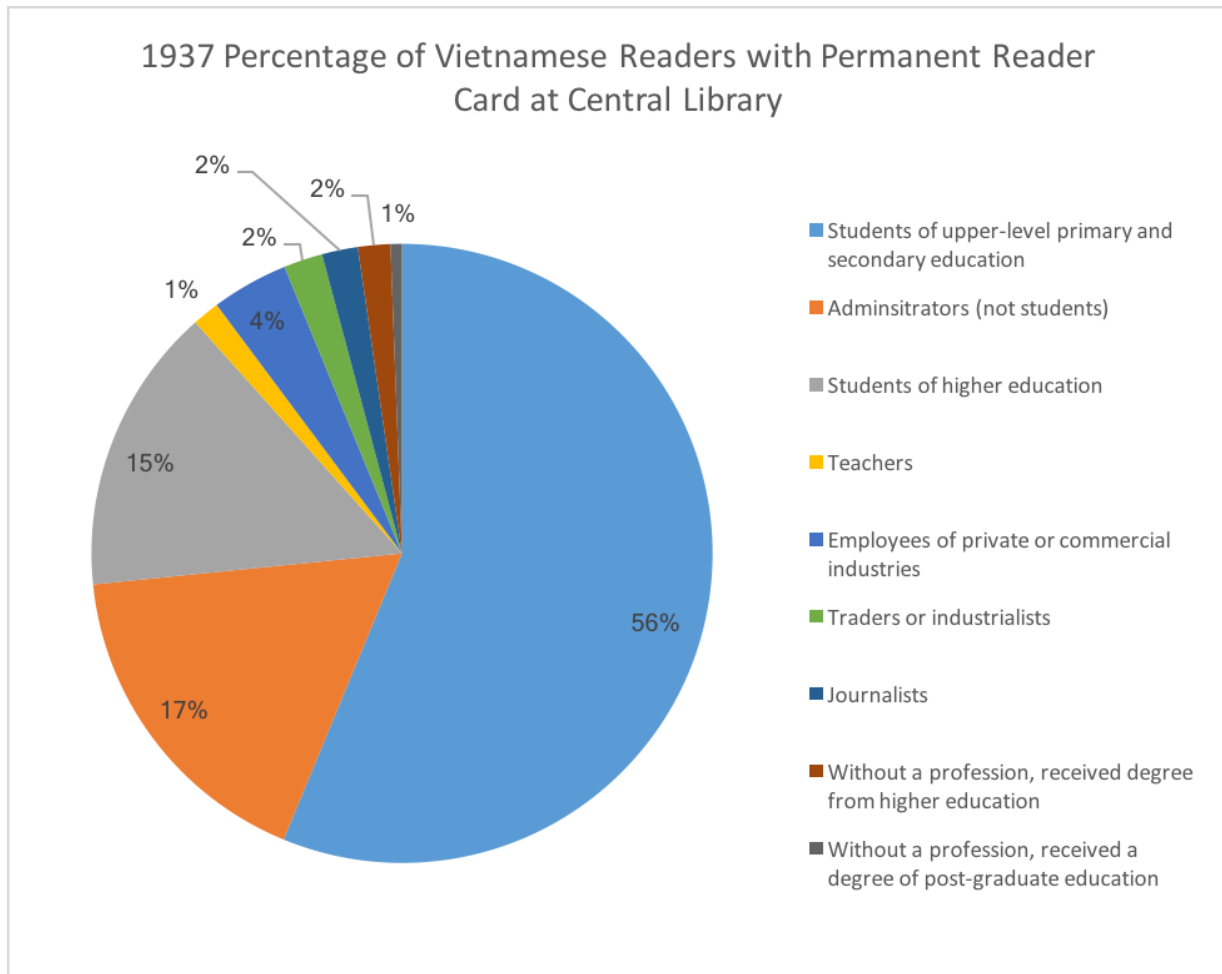


Images 2-5 and 2-6. Central Library Main Reading Room, c. 1936.²⁸⁰ As seen in these two images, young Vietnamese men, (most likely students) occupy the limited seats of the Central Library Reading Room.

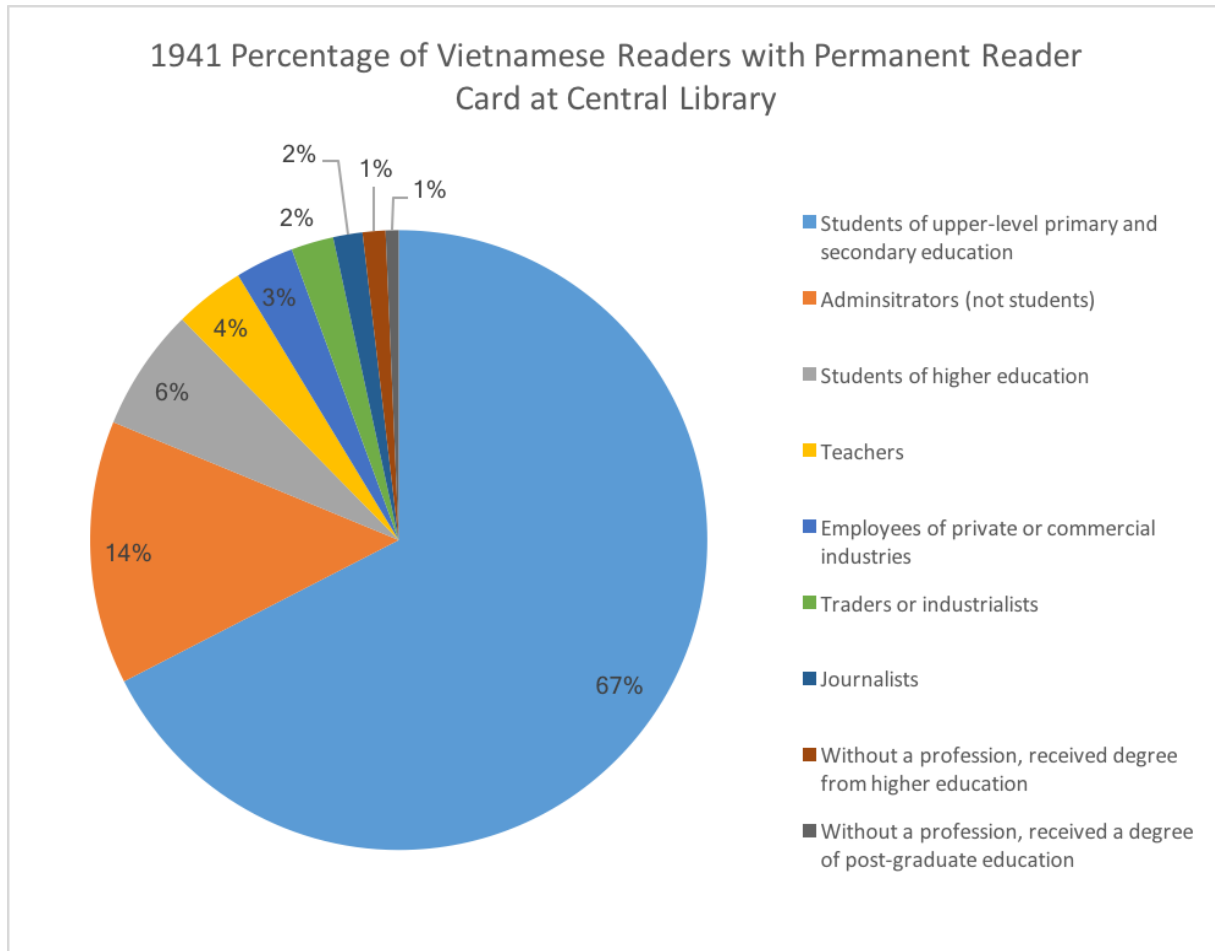
²⁸⁰ ANOM, PB, Folder 66 “Inauguration à la Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier à Hanoi (photographes)”, TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940,” n.d.

Vietnamese Students: The Transformation of the Reading Room for Study and Social Life

Who were the Vietnamese users flocking to the Central Library Reading Room? According to 1937 and 1941 library records on Vietnamese readers in the Reading Room, the majority of readers were young students ages 16-20s.²⁸¹ In 1937, 71% of Vietnamese patrons with permanent reader cards to the Central Library Reading Room were upper-level primary, secondary, or university students, while 17% were administrators. By 1941, the percentage of Vietnamese readers cards were 73% students and 14% administrators.



²⁸¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1629 “Répartition proportionnelle des différentes catégories de lecteurs indigènes titulaires d’une carte permanente et des livres lus à la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1937-1941,” [Proportional Distribution of Different Categories of Indigenous Readers, Holders of a Permanent Card, and Books read at the Central Library Hanoi], Document: “Répartition proportionnelle des différentes catégories de lecteurs annamites titulaires d’une carte permanente.”



Beginning in 1918, Governor General Albert Sarraut initiated a series of colonial school reforms to develop a Franco-Indigenous school system. Throughout the 1920s, the system experimented with different models such as teaching in indigenous languages, communal education, and renovations of pagoda school systems (in Cambodia).²⁸² In the case of Vietnam, these schools sought to dismantle the teaching and cultural influence of Chinese language and introduced quốc ngữ as the language of instruction. According to scholars Brocheux and Hémery, the colonial school system had three goals: “1) To inspire and control the content and the transmission of written knowledge within the villages; 2) To transmit to some extent a minimal modern mass education, on which the colonial system depended for its basic functioning; 3) To adapt the colonized elite to the functions assigned to them by the colonial system.”²⁸³ The system consisted of three years of elementary schooling, two years of primary schooling (after 1927, three years), four years of upper-level primary schooling, three years of secondary education (concluded with the colonial *baccalauréat*, the French high school

²⁸² Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (University of California Press, 2011). P. 220.

²⁸³ Brocheux and Hémery. P. 222. Many of these goals mirrored those of the metropole school system as well.

diploma), and university.²⁸⁴ However, high costs, limited schools and teachers severely restricted Vietnamese access to schooling especially for the rural poor. Most Vietnamese students only finished at the primary level, and few actually advanced to secondary school, let alone to university as shown in the following chart:

Level of Franco-Indigenous Schooling		1930	1942
ELEMENTARY (3 years)	Number of students	338,379	546,504
	Number of graduates	34,371 (of which 16,933 received certificates indicating they learned French)	47,214
PRIMARY (2-3 years)	Number of students	40,367	63,611
	Number of graduates	4,379	12,696
UPPER-LEVEL PRIMARY (4 years)	Number of students	4,615	6,163
	Number of graduates	648	1,124
SECONDARY (3 years)	Number of students	157	697
	Number of graduates with <i>baccalauréat</i>	75	?

Diagram 2-7. Numbers of students enrolled and certificates awarded on graduation throughout French Indochina. The total number of students in 1930 was 385,198 compared to 620,436 in 1942. Brocheux and Hémery’s statistics also account for the total number of instructors in 1930: 12,328 of which 12,014 were indigenous and 8,891 were from Vietnam.²⁸⁵

Vietnamese and French language newspapers exclaimed that Vietnamese students were taking over the library. Described as rambunctious leisure readers, Vietnamese students formed the majority of reading room readers — consuming textbooks, youth literature, and novels. On December 11, 1932, Hy Tǒng published an article titled “La crise des salles de lecture à Hanoi [The crisis of the reading room in Hanoi]” in the newspaper *L’Annam Nouveau* and criticized the Vietnamese students for crowding the Central Library and reading “useless” books.²⁸⁶ Hy Tǒng complained that young Vietnamese students take up the limited seating available and disrupt the

²⁸⁴ For an overview of the Vietnamese colonial school system and the ways in which class and national conflict manifested within schools, see Gail P. Kelly, “Conflict in the Classroom: A Case Study from Vietnam, 1918-38,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 1987): 191–212. P. 195.

²⁸⁵ Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (University of California Press, 2011). P. 223 and Appendix 10 on P. 399-400.

²⁸⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 442, Document Hy Tǒng, “La crise des salles de lecture a Hanoi” *L’Annam Nouveau*, Number 195, December 11, 1932.

library reading room. He remarked, “certainly the Reading Room cannot serve as a rendezvous for all the intellectuals who tend to find there the best refuge to pass pleasantly their days, [and also serve as a space for] careless youth in the company of action and adventure novels and illustrated reviews. A reading room is not made so that schoolchildren of all kinds play truant in the reading room and trouble the calm and meditation of the serious readers.” Contrasting young, leisure readers to ‘serious’ researchers, Hy Tõng claimed that if the library cannot satisfy its intellectual readers, it would fail its mission as an institution. Critiques of the library often referenced a hierarchy of ‘good’ serious reading versus ‘bad’ leisure reading. A detriment to ‘serious’ and ‘civilized’ readers, these casual readers undermined one of the core missions of the library as an encyclopedic resource for scholarly learning.

Most of the Reading Room users were Vietnamese students and preferred to read literature. In 1925, out of a total of 14,083 consultations and 27,933 works (excluding periodicals), the top genres of reading matter consulted by Reading Room patrons were literature (4,261), science (2,691), philosophy (2,060), mathematics (899), and history (620). By 1941, out of a total of 96,997 consultations and 101,643 works, the top genres of reading matter consulted were literature (45,250), periodicals (7,962), philosophy (6,581), mathematics (6,067), and science (6,065). Within a period of 16 years the collections and numbers of consultations in the Reading Room had exponentially increased. In 1925, nearly half of the total consultations were literature and science, but by 1941, nearly half of the total consultations were just from the literature genre. Comparing 1925 and 1941, there is also a shift away from history and a rise in periodicals reading. The popularity of science and math consultations could be due to the many student readers as well as the comparative high price of these works if purchased at bookstores.

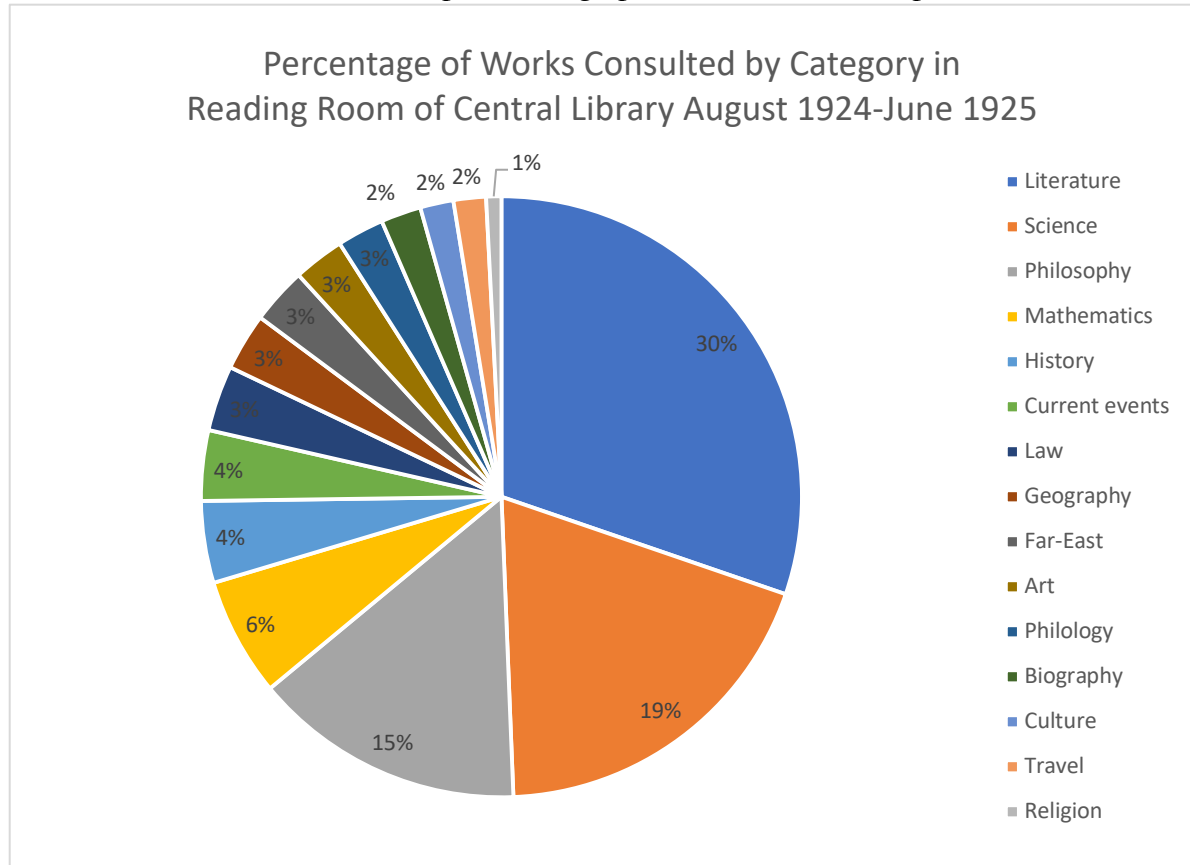


Figure 2-8. The library reported a monthly breakdown of the consultations by genre from August

1924 to June 1925.²⁸⁷ On June 30, 1925 the library reported 27,933 total works (excluding periodicals) of which 5,047 were new (4,305 purchases, 382 legal deposits, 360 gifts). This chart shows how the majority of readers to the Central Library Reading Room consulted works of Literature (30%) and Sciences (19%), followed by Philosophy (15%), Mathematics (6%), and History (4%).

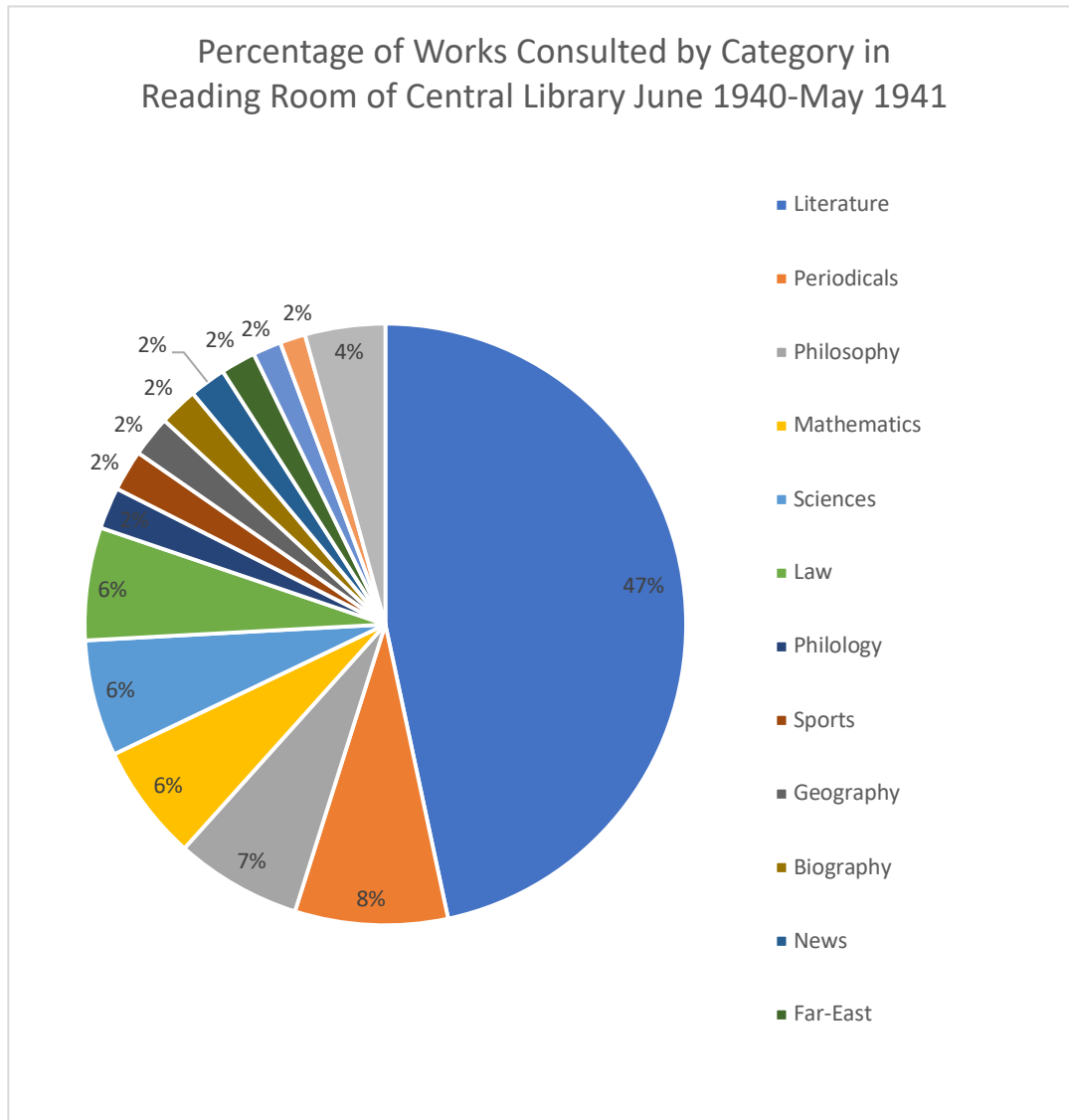


Figure 2-9. From June 1940 to May 1941, the total number of books and periodicals consulted in the Reading Room were 96,997 works (91.8% were books).²⁸⁸ This chart shows how the majority of readers to the Central Library Reading Room consulted works of literature (47%), than non-fiction works such as periodicals (8%), Philosophy (7%), Mathematics (6%), and Sciences (6%).

²⁸⁷ Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1924-1925)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Republique Francaise, 1925).

²⁸⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1629 “Répartition proportionnelle des différentes catégories de lecteurs indigènes titulaires d’une carte permanente et des livres lus à la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1937-1941.”

The popularity of literature and novels among Vietnamese and French was a topic of discussion among newspaper commentators and library administrators. According to the report published October 23-24, 1927 in “*Dépêche coloniale*” by Henri Lemaître Inspector of the *Revue des Bibliothèques*, each month, the Central Library reading room had 2,300 visits (800 French and 1,500 Vietnamese) and users consulted a total of 1,800 volumes and 900 periodicals.²⁸⁹ Lemaître remarked that in the Central Library of Hanoi, the most popular works were those on literature, science, philosophy, mathematics, history, arts, current affairs, and the far east. Lemaître commented that French novels were the most popular format of reading. He argued that novels were not a ‘useless’ leisure activity, but a way to improve Vietnamese knowledge of French language. In this case, Lemaître attempted to justify reading novels—usually associated with “useless” leisure reading—as an important educational tool for learning the French language. Hy Tông had critiqued leisure readers, described as disruptive young readers consumed by “action and adventure novels and illustrated reviews.”²⁹⁰ Leisure readers’ consumption of literary fiction was contrasted against serious research reading of scholarship, research, and non-fiction. This commentary between useful, serious reading and useless, leisure reading permeated library reports as builders justified the role of the library as a functional space to disseminate ‘useful’ knowledge such as language, history, science, and philosophy.

Vietnamese Visions for the Library and Demands for Improvements

Criticisms of leisure readers conveyed a vision of the library as an important, civilized space of colonial modernity. Hy Tông continued to argue for the expansion of reading rooms and circulating libraries following the model of “industrialized countries like England, whose circulating libraries play such an important role such that they currently number over 700 branches.” Recognizing the budgetary costs of expanding the reading room, the article also emphasized the critical importance of the library as a public service and state responsibility: “How does one evaluate a country? Not based on superficial institutions in order to justify heavy taxes. Nor does one evaluate an administration based on the number of public services. Instead, one praises a government founded on a few institutions thoughtfully organized, rather than a large number of superficial and ineffective institutions.” In this statement, Hy Tông alluded to the hypocrisy of exorbitant colonial state taxes, levied under the guise of providing public services and institutions. Addressing the members of the High Council of the Central Library, Hy Tông called for an additional loan to the general budget for the next financial year. This loan would provide the Directorate of Archives and Libraries an increased budget for 1933 from 77,560 piastres to at least that of 1932 (96,110). This budget would enable the Central Library to expand its reading room and pay for personnel and materials costs.

Other readers also requested the administration to improve the facilities in the Central Library. In the July 13, 1931 issue of the newspaper *France Indochine*, a Hanoi library reader demanded improved electric lights in the reading room.²⁹¹ The reader complained that the current lamps were hung so high on the ceilings that they tortured readers wanting to read in the later hours of the day. Proposing that the library lower the lights or provide desk lamps, the reader

²⁸⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 442. Document : Henri Lemaître, Les bibliothèques en Indochine, *Dépêche coloniale*, October 23-24, 1927.

²⁹⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 442, Document: Hy Tông, “La crise des salles de lecture a Hanoi” *Annam Nouveau*, Number 195, December 11, 1932.

²⁹¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4, Document: *France Indochine*, July 13, 1931, Number 3515.

exclaimed that this small reform would be appreciated by many readers of the library. In the January 23, 1936 issue of *L'Annam Nouveau*, another reader complained of the lack of bicycle storage for readers. "The readers who come to work at the library must leave their bicycles on the steps outside or lean them against the walls." The reader requested Paul Boudet to quickly construct a garage for the bicycles. These two articles show the significance and popularity of library reading to the larger community, and especially the importance of lighting in the library since the opening hours extended late into the evening.

Readers crowded into the Central Library Reading Room, requesting books and journals from the collection, and reading on the weekends and into the night. The 1927-1928 yearly report on the Directorate noted the crowdedness of the Central Library rooms: "The working room of the Central Library is day by day more frequented and has become insufficient. The development of schools brings to us a mass number of indigenous whom have now become difficult to accommodate. It is necessary to envision for the future the creation of one to several study libraries which can be designated for the indigenous."²⁹² This commentary suggests colonial administrators' concerns over the dominance of the Central Library by Vietnamese students and the suggestion to segregate the Vietnamese students into a separate library for their studies. The next year's report again commented on the lack of seating for both indigenous and French: "The overseer of the Reading Room has seen on various occasions indigenous readers and even French were forced on busy days to leave without using the resources of the library, because they could not find a place to sit. There is no better argument for demonstrating the necessity and extreme urgency for expansion."²⁹³ The June 1935-May 1936 statistics recorded a daily average of 229 readers.²⁹⁴ In one day, the Reading Room reached a peak high of 403 readers. Out of 403 readers, 390 were Vietnamese and 13 were French, which reveals the tremendous racial imbalance in the Reading Room. Furthermore, the Central Library Reading Room was overcrowded given that it provided only 84 chairs for the hundreds of readers (in prior years there were only 60 chairs). During the 1935-1936 year, 531 reader cards were issued, bringing the total number to 7,073 readers. By 1936, the Reading Room collection held in total 78,073 volumes. Each year the number of collections, readers, and consultations increased rapidly.

²⁹² Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1927-1928)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1928).

²⁹³ Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1928-1929)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1929).

²⁹⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1421 "Rapports annuels sur le fonctionnement des Services des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine pendant les années 1935-1936," [Annual report on the function of Archives and Libraries Services of Indochina during the years 1935-1936]. Document: "Du 1^{er} Juin 1935 au 31 Mai 1936 – Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier."

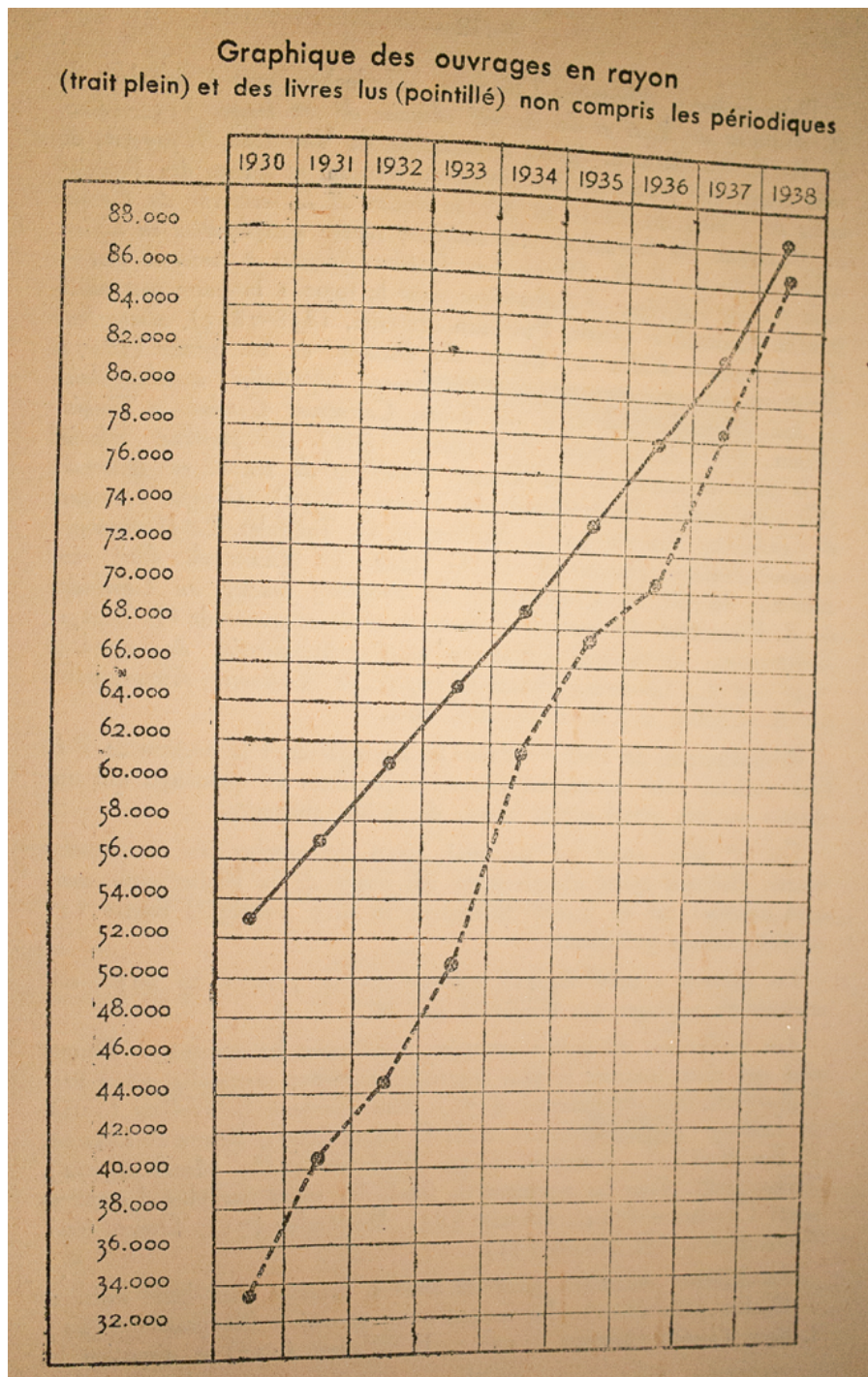


Image 2-10. The directorate designed charts such as the one above in 1938 to demonstrate the increasing collections size of the Central Library Reading Room and the high number of books read. The solid line shows the number of works on the shelves (excluding periodicals) while the dotted line shows the number of books read.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ Boudet, Paul, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1937-1938)*. Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1938.

Reading at Home or Reading On-Site? Popularity of Novels, Quốc Ngữ, and Young Adult Books in the Lending Section

The Lending Section of the Central Library in Hanoi first operated from the Reading Room but was moved to a separate room on August 1, 1921.²⁹⁶ The Lending Section operated from 9AM to 8PM without a midday break but was closed Sunday afternoons. In 1935, the collection included approximately 11,500 works of mostly novels, and also textbooks on science, arts, and letters. In contrast to the Reading Room, the Lending Section was designed for readers to freely browse the books on the shelves, [Principe du libre access aux rayons] as well as to loan books to read at home. The Manual of Classification detailed and emphasized the importance of the layout of the Lending Section: “works on the shelves must be carefully classified and the librarian desk must be positioned to monitor the shelves and the exit. The layout must also not disturb the readers of the Lending Section.” With a Lending Card, readers could freely enter the Lending Section, browse books on the shelves, and request to borrow them to read at home by submitting a request and leaving a monetary deposit.

According to Lending Section statistics from 1920 to 1941, French readers loaned more books from the Lending Section, often doubling the number of loans by Vietnamese readers. For example, in 1931 there were 26,965 loans by French readers compared to 7,955 loans by Vietnamese readers; in 1941, 38,332 loans by French readers compared to 19,167 loans by Vietnamese readers.²⁹⁷

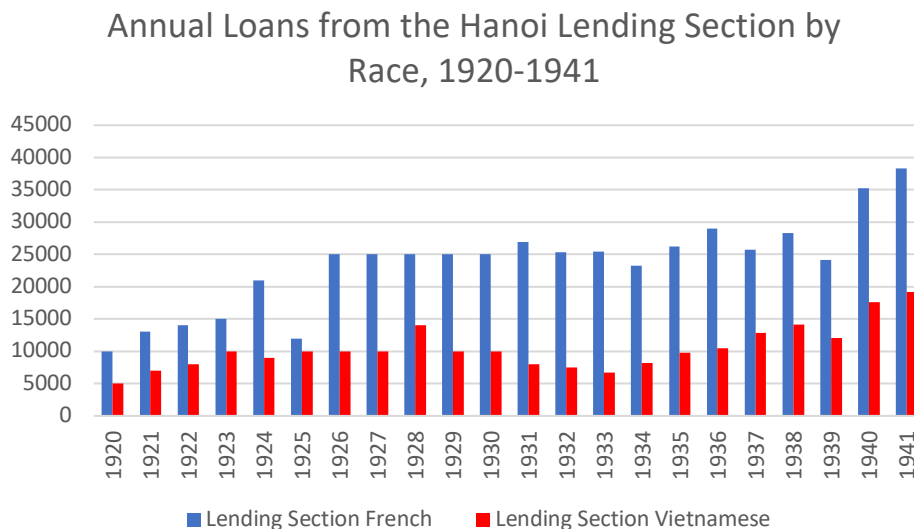


Figure 2-11. Number of approximate loans by French and Vietnamese readers from the Lending Section of the Hanoi Central Library. French Readers appear to use the Lending Section much more frequently than Vietnamese based on these recorded loan numbers. Note that the Central Library statistics of the Lending Section only recorded instances in which readers requested to borrow books home. These numbers do not account for users who consult books from the

²⁹⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1276 “Manuel d’apprentissage du classement des Bibliothèques” ca. 1935, Chapter VIII “Lending Section” and “The Central Library of Hanoi.”

²⁹⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1627 “Statistiques Annuelles de 1920 à 1941 du Nombre des Lecteurs, des Livres Prêtés et Consultés à la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1920-1941,” Document “Statistiques des lecteurs.” A handwritten note explains the process of approximating daily reader numbers by dividing the loan records by 2.

Lending Section on-site.

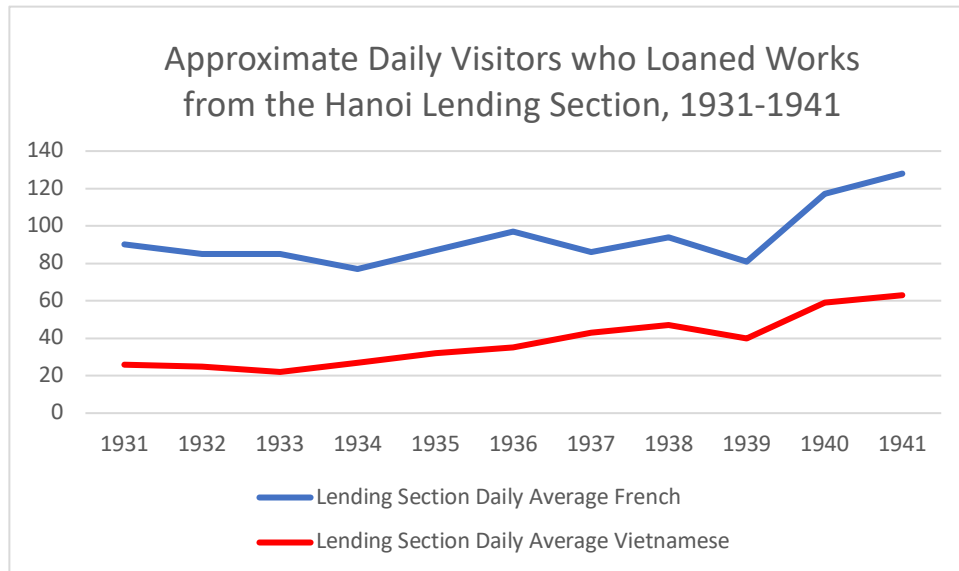


Figure 2-12. Number of approximate daily visitors. The Lending Section approximated the number of readers since they only recorded the daily number of books checked out and if the reader was French or Vietnamese. The library averaged two books per reader and approximated the number of French or Vietnamese borrowers from the Lending Section by dividing the total number of loans by two.

While Vietnamese patrons actively used the Reading Room, French users frequently loaned materials from the Lending Section to read outside the library. It is important to recognize that this data only accounts for readers *who loaned materials* from the Lending Section, not readers *who consulted materials on-site*. Vietnamese readers possibly used the Lending Section to consult materials and read on-site rather than checking out the materials to read at home. This could be due to the fact that loans from the Lending Section required a monetary deposit while browsing the shelves and consulting materials in the Lending Section did not have an upfront cost.

Furthermore, the comparatively lower number of Vietnamese loans from the Lending Section could be related to differing notions of public reading versus private reading. Vietnamese readers were possibly more familiar with reading in designated scholarly places, rather than with loaning a library book to read in private spaces such as in the home, school, café, or street. This notion of lending books to read in alternative spaces had a comparatively longer tradition in French library culture. The Central Library Lending Section and the Reading Room provided a common, scholarly, well-lit and furnished area for readers to consult materials within the confines of the library institution. For Vietnamese readers, using library materials—a public, common good—in the common area possibly made more logical sense. Library books were public objects and the heavy fines for damaged and lost works could have deterred Vietnamese readers from actively using the Lending Section. In addition, reading in the library was a popular social practice for Vietnamese. As described from the newspaper articles and reader statistics, the Reading Room was a popular social space for Vietnamese readers to congregate and access valuable library materials such as journals, literature, and non-fiction maps, reference works, and science manuals. In May 1936, the Lending Section recorded a total of 39,397 reader visits

(73.5% French, 26.5% Vietnamese). In comparison, the Reading Room counted 63,133 reader visits (7.6% French, 92.4% Vietnamese).

Overall, more readers visited the Central Library Reading Room, but readers to the Lending Section consumed more books each visit. By May 1939, 1,158 French and 1,403 Vietnamese, or a total of 2,561 Central Library patrons possessed cards to the Lending Section.²⁹⁸ The number of readers to the Lending Section was still relatively small compared to the popular Reading Room: In May 1939, the total number of Vietnamese readers registered at the Central Library Reading Room was 8,532, with 815 new cards made within the year. From May 1938 to May 1939, reader visits totaled 83,244, averaging 305 daily visits with a peak of 590 in a single day. During the same year, readers consulted a total of 84,395 works. However, the smaller number of patrons to the Lending Section read a significantly higher proportion of works than the patrons to the Reading Room. For example, in the statistics below for 1935-1936, patrons in the Reading Room consulted an average number of 1.27 books or journals. In comparison, patrons in the Lending Section loaned 2.03 books per visit.

	Reading Room (1936)	Lending Section (1936)
Total Reader Visits (Number of readers recorded entering the Library)	63,133 (? new readers)	39,397 (593 new readers)
Total French Reader Visits	4,809	28,967
Total Vietnamese Reader Visits	58,324	10,430
Total Library Cards	7,073 (531 new cards)	? (593 new cards)
Average Daily Visits	229 (Maximum 403 of which 13 French, 390 Vietnamese)	~119
Total Consultations or Loans	80,483 (70,045 books, 10,438 periodicals)	79,794 loans (of which 62,459 were novels or 79.3%)
Total Collections	78,073 (books and periodicals, of which 4,828 were new)	~11,500
Average number of books per reader visit	~1.27 books or journals	~2.03 books

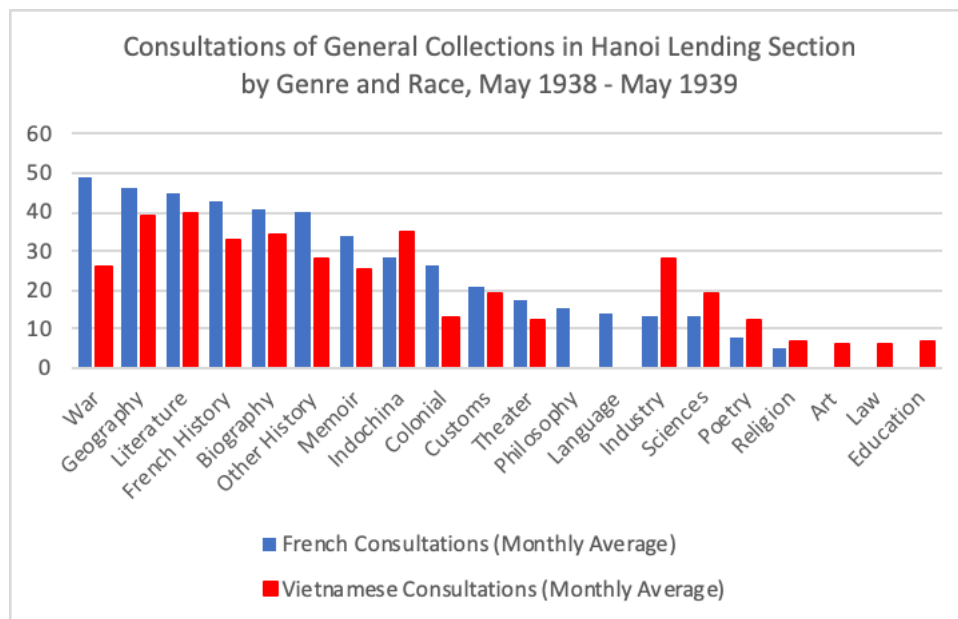
Chart 2-13. A comparison of the usage statistics to the Reading Room and Lending Section of the Hanoi Central Library during an 11-month period June 1935-May 1936. The annotation “~” designates my own calculations and “?” means the statistics were not found in the primary documents.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2211 “Rapports sur les activités de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine pendant les années 1938-1939 et 1944-1946,” [Report on the Activities of the Direction of Archives and Libraries of Indochina during the years 1938-1939 and 1944-1946].

²⁹⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1421, 1935-1936 Annual Report.

More and more new Vietnamese readers registered to borrow materials from the Lending Section. During the one-year period from May 1938-May 1939, 1,054 new cards were created: 427 French and 627 Vietnamese (this number does not count renewed cards). Many of these cards were for students of law and medicine.³⁰⁰ This brought the total to approximately 2,561 registered readers (1158 Europeans, 1403 Vietnamese). Over the course of the same period, the readers made 92,508 loans in total, which averages to approximately 36 loans per reader per year. 36 book loans per user per year is an impressive number when compared to an average of only 21 book loans per year by an American library user in 1937.³⁰¹ Additionally, this number excludes the times readers consulted and freely read materials in the Lending Section room but did not submit a request to borrow and take materials out of the library. Taking into consideration the relatively small size of the Lending Section collection (11,500 works in 1935), 92,508 book checkouts and 36 loans per reader in a year points to an actively used Lending Section.

The previous statistics only recorded the number of loans, but the 1938-1939 report also collected statistics of reading on-site or consultations of materials in the Lending Section according to genre, race, and collection.³⁰² Based on statistics collected between May 1938 and May 1939, the Lending Section reported a monthly average of 458 instances of French and 389 instances of Vietnamese on-site consultation of materials from the general collection. The following chart shows the monthly average of genres consulted in the Lending Section according to race:



According to this monthly average of consultations in the general collection, the highest consulted genre of books were as follows: French readers preferred to read works on war (on

³⁰⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2211, 1938-1939 and 1944-1946 Annual Report.

³⁰¹ Kaiser draws these statistics from public libraries in cities with population sizes over 200,00 in the United States of America. Walter H. Kaiser, "Statistical Trends of Large Public Libraries, 1900-1946," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 18, no. 4 (1948): 275-81. P. 278

³⁰² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2211, 1938-1939 and 1944-1946 Annual Report.

average 49 consultations a month), geography (46), literature (45), French history (43), and biography (41). In comparison, Vietnamese reader preferred materials on literature (40), geography (39), Indochina (35), biography (34), and French history (33). Reader tastes diverge the most for French readers who preferred war, philosophy, and language genres while Vietnamese preferred professional topics such as industry, Indochina, law, education, and art. This suggests that Vietnamese used the Lending Section to supplement their professional education or vocation, a common pattern that occurred also in the Reading Room of the Central Library. Overall, reader preferences spanned newly popularized genres in Indochina such as biography (19%), literature (20%), geography (20%) and history (32%). Since many of the library readers were administrators and students, non-fiction works on Indochina, geography, language, sciences, and war were also popular. Note that the majority of the general collection works were written or translated into French.

Besides the general collections, the Lending Library of the Central Library in Hanoi created separate collections of materials, such as Vietnamese quốc ngữ books, novels, and young adult books. The majority of the works in both the Reading Room and Lending Section were in the French language, but the development of a separate Vietnamese quốc ngữ collection also reflect the literacy in Vietnamese and demands for Vietnamese language works by the 1930s. Created in 1939, the collection of Vietnamese quốc ngữ works was highly popular among Vietnamese readers: from January 1939 to May 1939 there were 1,360 loans from this collection, averaging 272 loans a month. On average Europeans checked out the genre of young adult books the most (201 loans a month); the collection was also popular among Vietnamese (150 loans a month). Not taking into account the collection size, the absolute popularity of the Lending Section collections rank as follows: novels (1319), general collections (847), young adult books (351), and quốc ngữ works (272).



Image 2-14. Central Library Lending Section – The caption of this photograph reads “Main room reserved for literary novels.”³⁰³

³⁰³ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940,” n.d.

The 1938-1939 Lending Section reports also recorded the most popular French language novels consulted and read on-site from May 1938 to May 1939. Based on the annual statistics collected, the Lending Section reported a monthly average of 669 instances of French and 650 instances of Vietnamese consultation of novels.

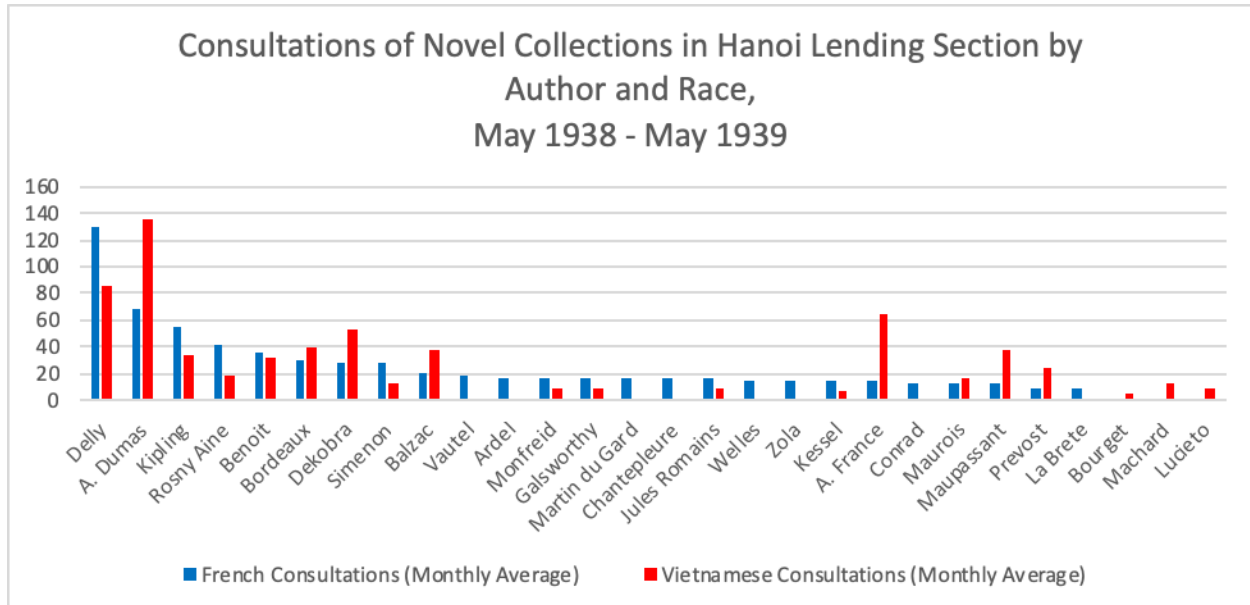


Diagram 2-15. The monthly average of consultations of authors by race from May 1938 to May 1939 in the Lending Section of the Central Library in Hanoi.³⁰⁴

According to monthly averages, French highly preferred the works by “Dely” (129), who was the brother and sister authors Jeanne-Marie et Frédéric Petitjean de La Rosière, most known for their popular romance novels and easily read “train station literature [*littérature de gare*]” such as *L'héritier des ducs de Sailles*, *Un amour de prince*, and *L'infidèle*. Other years report Dumas as the most read author. However, in 1938-1939 French readers in the Lending Section begin to consult Dely (129) significantly more than Alexandre Dumas (69). Dumas was followed by Rudyard Kipling (55), Rosny Aine (41), and Benoit (35). In comparison, the most popular authors consulted by Vietnamese readers were Dumas (135), Dely (86), Anatola France (64), Dekobra (53), and Bordereaux (40). Most of these authors are French, while the remaining were bestsellers translated into French such as British authors Rudyard Kipling, John Galwsworthy, and Joseph Conrad. The tremendous popularity of authors Alexandre Dumas, Dely, and Anatola France reveals Vietnamese readers’ preferences for classic adventure novels and fiction leisure reading. These popular authors paralleled other literary consumption trends for translated and global literature at the time. For example in 1840-1920s China, Chinese language translations of English detective stories and French authors Maupassant, Dumas, Hugo, and Verne, gained popularity within fiction reading.³⁰⁵ Many levels of translation and retranslations

³⁰⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2211. Document: Section de prêt année 1938-1939.

³⁰⁵ Many Chinese translations of global literature were retranslations of Japanese translations of Western works. Teruo Tarumoto, translated by D.E. Pollard, “A Statistical Survey of Translated Fiction 1940-1920,” in *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840-1918*, ed. David E. Pollard (John Benjamins Publishing, 1998).

of Chinese, Japanese, and Western language reading circulated through to Vietnam, contributing to a vibrant body of global literature and its local articulations through retranslation.

Cochinchina Library: Building Constraints and Popularity of Lending Section in Saigon

In comparison to the Hanoi Central Library, the Saigon Cochinchina Library Reading Room and Lending Section was smaller in collection size and total readers, but still was extremely popular among Saigon readers.³⁰⁶ While Hanoi readers crowded into the Reading Room of the Hanoi Library, Saigon readers preferred the Lending Section of the Cochinchina Library. In 1931, the number of loans from the Cochinchina Lending Section almost equaled that of the Central Library in Hanoi.³⁰⁷ The popularity of the Cochinchina Library Lending Section could be due to the limited seating in the Reading Room and unwelcoming facilities for readers throughout the 1920s. In a February 15, 1920 summary of the Cochinchina Library to the Governor Georges Maspero, librarian-archivist Léon Saint-Marty exclaimed the urgent need to revise the budget and swiftly improve the library and archives of Cochinchina.³⁰⁸ Saint-Marty described how the library was unwelcoming to readers, beginning with rude placards in the entranceway: “It is forbidden to bring in dogs”, “We do not store bicycles”, and “The library is closed Saturday night.” Saint-Marty continued to highlight other challenges for readers, such as the noisy Reading Room and confusing catalog system:

What if the reader tries to read on-site? An incessant coming and going of readers in the hall where he thought he could read, distract and divert his attention. He arrived full of good intentions, but now he is unable to maintain his eyes on the newspaper. If our reader here triumphs over this inconvenience and tries to find fruitful research, the absence of a truly logical classification makes it almost impossible to consult valuable works.

Throughout the colonial period, the Cochinchina library operated with a limited staff in the overcrowded building at 27 Lagrandière street.³⁰⁹ The colonial government originally designed the building to house only the archives. However, due to limited space the administration transferred the library to the same building and both services shared a cramped space since 1902.³¹⁰ Beginning in 1920, the colonial administration proposed expansion projects to construct a new building to house the popular Cochinchina library at Catinat Square or Boulevard Norodom, but throughout the colonial period the projects remained in a tentative state due to budgetary limitations. As seen in the many reports by librarian administrators Simone de Saint-Exupéry, Léon Saint-Marty, and J. Quesnel, the Cochinchina facilities for storage and

³⁰⁶ In 1923 the Saigon Library collection size was 7640. The collection increased dramatically in 1929 to 25,934 and almost doubled to 45,376 in 1941. TTLT2, GC Folder 1626 “ Statistiques de l'accroissement des collections des ouvrages à la Bibliothèque de la Cochinchine. 1923-1941.”

³⁰⁷ Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1935-1936)*, 1931.

³⁰⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314 “Rapports sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et des Bibliothèques de Saigon, 1919-1926” Note by Saint-Marty Librarian Archivist of Government regarding budget, February 15, 1920.

³⁰⁹ In 1922 J. Quesnel noted that the library continued to operate with financial and material limitations: “Still functioning from the 1910 building intended only to hold the archives, the library was crowded and collections were in poor condition.” TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314 Document “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du service des archives et des bibliothèques de Cochinchine (signed J. Quesnel)”

³¹⁰ ANOM, PB, Folder 53, “Dossier concernant la construction des bâtiments pour les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine” (c. 1946).

distribution of library and archives materials operated in a dismal state. Even with the financial and space constraints, Saigon readers crowded into the Reading Room and frequently requested books from the Lending Section.

From January to April 1919, the Cochinchina Library closed for a complete technical reorganization and facilities update. After the library reopened, the director of the library Saint-Marty reported a steadily increasing number of visitors. On July 1920 Saint-Marty reported that the Reading Room of the Cochinchina Library contained approximately 7,000 works on topics such as law, administration, literature, art, history, geography, and dictionaries.³¹¹ In order to access the materials, readers with a library card consulted the newly organized alphabetical and topic catalog and submitted a request form to the front desk. A separate Reading Room for newspapers provided readers access to local, metropolitan, and regional newspapers from Japan, China, the Indies, the Philippines, and Siam.

According to Saint-Marty's calculations of the year 1920, 2071 request slips were submitted in the Reading Room and the following categories of works were the most popular: Magazines (583), Official Bulletins (378), Scientific works (237), Literature (217), Reference works (208), and History-Geography-Travel (161). Saint-Marty noted that this number of request slips would only average 17 readers a day—an inaccurate accounting of actual use of the library because it excluded the number of readers consulting the newspapers, periodicals, and reference works available freely on the shelves. Saint-Marty commented on readers' hesitancy to submit request slips:

Indeed readers of newspapers, periodicals, and reference works do not fill out a form because they find the works they desire, while the other works beyond their reach must be requested to the staff by a form. Some readers feel a mistrust against the request slip and believe it brings an incursion to the Librarian...From the current number of readers, there is an absence almost totally of the schoolboy who could use the Library as a resource for his studies...Nevertheless, from a general observation and to my great satisfaction, the [library] institution is most attractive around the hours of 7PM, when the readers are forced to sit closely together in order to make room for the many readers.³¹²

Saint-Marty's observations sheds light on the emerging social life and reading tastes in the Cochinchina Reading Room: readers most commonly consult periodicals and reference works and hesitate to "bother" the librarian with a request form. In 1920, there was a lack of students who used the library. Administrative users often came to read in the evening. In another summary in 1920, Saint-Marty criticized the limited library opening hours which did not cater to the many patrons of the library who were administrative workers: "...its opening hours, the library is accessible to only idlers; it opens its doors during the office hours and when business is in full swing. It is illogical, I dare say outright immoral."³¹³

Like the Reading Room, the Lending Section confronted many challenges with its organization, facilities, and limited collections. Many of the policies and organization structure

³¹¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: "Rapport relatif au fonctionnement des Archives et de la Bibliothèque depuis 1919 à ce jour (10 July 1920, signed Saint-Marty)"

³¹² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: Letter from Saint-Marty to the Director of Archives and Libraries in Hanoi, July 23, 1921.

³¹³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder, Document: Note by Saint-Marty Librarian Archivist of Government on the budget, February 15, 1920.

of the Cochinchina Library were legacies from its operations as an administrative library since 1865. In the February 1920 report to General Maspero, Saint-Marty critiqued the prohibitive rules in the Lending Section and the administrative torpor of book requests:

The lending section does not fulfill its role. I could endlessly humor you with hundreds of stories on the tribulations of our unlucky readers. When a reader enters the library, he encounters an excessively prohibitive notice which reads: "It is absolutely forbidden to touch the books on the shelves. Instead, speak to the orderlies." These notices are boldly stated on long strips of papers affixed to the shelves. As we know, rules are imperative for libraries in order to convey how to read and handle the books. However, the reader is vexed by such a particularly strict note. Indulgent or resigned, our reader will proceed to consult the "catalog." He diligently inspects the authors who will charm his hours of leisure. He carefully notes the call number [of the work] on a request slip which he received on entering the room and submits the paper to an important administrator—who he trusts as a competent government official—but it is actually just an orderly. After a long delay, the orderly returns empty-handed at least three to five times. If the orderly returns with the works requested by the bibliophile, the orderly will stop at the first page before stamping the book and will say, "This work must not leave the library." Nothing in the catalog could make the reader foresee that this would happen. Resolute, the reader picks up the catalog and request slip and searches this "true lottery" to simply draw a good or bad number. I have seen some readers make five or more requests, without success (5 requests x 3 volumes = 15 volumes requested).³¹⁴

Designated by Paul Boudet to improve the organization and functions of the Cochinchina Library, Saint-Marty did not hold back from his criticisms of the library operations. In his commentary, Saint-Marty emphasized the importance of a library service that welcomed readers and made easily accessible the library materials. By July 1920, Saint-Marty reported that a new system of organization had been implemented in order to reduce friction for readers to request works. "The method adopted permits people to move between the shelves and choose their work, where previously they had to request an orderly to search for the work which cost time and prolonged the congestion of services for a small number of readers." Furthermore, Saint-Marty's observations regarding the "important library administrator" alludes to the pervasiveness of untrained library personnel. Orderlies not officially trained in library and archives techniques carried out the task of librarian, such as orderly-in-training Nguyen Van Hoi who served as temporary librarian in 1924.³¹⁵

In 1920 the Lending Section of the Cochinchina Library averaged 35 to 40 readers a day and a monthly average of 766 reader cards. The Lending Section included approximately 5,000 literary and popular works, and sought to develop a children's section "to satisfy the young, passionate, and assiduous Saigonese's craving for reading."³¹⁶ According to Saint-Marty, the existing collection "was barely enough to satisfy our seven hundred borrowers; the return and

³¹⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: Note by Saint-Marty Librarian Archivist of Government regarding budget, February 15, 1920.

³¹⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: "Note sur le fonctionnement du service des archives set bibliothèques de la Cochinchine pendant le mois d'Avril 1924 (May 2, 1924)"

³¹⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: "Rapport relatif au fonctionnement des Archives et de la Bibliothèque depuis 1919 à ce jour (10 July 1920, signed Saint-Marty)"

exchange of books seems to accelerate and it is not uncommon to see readers exchange their books several times a week.” In his July 1921 report, Saint-Marty closely analyzed the 766 monthly readers and how frequently they visited the Lending Section:

20 visit every day
About 30 visit every three days,
About 80 visit every seven days,
About 120 visit every ten days
About 280 visit every fifteen days
About 90 visit every twenty days
146 visit rarely.

Based on the reader frequency, number and types of works loaned, Saint-Marty concluded that that “250 of these readers are very diligent readers, 280 average around three works, and 236 are intermittent readers. These numbers makes sense since this is a population of which the business world dominates.”³¹⁷ In the conclusion of the July 1921 report, Saint-Marty emphasized the importance of developing the facilities and services of the Cochinchina Library, “an improvement which is imperative for the important capital city of Cochinchina, the center of our influence in the Far-East.”³¹⁸ Saint-Marty also notes that while the number of library users to the Cochinchina Library was increasing, overall, Saigon was dominated by commercial activities rather than reading.

By May 1924, the Reading Room expanded and contained 8,963 works in its collections. Librarian Quesnel reported, “The expansion of the buildings has given the public a spacious room for frequent readers of books or newspapers and for working. On [monthly] average, 728 educated persons spend their days there, with a daily average of 28, and 1,508 request slips. The improvements only temporarily alleviate the many issues of the Cochinchina Library: the collection of the library overflows into another room and the incoming books must be stored in the archives along with 2,000 other books which should belong in the library collections.”³¹⁹ Quesnel observed that the library serves mainly colonial administrators rather than teachers, students, and specialists. Quesnel noted that some of the administrator readers requested more works from other libraries. Thus in 1924, the Cochinchina Library attempted to set up a library exchange with other libraries such as the New York Public Library. By 1927, the yearly report noted that more students began to visit the Reading Room of the Cochinchina Library.³²⁰

³¹⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: Report from Saint-Marty, Librarian-archivist of the Government of Cochinchina to the Director of the Archives and Libraries in Hanoi July 23, 1921.

³¹⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: Report from Saint-Marty, Librarian-archivist of the Government of Cochinchina to the Director of the Archives and Libraries in Hanoi July 23, 1921.

³¹⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: Report Rapport on the Function of the Archives and Library 1923-1924, Signed J. Quesnel May 28, 1924.

³²⁰ Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1935-1936)*.



BIBLIOTHEQUE DE LA COCHINCHINE
SALLE DE LECTURE



BIBLIOTHEQUE DE LA COCHINCHINE
SALLE DE LECTURE



BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE LA COCHINCHINE
SALLE DES JOURNAUX

Images 2-16, 2-17, and 2-18. Photographs 2-16 and 2-17 (undated) show the crowded reading room and limited seating available for the readers. Photograph 2-18 depicts the room for newspapers. As seen in the photographs, the readers are predominantly Vietnamese men and a few French women.³²¹

³²¹ ANOM, PB, Folder 52 "Photographies du service des archives et des bibliothèques à l'Indochine



Image 2-19. The photograph above (undated) was possibly taken after the addition of new tables and the reorganization of the Cochinchina Reading Room to allow for more seating. Note the Vietnamese librarian seated on the right table, who was in charge of overseeing the consultations of the room.³²²

The Lending Section collection in 1924 had 5,026 books. Due to damages and overuse of materials loaned, 733 books that year needed to be re-bound and 285 books would be destroyed or donated. 1924 reports recorded 1000 reader visits to the Lending Section a month, averaging to 41 readers a day.³²³ Number of visits to the Lending Section continued to be greater than the Reading Room. In January 1,220 readers used the Lending Section, compared to 874 in the Reading Room.³²⁴ In March 1925, the Reading Room recorded 1,738 reader visits and the Lending Section received 2,461 reader visits. Even with the overwhelming heat in April 1925, Saint-Marty reported high usage of the library: the Reading Room had 1,925 reader visits and the Lending Room had 2,695 reader visits. By May 1925 the Cochinchina Library Reading Room totaled 10,011 volumes and the Lending Section contained 5,811 works. Although the Cochinchina Library collections had grown, it was still relatively small compared to the Hanoi Central Library collections.

The Cochinchina Library recorded yearly statistics of reader visits and reader

³²² ANOM, PB, *Foldeer* 52 "Photographies du service des archives et des bibliothèques à l'Indochine."

³²³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 315 "Aménagement de la Section de Prêt de la Bibliothèque de Saigon 1924-1926."

³²⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 314, Document: "Note sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et bibliothèques de la Cochinchine pendant le 1^{er} trimestre 1924" Report from Librarian-archivist of the Government of Cochinchina to the Director of the Archives and Libraries in Hanoi April 2, 1924.

consultations of works in both the Reading Room and Lending Section from 1923 to 1941. The Cochinchina Library encountered many daily operational issues such as limited and undertrained staff, inconsistent recordkeeping, frequent closures and reorganization. Thus compared to the Hanoi Central Library, the Cochinchina Library did not record as detailed statistics of its readers and collections such as race, employment, student status, and genre consumption.³²⁵ Nevertheless, the Cochinchina Library statistics reveal important information about reader behavior in the Cochinchina Library: the increased growth in total reader visits to the Cochinchina Library over the years and the comparative popularity of the Lending Section over the Reading Room.

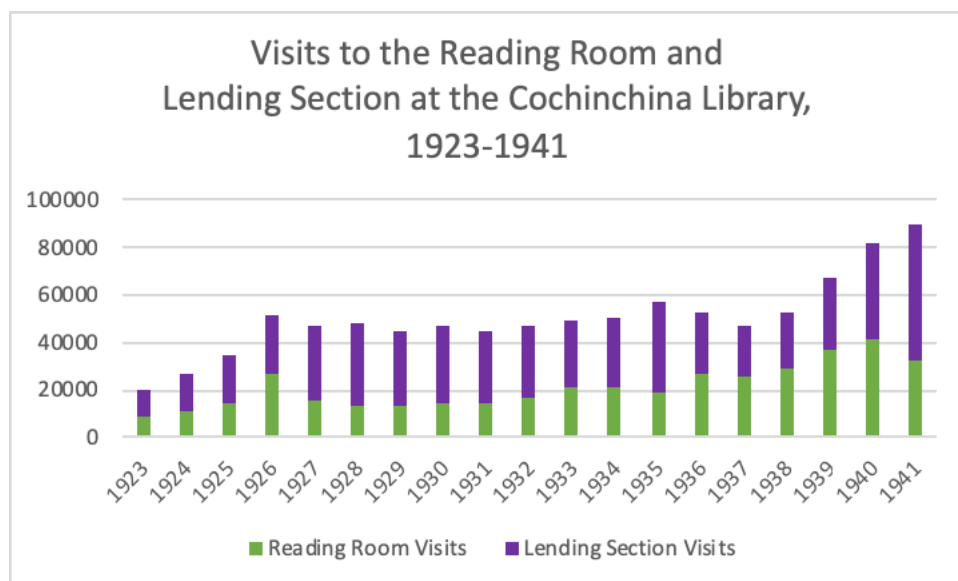


Diagram 2-20. The growth rate of total visits to the Cochinchina Library (both Reading Room and Lending Section) increased most significantly in 1923-1926 and 1938-1941.³²⁶ In 1923 the total reader visits numbered 19,200 and more than doubled to 51,712 in 1926. The total reader visits remained stagnant at 50,000 from 1926 to 1938, possibly as a result of the colonial economic shock from the Great Depression. The total reader visits increased again to a peak of 89,433 in 1941.

³²⁵ TTLT2, GC, Folder 1626 “Statistiques de l’accroissement des collections des ouvrages à la Bibliothèque de la Cochinchine. 1923-1941.”

³²⁶ Ibid.

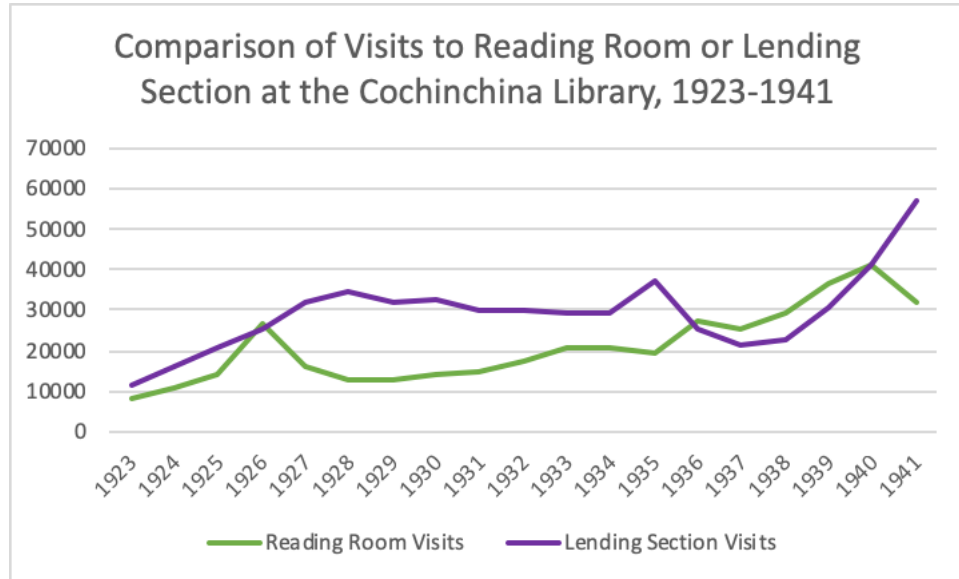


Diagram 2-21. When comparing the reader visits to the Cochinchina Library Reading Room and Lending Section, the Lending Section surpassed the Reading Room in reader visits, except for a dip in 1936 to 1940.

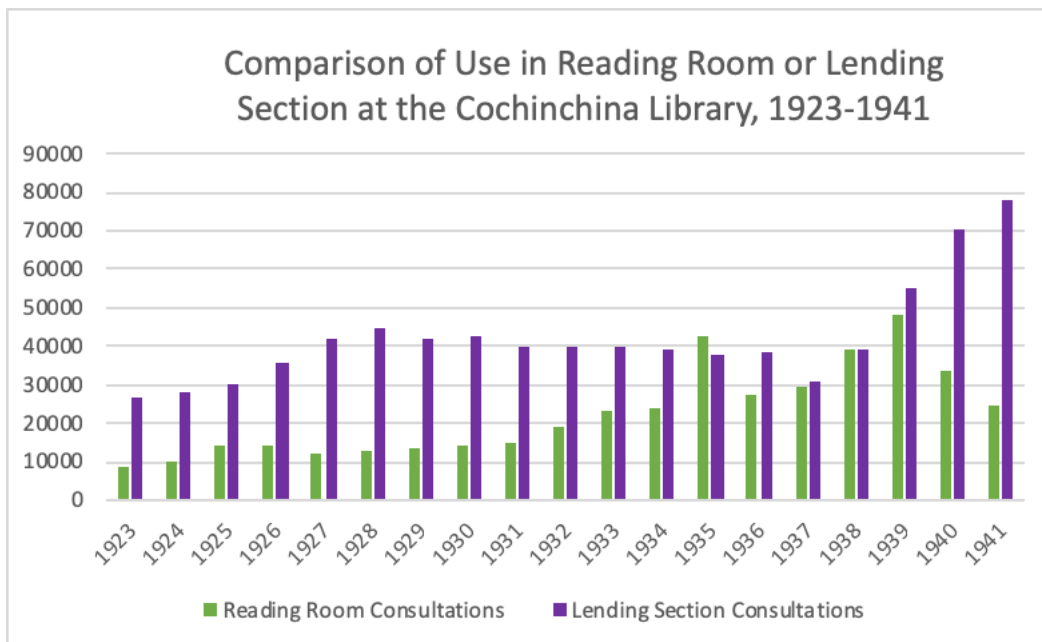


Diagram 2-22. When comparing the number of consultations in the Reading Room and in the Lending Section, the Lending Section appears to be even more highly used than the Reading Room. Overall, Lending Section consultations surpassed the Reading Room except in 1935. In 1935 Reading Room visits increased dramatically after the building expansion, which brought in additional tables and chairs. This expansion resulted in an increased number of patrons to the Reading Room, averaging 94 patrons each day.³²⁷

³²⁷ Boudet, Paul. *Les Archives et Les Bibliothèques de l'Indochine*. Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1919.

A borrowing registry provides insight into the actual use of the Lending Section of the Library of Cochinchina from 1920 to 1925.³²⁸ The registry recorded the following: date, name and address of borrower, library catalog code, type of work, date of return, and borrower signature. From this registry, we can see that most of the readers during 1920-1925 were French government workers who borrowed books on Indochina. But a closer look reveals that the books consulted ranged in topic: the question of French colonialism, the complete history of the Russian revolution, Cicero, histories of imperialism in Israel, Indochinese spirituality and magic, and language primers in Vietnamese and Chinese. This diverse reading of world history and politics demonstrates the breadth of readings which government workers consulted—from history to culture, to religion and language.

While the majority of readers who borrowed from the Lending Section were men, a few women also borrowed materials. For example, the registry records women who borrowed political and governance books such as “Civil Law”, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises*, and *L'état ou le république*. In total, the borrowing registry recorded 3016 loans from April 7, 1920 to June 2, 1925. The first recorded loan was on April 7, 1920 from M. Maspero, who borrowed “*Oeuvres de Jeaneau (Cambodge)*” and returned the work six weeks later on May 17, 1920. The last work recorded in this borrowing registry was D. Bureau who borrowed “*J.O. R.T. Du mois decembre 1923*” on June 2, 1925 and returned the work a day later on June 3, 1925. From 1920-1922, most of the borrowers were French male government administrators who borrowed works such as “Notes on Laos,” dictionaries, comparative works on Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, and the “*Revue de Paris.*” By 1924, the borrowing registry recorded more women’s names such as Madame Tholance who borrowed the following books: “Theatre; *Greco, ou Le Secret de Tolède* by Maurice Barrès; *An 5e de l'Allemagne*; *Amori et Soloi Sacreaux*; *L'anjoise de pascal*; *Connaissance de l'est*,” Madame Joaoven, Professor at the l'école supérieure, who borrowed “*Histoire moderne*”; and Mademoiselle Borel who borrowed “*Aristotle*” and “*Essai sur la métaphysique d'aristotle.*” In general, most of these works borrowed from 1920-1925 addressed topics of administration, religion, Indochina, France, and history.

As for Vietnamese readers, many were government administrators and journalists who borrowed an equally diverse range of books regarding world history, literature, and science. For example on December 22, 1924 Monsieur Thinh the Treasurer of Cholon borrowed *Claudine s'en va*, *Les Arnoud de Raspoutin*, *Les mauvais de Stalin-Grad*, and *Histoire complete de la Revolution Russe*.

The Cochinchina Library and Collections 1934-1939: Improvements and Limitations

A 1934 report commented on the dismal state of the Cochinchina Library facilities and also demanded additional linguistic diversity in the collections.³²⁹ The majority of the library materials were in French. The report argued, “the quốc ngữ collection is non-existent. The Library of Saigon has often forgotten that quốc ngữ was the living language. Furthermore, an increasing number of [quốc ngữ] literature and periodicals raises the number [of printed matter] in the Legal Deposit in Hanoi each year.” The report also described the reader demographics of the Cochinchina Library: “European, assimilated [Vietnamese who read in French], and

³²⁸ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11930 “Registre de Prêts des ouvrages de la Bibliothèque années 1920-1925.” Sometimes in the borrowing log, the name was marked ‘private’ but the borrower’s address was provided.

³²⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1423-01 “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Archives et des Bibliothèques de la Cochinchine en Septembre 1934.”

Vietnamese” readers, as well as a large group of Chinese readers. The author argued, “The Chinese, who for reasons of political order, will without a doubt never have a library. It will be interesting to create next to the French and Vietnamese collections, a Chinese section that the Chinese, artist and lettered [reader], when he has the means, will be happy to frequent.”

Administrators and students over the age of 16 came to the Reading Room to consult periodicals and reference materials. However, the Reading Room was not a conducive place to read and work. The Reading Room shared a crowded building with the archives and Lending Section on Lagrandière Street. As described in the unpublished September 1934 report, the Reading Room was old, dusty, ridden with bats and mosquitos, and the Lending Section occupied whatever space was available—one day next to the stairs, the next in a crowded gallery.³³⁰ By 1935 the Lending Section moved to a temporary location on Catinat Street, which freed up some space for the Reading Room on Lagrandière. The separate location of the Lending Section possibly offered a more hospitable space for patrons to consult and borrow books compared to the overcrowded and poorly maintained Reading Room. Furthermore, the popularity of the Lending Section in Saigon could also allude to the availability of alternative spaces to read the materials throughout the rapidly developing urban Saigon scene such as cafes, universities, and mutual learning societies.³³¹

In 1938 to 1939, the total number of readers at the Cochinchina library increased to 36,371 compared to 29,523 in the previous year, bringing the average to 133 readers a day. Continuing the previous year’s trend, the Lending Section was comparatively more popular than the Reading Room—both the number of borrowers in the Lending Section (30,919) and total number of book loans (55,152) increased by nearly 30% from its previous year. Additionally on November 14, 1938 a corner of the Lending Section was dedicated for children’s works, which had already received 2,216 requests for book loans.³³²

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Van Nguyen-Marshall et al., *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam*, Asia Research Institute Springer Asia Series (Singapore: Springer, 2012).

³³² Rémi Bourgeois, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1938-1939)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1939).



Image 2-23. Children's Corner in the Cochinchina Library, 1939. This photograph was used in the yearly report on the Directorate of Archives and Libraries and appears to function as an advertisement of the new children's corner in the Cochinchina Library. The diverse subjects (Vietnamese, French, male, and female) and their posed body language present an image of a diverse youth community eagerly engaging with the library reading matter.³³³

Like the Hanoi Central Library for Tonkin, the Saigon Library served the important role as the leading library resource for Cochinchina. Even with poorly maintained facilities and collections, the Cochinchina Library welcomed an increasing number of Saigon users to its Reading Room and especially to its Lending Section.

Conclusion

The Hanoi Central Library's original mission according to Paul Boudet was to function as an encyclopedic, comprehensive, and valuable collection of materials for the reading public. However, these initial visions for a 'modern' library were vague ideals that re-emphasized the cultural and technical prestige of France over its colonies. Furthermore, the strained operations of the Cochinchina Library points to the uneven development of colonial institutions. The Cochinchina Library began as a governmental library for French colonial administrators in 1865 and opened its doors to Vietnamese and French non-administrators. By the 1920s, the Cochinchina Lending Section had developed into an actively used resource for Saigon readers. On the other hand, the Reading Room was cramped, poorly organized, and circulated a limited collection to a growing urban population.

³³³ Rémi Bourgeois, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1938-1939)* (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1939).

By the 1920s and 1930s, newspaper debates chronicled the contradictions of colonial rhetoric of modernity and the reality of fiscal limitations, racism in reader privileges, and unmet demands for reading matter and better facilities. Racist dramas ensued between French and Vietnamese readers and administrators, calling attention to the hypocrisy of French Republican notions of public access and legal justice. These debates reflect the changing demographics of readers. With an increasing population of literate and urban Vietnamese, the demographics of library readers included an increasing majority of Vietnamese students, administrators, merchants, and teachers. These readers had different needs and reader tastes such as literature, Vietnamese and French language professional instruction and reference materials. Additionally, the sheer volume of readers by the 1930s compared to 1919 dramatically changed the everyday dynamics of the Hanoi Central Library Reading Room from an idealized space of “quiet meditation and research” to a crowded study and social space. The reoccurring criticism against students and casual visitors crowding into the Hanoi Central Library provides evidence of an important transformation of the Central Library from a ‘storehouse of knowledge’ to a public space of socialization. This transformation was contentious because it also challenged the existing colonial hierarchy of readers—prior to the 1920s most of the library readers were French administrators and a handful of Vietnamese administrators and teachers.

The Reading Room of the Central Library in Hanoi, functioned as an important space for the definition, creation, and expression of colonial modernity. The library was not simply a one directional delivery machine to ‘civilize’ Vietnamese with French literature and Western reading matter. The majority of vocal, educated Vietnamese readers contributed their own perspectives regarding the function, mission, and responsibility of the library. Defying and defining an alternative vision of modernity through reading literature, use of libraries as public social space, Vietnamese readers transformed the Reading Room in Central Library in Hanoi as a public social space and resource for self-learning. Similar to an agora in Ancient Greece, the library was an open market of intellectual and social exchange of new ideas, worldviews, and practices. The library provided access to new forms of intellectual expression such as the novel, the newspaper and modern technologies of representation such as maps and encyclopedia. The Central Library in Hanoi and the Cochinchina Library in Saigon connected Vietnamese readers to current and classic reading matter, published throughout Indochina and France as well as other cosmopolitan cities and colonies such as Hong Kong, the Dutch East Indies, and British India. Readers could freely consult current periodicals and reference works such as maps, administrative bulletins, and encyclopedia and dictionaries—materials of which were expensive to purchase from a bookshop or printing house. During the French colonial period, the library was a space of knowledge, self-directed learning, and access to diverse, global, and contemporary information. ‘To read’ meant to access ideas, philosophies, and stories from worlds far away; to learn new languages, cartographies, and histories; and to connect with contemporary news of the region and the world. Reading was not a passive act of information consumption but was a process of knowledge empowerment.

Library materials were not just ‘read’, but ‘misread.’ Library personnel chased after cases of ‘misreading,’ sending repeated recall requests to overdue books, republishing library rules for ‘appropriate’ reading behavior in the Reading Room and Lending Section, and revoking library privileges to readers who had violated codes of library conduct. Books were constantly reported as damaged, lost, or stolen. These attempts to police reader behavior and monitor the state of the library collections filled countless folders of the colonial archives on the library, demonstrating the importance of ‘control work’ in everyday administrative responsibilities. Furthermore, by the

1920s colonial administrators realized the political potential of ‘misreading’ to incite anti-colonial revolutionaries. Library administrators expressed anxiety over the “easily manipulated Vietnamese youth” who would ‘misread’ Chinese translations of political texts and French novels with subversive themes. Chapter 4 will examine how this fear of the radicalizing potential of reading motivated state projects in the 1930s and 1940s to control, censor, and surveil popular reading and libraries. The next chapter will situate library reading within the Vietnamese quốc ngữ print industry, the rise of cultural practices of book collecting and association libraries, and the cultural politics of translation.

Cultural Economics of the Print Industry: The Translation Project of the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation and Alternative Reading Spaces, 1908-1941

This chapter moves beyond the confines of colonial state-initiated libraries and positions reading matter as part of a larger economy of print production, market, and circulation. Specifically, I analyze the histories, politics, and economic realities of the following: translation projects, subsidized publishers, the practice of book collecting, and association reading rooms in late colonial Vietnam. This chapter challenges top-down concepts of state control by revealing how publishing and associations operated at the interstices of consumer demands for reading matter and the administrative capacity to define and implement a colonial policy on print control.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part considers the early publishing industries in Hanoi and Saigon from the 1880s to 1920s. This section reveals the complexity of publishing as a process of cultural translation, expansion of literacy and vernacularization, and the dissemination of educational print matter. Focused on the case of François Henri Schneider and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, this part reveals how commercial printing navigated government sponsorship as well as defined a distinct cultural platform for its readers. I analyze the nuances of Schneider and Vĩnh's Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation [Vulgarization or Popularization Library] project—the translation, publication, and dissemination of ‘good reading’ in Vietnamese quốc ngữ script. I reveal how this was not a simple top-down state project of French cultural imperialism, but a nuanced interpretation of French colonial republicanism and the ‘civilizing mission.’ The disaggregated and changing project of the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation provides a compelling case study to understand the diverse actors—administrators, librarians, businessmen, publishers—who used print matter as a tool of cultural empowerment and social transformation.³³⁴ This part concludes with the transformation of publishing from indirect and private initiatives at the turn of the twentieth century to more direct and authoritarian methods of state print control by 1919. This discussion of colonially-sanctioned publishing sheds light on the pluralistic perspectives of moderate journalism and cultural politics that transcend simple categories of nationalism or collaboration.³³⁵

The second part examines the history of alternative spaces of reading, specifically private libraries and association reading rooms in the 1920s to 1940s.³³⁶ The cultural practice of book collecting, building private libraries, and the creation of association reading rooms coincided

³³⁴ This chapter builds upon the important early scholarship on the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation by Emmanuelle Affidi, Claudine Salmon, and Christiane Rageau, and contributes new research on publishing, print control, and reading communities.

³³⁵ I push against the oversimplification of all cultural and political projects in the colonial period as either pro-colonial or anti-colonial. This historiographical shift away from the predetermined Vietnamese nation and anti-colonial nationalism considers the many varieties of colonial reform and cultural politics such as republicanism, reformism, constitutionalism, and monarchism. For a crucial reframing of Vietnamese historiography, see Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

³³⁶ While the other chapters focus primarily on state funded libraries such as the Hanoi Central Library and the Cochinchina Library, this chapter draws attention to ‘alternative’ spaces of reading. Readers accessed a specific type of literature and space through official libraries but were also embedded within a web of reading and social reading spaces: newspapers and bookstores, French-Vietnamese classrooms, private associations and reading rooms.

with urbanization, increased education and literacy in quốc ngữ, and mass production of print media in Hanoi and Saigon.³³⁷ I analyze the series “Tủ Sách Gia Đình [Family Library]” which appeared on the pages of the Hanoi-based *Phong Hoá* magazine in the 1930s and circulated to Saigon, Hue, and Haiphong. The series called for readers to partake in the modernizing practice of book collecting and to transform the Vietnamese print industry through their demands for higher quality literary content and production. Writers and publishers engaged with their readers in a self-conscious awareness of the Vietnamese print sphere with distinct literary tastes and purchasing power. In this way, the act of book buying was part of an emerging set of urban cultural practices tied to economic means and cultural prestige. The ability to purchase books and to create one’s own private library exhibits what Pierre Bourdieu has described as ‘cultural capital’, in this case, the practices, behaviors, material belongings associated with the social class of Vietnamese urban elite of the 1920s and 1930s.³³⁸

The last section examines the libraries of associations and mutual aid societies primarily in Cochinchina. These social groups organized themselves into specific communities with shared mission statements and often created a shared library of educational resources. This chapter does not provide a comprehensive history of associations nor urbanization in Hanoi and Saigon, but focuses instead on the practice of building private libraries and association libraries.³³⁹ I situate building libraries as part of the many social, intellectual, political, and technological transformations which contributed to the emergence of the Vietnamese public sphere. The historic moment of the 1920s to 1940s is significant because of the intensity of urbanization, a short period of colonial liberalization (1936-1938), and the coming of age of a new generation of literate youth educated in French or French-Vietnamese schools. These transformations provided a shared language (Vietnamese quốc ngữ or French) to discuss the changing world and the social role of the individual.³⁴⁰ Su Lin Lewis describes how the press and associations allowed for “the articulation of individual and collective identities within a shared public space, and provided a

³³⁷ Woodside provides an introductory analysis to the rise of the many diverse professional associations, mutual aid societies, and religious organizations in the late colonial Vietnam. However, he does not analyze Hanoi and Saigon with distinct political and social histories of urbanization. Alexander Woodside, “The Development of Social Organizations in Vietnamese Cities in the Late Colonial Period,” *Pacific Affairs* 44, no. 1 (April 1, 1971): 39–64. With increased literacy in quốc ngữ, the quốc ngữ publishing industry developed during the 1920s and 1930s particularly in Hanoi and Saigon. Between 1926 and 1930, publishers founded over four hundred quốc ngữ periodicals.

³³⁸ Bourdieu conceptualizes cultural capital in the following way: “Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee.” Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in J.G. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood, 1985), 241-258.

³³⁹ For specific histories on the development of urban Vietnamese associations, the public sphere, and intellectual politics, see Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (Columbia University Press, 2012); David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

³⁴⁰ Benedict Anderson argues that ‘print capitalism’—the rise of mass printed newspapers, novels, and proliferation of vernacular languages—provided the social technology for individuals to think and relate to one another. Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

venue for modern ideas of citizenship, society, and individualism to be discussed.”³⁴¹ Adding to associations and the press, I show how libraries and reading rooms also provided a collective, organizing space where communities of readers found individual and collective power through access to information and reading matter.

Part 1

Private Enterprises of Cultural Imperialism and Colonial Modernity: The Politics and Economics of Publishing and Translation

The Indochina publishing industry did not fall within the clear demarcation of pro-colonial or state sponsored. Instead, individual printing houses had to navigate a beneficial relationship with the state through subsidies, politically ‘safe’ topics of discussion, and subscription contracts for administrative offices. Publishers, writers, and printers worked within the framework of changing colonial law on freedom of the press and different levels of enforcement. In principle, Cochinchina newspapers had similar legal freedoms as the French metropole (according to 1881 freedom of the press law) and thus developed a wider ‘public sphere’ of political journalism. Three major colonial restrictions suppressed the everyday operations of Vietnamese publishing: 1) quốc ngữ and Chinese language presses were classified as ‘foreign presses’ and thus subject to prior approval by the governor general, 2) non-French language newspapers must submit a copy of their publication to the censor before printing and 3) only French citizens could own and manage newspapers.

F.H. Schneider and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh: Commercial Printing and Quốc Ngữ Language Popularization

The history of colonial printing and publishing in Indochina was deeply shaped by the labor and vision of Jean François Henri Schneider (1851-1930), whose abbreviated name “F.H. Schneider” was associated with many of the major Indochina publications in the first decades of the twentieth century. Schneider had an illustrious forty-year career in Indochina where he held positions as a government employee, printing and publishing entrepreneur, and was nicknamed the “father” of the press by colonial administrators. Schneider contributed to the technological, commercial, and linguistic development of the press in Indochina as well as the popularization of Vietnamese quốc ngữ. Furthermore, Schneider collaborated closely with Vietnamese printers, writers, and trained many technicians in new methods of lithography, typography, printing, and paper production. In a 1924 article commemorating Schneider, journalist Henry de Lachevrotière of the Saigon Francophone newspaper *L'impartial* commended Schneider’s commitment to develop a sustainable Vietnamese print industry through technical training and land grants for his Vietnamese employees.³⁴² Schneider’s life and work reveals the complexity of commercial and private printing initiatives that at times worked collaboratively and other times independently of

³⁴¹ Lewis, Su Lin, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism Southeast Asia, 1920-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). P. 179.

³⁴² Henry de Lachevrotière, “F.H. Schneider,” *L'écho annamite*, June 23, 1924. The author elaborated on Schneider’s personal investment in the livelihood of his employees: “He even followed his workers outside the workshop, striving to make their lives easier through the means of cooperatives and by making land grants to those who wished to retire, so that they would have their bowls of rice guaranteed in their old days. He thus earned the recognition of all these good people.”

the colonial state.

F.H. Schneider was born on December 1, 1851 in Paris. Son of the mason Jacob Schneider and Thérèse Duvallat, F.H. Schneider participated in the voluntary infantry [francs-tireurs] during the Siege of Paris in 1870. In 1882 F.H. Schneider arrived in Indochina and began his work at the Colonial Printer office in Cochinchina. Cochinchina had a series of French-language official bulletins since 1861. The first quốc ngữ language monthly *Gia Định Báo* [Gia dinh News] was launched in 1865 by editor-in-chief Pétrus Ky (alias: Trương Vĩnh Ký and Jean-Baptiste Pétrus) and published administrative documents and articles on Vietnamese culture.³⁴³ In 1883, Schneider was appointed to set up another governmental printing office in Tonkin which later became the influential Imprimerie d'extrême-orient [Far East Printer, abbreviated IDEO] on 28 Rue Paul Bert in Hanoi.³⁴⁴ Schneider purchased the Imprimerie d'extrême-orient in 1885, and turned it into one of the first commercial printers in Indochina. He operated IDEO with his older brother Ernest Hippolyte Schneider and Louis Gallois in Hanoi.³⁴⁵ Schneider described his successful work with the Far East Printer which printed one of the longest running and well-received scholarly publications, the *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême-orient* [Bulletin of the French School of the Far East]: "I had the great pleasure of bringing to realization in Tonkin this inevitable and vital transformation of printing [that is, the centralization of all the printing stages into one printing office]. The Far East Printer which I now inherit, is able to print works under excellent conditions. I am very proud of the successful material production of the Bulletin of the French School of the Far East, which even circulates among the scientific milieu in the Metropole."³⁴⁶

In 1891, Schneider created a paper mill and one of the first publishers of postcards and photographs of Tonkin from the late nineteenth century. In 1892 he founded *Revue Indochinoise* [Indochinese Review], a publication focused on "making known Indochina to the French public, scholars as well as traders, philologist and industrialists."³⁴⁷ Schneider integrated the processes of paper making, printing, and publishing, and innovated new technologies and approaches to the print industry in Indochina. Schneider also worked in local government at the Municipal Council and Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi and helped to organize Tonkin's participation in the French Indochina and International Exposition in 1902 [*L'exposition de Hanoi*]. On May 20, 1903 the Minister of Colonies inducted Schneider to the Legion of Honor at the rank of Chevalier [Knight] at the Exposition of Hanoi for Schneider's work as printer, editor, and paper manufacturer.

³⁴³ Trương Vĩnh Ký (1837-1898) and Huỳnh Tịnh Của (alias: Paulus) (1834-1907) were some of the leading Vietnamese Confucian trained scholars and linguists. As Catholic scholars, French colonial administrators, journalists and translators, they popularized the use of Vietnamese quốc ngữ through translations from classical Chinese, nôm, and French.

³⁴⁴ Biographical information on F.H. Schneider is drawn from his Legion of Honor dossier in 1930: "Dossier de Légion d'honneur de Jean-François-Henri Schneider."

³⁴⁵ Ernest Hippolyte Schneider was born in Paris on May 10, 1843 and died July 8, 1913. In 1886, Ernest was a bookseller, sold stationary and later also sold supplies for offices and libraries from 1890. Ernest was also named Knight [Chevalier] in the Legion of Honor on November 3, 1908.

³⁴⁶ While in Tonkin, Schneider worked with the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* and newspaper *L'Avenir du Tonkin*. TVKHXH OCTO 11453, *Association franco-annamite dite Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation pour la diffusion de l'influence française en Cochinchine et le développement intellectuel du peuple annamite par le bon livre et le livre à bon marché* (Saigon: F. H. Schneider, 1910). P. 1.

³⁴⁷ Emmanuelle Affidi, "Vulgarisation du savoir et colonisation des esprits par la presse et le livre en Indochine française et dans les Indes néerlandaises (1908-1936)," *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est*, no. 13-14 (December 1, 2009): 95-121, P. 3. *Revue Indochinoise* was later administered by Jules Boissiere.

Furthermore, Schneider contributed to the technical and commercial development of the quốc ngữ language press throughout Vietnam. Between 1891 and 1893 he founded *Đại Nam Đông Văn Nhật Báo* in Hanoi. Originally written in Chinese characters, on March 28, 1907 the newspaper changed its name to *Đảng Cổ Tùng Báo* and began publishing in both quốc ngữ and Chinese characters. Schneider worked closely with Vietnamese translators, editors, and writers to develop and popularize French and Vietnamese language publications throughout Indochina. Schneider collaborated with and sponsored the work of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936)—one of the most prolific cultural intellectuals who advanced the Vietnamese publishing industry through his translations, journalism, and editorial work on literature and social commentary. Although Schneider was characterized as the “father” of the Indochina press by colonial administrators due to his commercial operations, it was actually Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh who shaped the intellectual and cultural discourse, content, and directions of the early quốc ngữ press.³⁴⁸

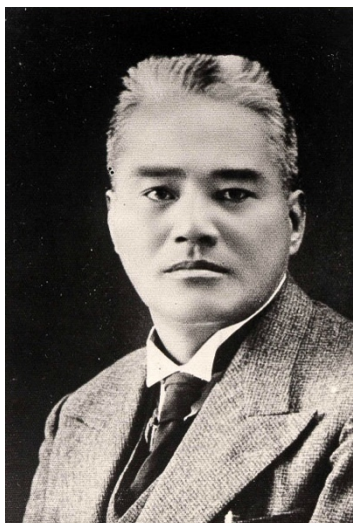


Image 3-1. Photograph of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh.³⁴⁹

Born in the province of Hà Đông on June 15, 1882, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh came from a poor rural family who worked as buffalo herders. At age 8, he worked as a classroom fan-operator at a school for French interpreters in the nearby province of Yên Phụ. His exceptional language skills quickly gained the attention of his teachers, who then offered Vĩnh a full scholarship to further his language studies. He later excelled at the Collège des Interprètes and worked as a secretary and translator within the colonial administration. From 1893 to 1905, Vĩnh climbed the ranks of the colonial administration as an interpreter in Lào Cai, Hải Phòng, and Bắc Giang. His talents for translation earned the praise of some colonial officials who entrusted Vĩnh with many duties including reviewing applications for translation societies and the Society to Help Vietnamese Study in France [Hội giúp đỡ người Việt sang Pháp học].

Vĩnh was also deeply influenced by his first hand encounter with the printing press

³⁴⁸ I owe much of my introduction to Vĩnh’s life and work through Goscha’s essay on Vĩnh. I am grateful also for the opportunity to meet and interview Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh’s nephew Nguyễn Lâm Bình in Hanoi. Christopher Goscha, “The Modern Barbarian: Nguyen Van Vinh and the Complexity of Colonial Modernity in Vietnam,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 1, no. 3 (2004): 99–134.

³⁴⁹ For additional research essays, photographs, and a contemporary discussion on Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, see the website <http://tannamtu.com> managed by Nguyễn Lâm Bình (Accessed June 1, 2019).

during the Marseille Colonial Exposition in 1906. Vĩnh worked on the Tonkinese exhibit and lived in France for four months. During his stay, he was swept away by the technological advances, material prosperity, and culture of France. “Every day, I watched that scene of activity with hungry eyes—the humming presses, reporters dashing off to gather news. I became infatuated with the newspaper business. All day I came over to learn, asking this and that, and the editor [of *Le petit Marseillais*] explained everything to me very kindly.”³⁵⁰ From his encounters with what he perceived to be the epitome of modern civilization, Vĩnh sought to adapt Western cultural thinking and practices in his life and writing. On his return to Indochina, he shed his traditional dress and hairstyle, wore Western attire and leather shoes, and sported a Terrot motorbike from France.³⁵¹ He referred to himself as a “Tân Nam Tử [Modern Man]” with a distinctly modern perspective and cultural lifestyle. Beyond his material changes, Vĩnh’s ideas about politics and culture began to take shape. Firstly, like other reformist scholars who advocated Vietnam’s gradual independence through socio-cultural transformation, Vĩnh became even more captivated by the ideas of progress, civilization, and self-determination. Secondly, he decided that the key to bringing Vietnam to an age of cultural modernity was the powerful tools of language and print.

After his return from France, Vĩnh began to form his cultural politics on modernization, reformism, and criticism of the Confucian mandarin system. In 1906, Vĩnh joined the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thực* [Tonkin Free School], created by reformist intellectuals Phan Châu Trinh, Lương Văn Can, and Phạm Duy Tốn in Hanoi. Modeled after Japanese modernization programs, the school sought to modernize Vietnamese culture and education through instruction of Western disciplines, Vietnamese quốc ngữ and French, and applied arts such as commerce and technology. Pushing against traditional Confucian educational and moral values, the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thực* served both as a school and as a social movement. Vĩnh taught quốc ngữ and French at the school and also served as editor in chief of the periodical *Đăng Cổ Tùng Báo*, which operated like a mouthpiece of the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thực* in 1907.³⁵² On August 15 and 22, 1907, *Đăng Cổ Tùng Báo* republished Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh’s speech delivered at the meeting of the *Hội Trí Tri* [Société d’Enseignement Mutuel du Tonkin] in Hanoi.³⁵³ At this meeting, Vĩnh declared the importance of quốc ngữ translation for the development of Vietnamese civilization. Vĩnh argued that Vietnamese scholar’s reliance on using Chinese script (in *nôm* and classical Chinese) restricted Vietnamese intellectual thought and popular literacy. “If the written language reflected the spoken language, then a person could write a book and produce several copies. As a result, this could exponentially multiply the value of their spoken words since a reader could understand the text as if they were listening to the speaker in person.” Vĩnh approached the task of quốc ngữ literacy as an imperative tool for the dissemination of Vietnamese culture, civilization, and thinking. Furthermore, he believed that translation of foreign texts into quốc ngữ would cultivate deeper thinking and new ideas. Thus, he called for the creation of a Book Translation Association [*Hội Dịch Sách*] which would produce translations of diverse foreign books into quốc ngữ. He argued that translation must draw out meaning and be a continually

³⁵⁰ *Tin Văn*, Number 1, July 28, 1935. “Hàng ngày tôi thấy cái cảnh hoạt động trong tòa báo ấy mà thèm, máy chạy ãn ãn, phóng viên đi lấy tin tấp tợi. Tôi thấy như tôi đắm mê cái nghề làm báo. Cả ngày tôi sang hỏi hết cái này cái nọ, ông chủ báo ôn t ãn giảng giải cho tôi rất tử tế...”

³⁵¹ Xuân Bính Tý, “Dịch giả Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh – Chiếc c àu nối văn hoá Đông Tây” <http://www.tannamtu.com/?p=273> (Accessed December 21, 2018).

³⁵² *Đăng Cổ Tùng Báo* continued to publish until issue number 826 on November 14, 1907.

³⁵³ Excerpts from issues number 813 and 814, August 15, 1907 and August 22, 1907 of *Đăng Cổ Tùng Báo*.

iterative process: “We must translate the meanings of the books...and then after all have familiarized themselves with these translations, then we will translate the books again. We know that the books that we translate today, the next generation will criticize it, but that’s when we recognize there is progress...”

Furthermore, Vĩnh’s politics were deeply influenced by French ideas of Republicanism and the policy of a Franco-Vietnamese association advocated by Governor General Albert Sarraut.³⁵⁴ Vĩnh believed in a Republican vision of a mutually beneficial French-Vietnamese colonial partnership where the colonial administration would lead with ‘enlightened control’ to advance civil liberties, education, and modernization of indigenous society. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was involved with the Ligue des droits de l’homme [League of Human Rights] in Hanoi since 1906, an organization that promoted Republican ideas of individual rights and liberties, egalitarianism, and citizenship. Additionally, Vĩnh also joined the freemasons in Indochina. His politics of reform and colonial association manifested in his moderate approach to transform Vietnamese culture and society through print and language.

In 1910, Vĩnh served as editor-in chief of several French language publications including *Notre Journal* and *Notre Revue* in Saigon. Under their motto “The greatest invention of mankind is printing,” Vĩnh and his fellow French co-editor François Henri Schneider openly declared their belief in the modernizing quality of literature.³⁵⁵ Schneider owned the Cochinchina newspaper *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* [News of the Six Provinces in Saigon] of which Vĩnh managed since 1910. In 1913 Schneider and Vĩnh returned to Hanoi and created a new Tonkin branch of *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* under the name *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* [Indochina Review]. *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* initially began as an expansion of *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, but over time developed its own reputation as a “vulgarizing” [popularization] resource for translations of French and world literature, scientific and pedagogical materials, and cultural essays in quốc ngữ.³⁵⁶ The colonial administration provided some financial support to *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* in hopes that sponsoring more pro-colonial moderate newspapers would counteract the recent violent acts of anti-colonial sedition from the Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội [Vietnam Restoration League] in 1912 and 1913.³⁵⁷ *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* also took a markedly conservative stance; Vĩnh publicly spoke out against the

³⁵⁴ Sarraut served two terms as Governor General of French Indochina: 1912-1914 and 1917-1919.

³⁵⁵ "La plus grande invention de l’homme c’est l’imprimerie." (Nghề in là sự phát minh lớn nhất của loài người). Xuân Bích Tý, “Dịch giả Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh – Chiếc c’âu nối văn hoá Đông Tây” <http://www.tannamtu.com/?p=273> (Accessed December 21, 2018). According to the 1910 General Directory French Indochina, Schneider was associated with at least five offices: as the manager of the office on 30 Rue Paul Bert in Hanoi, and in Saigon, as the bookseller-printer on 132 Rue Catinat, as the bookseller-stationary shopkeeper at place du Théâtre, as the printer at 22 Rue Kerlan, and as the innkeeper at 4-6 Rue Krantz.

³⁵⁶ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407 “Propagande par la presse indigène,” Document: Letter from Schneider to Governor General of Indochina on December 30, 1912. Schneider requests GGI to create the *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* to serve the Vietnamese population throughout Indochina.

³⁵⁷ The Vietnam Restoration League was led by Phan Bội Châu and Prince Cường Để and based in Canton. The group sought to overthrow French colonialism but was divided on if they should restore the Vietnamese monarchy or create a new democratic republic. Between 1912 and 1913, the group carried out various assassination attempts and violent attacks including the failed assassination of Governor-General Albert Sarraut, the assassination of the governor of Thái Bình Province, and the bombing in Hanoi. After these attacks, the French colonial administration mass arrested 254 individuals and sentenced several to death. David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) p. 220.

violent acts of anti-colonial resistance initiated by Phan Bội Châu.³⁵⁸ The sub-header of each edition specified the journal's intention "...to use literature and art, to use the cultural benefits of France to shut out seditious noises, so that the explosions caused by the rebels will not drown out the drums of civilization." In 1915, Schneider created another extension of *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* named *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* and placed Vĩnh as editor-in-chief of the new publication.³⁵⁹

Between 1910 and his death in 1936, Vĩnh wrote extensively on culture, language, modernization, and translated French classics to Vietnamese quốc ngữ.³⁶⁰ In his article "Examining our faults" published in 1913 in the Indochina Journal, Vĩnh assumed a Western identity and critiqued Vietnamese society's 'barbaric' practices such as gambling, corruption, superstition, lack of conversation skills, and a backwards education system. In dozens of other articles, Vĩnh questioned Vietnamese habits and norms, urging Vietnamese to become 'civilized' according to his interpretations of Western modernity. His criticism stemmed from a deeper goal of strengthening and modernizing Vietnamese society.

Vĩnh's translations were not purely literary in intent nor were they simply acts of pro-colonial collaboration—rather, they reflected his own cultural and political ideas for change in Vietnam. Christopher Goscha argues that Vĩnh communicated his ideas for social and cultural change through his translations.³⁶¹ For example, through his translation of Jean de La Fontaine's seventeenth century collection *Les Fables*, he revealed his hatred for the mandarin system. The original text was a satirical attack on the corruption of the French monarchy and court aristocracy, and Vĩnh's conscious decision to translate the text was a veiled stab at the Vietnamese monarchy and corrupt mandarin system. Vĩnh also translated Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Felon's *Les aventures de Télémaque*, and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and used these strategic translations to critique Vietnamese social and political ills under French colonialism. These stories depict the plight of the peasants and lower classes at the hands of corrupt ruling authorities. Furthermore, he was critical of French colonial treatment of the rural poor. In 1933-1934 articles in *L'Annam Nouveau*, Vĩnh called attention to the French inability to curb the mandarin exploitation of peasants. He offered concrete plans for the modernization of rural Vietnam such as providing clean water, development of local industries, and creating lending associations to finance development projects in village areas.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Hue-Tam Ho Tai argues that Vĩnh's public denunciation of Châu as a failed revolutionary led to the dismissal of Vĩnh as a colonial collaborator in nationalist historiography. Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) p. 28.

³⁵⁹ Schneider edited, founded, and co-owned many quốc ngữ and French language publications in Hanoi and Saigon including the following *Đại Nam Đông Văn Nhật Báo* (1891-1907), *Nam Việt Quan Báo* (1908-13), *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* (purchased in 1909), *Nam Việt Công Báo* (1911-13), *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* (1913-18), *Pháp Việt Thông Báo* (1914-18), *Công Thị Báo* (1914-15), *Journal officiel de l'Indochine*, *Revue indochinoise*, *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, and *Trung Bắc Tân Văn*.

³⁶⁰ Vĩnh accrued thousands of piastres of debt for his newspaper business ventures. In 1931 he moved to Laos to pan for gold and died suddenly of dysentery on May 2, 1931.

³⁶¹ During these early decades, Vĩnh translated French classics and popular world literature such as La Fontaine's *Les fables*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Felon's *Les aventures de Télémaque*, Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, *Les femmes savantes*, *L'Avare*, and *Le malade imaginaire*, and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. For more on Vĩnh's work as a cultural translator, see Christopher Goscha, "The Modern Barbarian: Nguyen Van Vinh and the Complexity of Colonial Modernity in Vietnam," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 1, no. 3 (2004): 99-134.

³⁶² "Les industries villageoises [Village industries]" (January 28, 1934), "La question d'eau potable dans nos villages [The question of drinking water in our villages]" (July 2, 1933), "Le financement des entreprises d'intérêt

Through his translations of French classics, Vĩnh introduced French literature and new genres of the Western novel, comedy, satire, and theater to the Vietnamese masses. Vĩnh also sought ways to showcase Vietnamese literary tradition and culture through translations from chữ nôm [demotic script] and classical Chinese to quốc ngữ. Vĩnh's efforts to exhibit the wealth of Vietnam's literary tradition was reflected, for instance, in his meticulous translation of the classic *Tale of Kiều* [*Kim Văn Kiều*] and his attempts to make it into a film in 1924.³⁶³ He also believed firmly in the importance of language as a reflection of culture and advocated teaching Vietnamese to the French.³⁶⁴

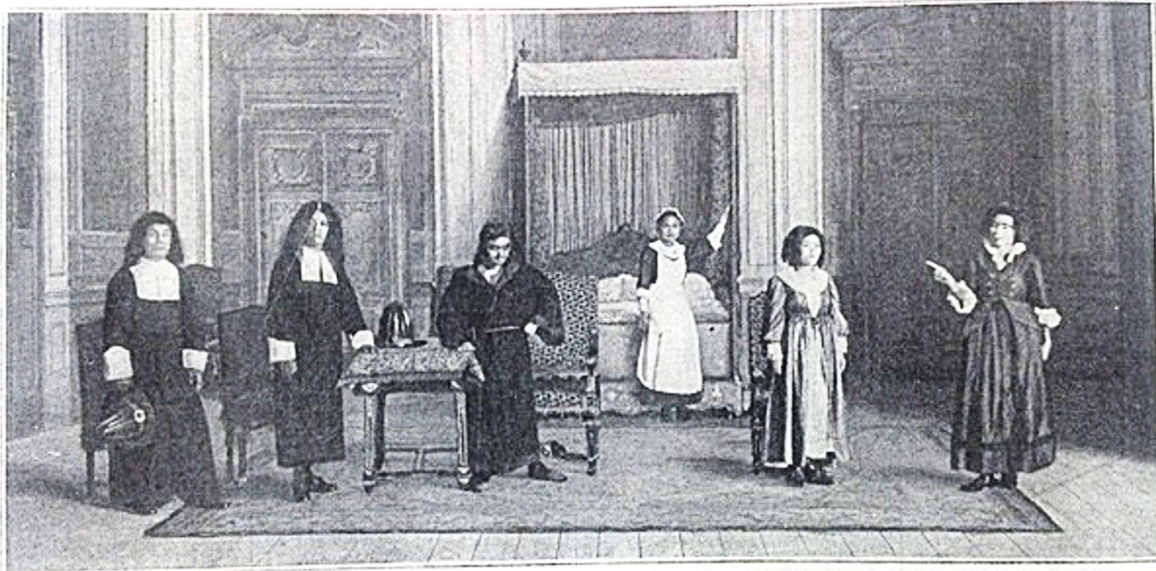


Image 3-2. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh also translated the plays by Molière and even performed in a Vietnamese production Molière's comedy play "*Le Malade Imaginaire*" (translated as "Người Bệnh Tưởng" or "The Imaginary Invalid") at the Hanoi opera house in April 25, 1920.³⁶⁵ In this performance, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh played Diafoirus the doctor (standing second from the left).

The life and work of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh illuminates the complex ways in which colonial modernity and colonial collaboration was envisioned and practiced. Colonial modernity was not simply French or state initiated, but manifested through the different engagements between Vietnamese individuals, French commercial figures such as Schneider, and diverse ideas of cultural reform from Japan, China, France, and other colonies throughout Asia. Nguyễn Văn

rural [Financing business of rural interest]" (August 24, 1933), "Projet de création d'un établissement de crédit foncier privilégié [Project to create a special land credit institution]" (November 9, 1933) in *L'Annam Nouveau*.

³⁶³ Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh first published a serialized translation of *Kim Văn Kiều* [The Tale of Kieu] from Vietnamese quốc ngữ to French in issue 99 of the Literature Section of *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* on December 3, 1916. The Literature Section published and serialized translations from French and Chinese to Vietnamese, and Vietnamese to French.

³⁶⁴ In his series "Les noms annamites" published April 21, 1931, April 24 1931, and April 28, 1931 in *L'Annam Nouveau*, Vĩnh introduced Vietnamese customs, language, and culture as a way of bridging the cultural divide between French and Vietnamese. Emmanuelle Affidi, "Créer des passerelles entre les mondes... L'œuvre interculturelle de Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936)," *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est*, no. 24 (December 1, 2014): 33-55.

³⁶⁵ François de Tesson, "Molière chez les Annamites," *L'illustration* No. 4061, January 1, 1921, Paris.

Vĩnh advanced a reformist, multifaceted platform of cultural, social, and economic modernity within the framework of French colonialism. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's reformist political and cultural vision focused on modernization, education, legal rights, anti-monarchism, and gradual liberation from French colonialism. Vĩnh's diverse reformist politics point to the many ways in which early twentieth century intellectuals advanced social and political change within the confines of colonial governance and domination.³⁶⁶ Throughout the early twentieth century, Schneider and Vĩnh expanded the Indochina publishing industry, popularized the use and learning of quốc ngữ, and produced extensive Vietnamese translations of French short stories, literary classics, and plays. Schneider and Vĩnh's comprehensive work in publishing and translation reflected their cultural politics and belief in the modernizing power of print.

Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation: Cultural Imperialism and the Educational Dissemination of 'Good Reading'

In 1910 Schneider founded a group of publishers and collaborators with the mission to write, publish, and disseminate “good reading.” Schneider described the group as the “French-Vietnamese association known as the Popularization Library for the Dissemination of French Influence in Cochinchina and the Intellectual Development of the Vietnamese People by Good Books and Cheap Books,” or for short “Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation [Vulgarization or Popularization Library].”³⁶⁷ In a bounded volume by the same name, F.H. Schneider assembled documents related to the founding of the Popularization Library in Cochinchina.³⁶⁸ These documents reveal Schneider's early motivations to build up a publishing office and association of writers, translators, and publishers who would promote the publishing of quốc ngữ educational texts in Cochinchina. The Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation in Indochina drew from the intellectual and social movements of nineteenth century French Republicanism to popularize science in France. The Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation in Indochina also coincided with turn of the twentieth century modernization movements throughout Asia, particularly in Japan and China.³⁶⁹ In Vietnam, these modernization initiatives included educational movements like the Đàng Kinh Nghĩa Thục and French-Indigenous school reform, countless Vietnamese and French language newspapers, and study abroad movements that sought to ‘modernize’ Vietnamese thinking and society. At the foundation of Schneider's project, the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation was a publishing project to share and translate French language works to quốc ngữ. Through translation, Schneider explained how the Popularization Library could spread French influence, introduce modern ideas, and also contribute to the intellectual development of Vietnamese.

³⁶⁶ Vĩnh was part of a generation of intellectuals who advanced reformist political and cultural platforms such as Phan Chu Trinh and Bùi Quang Chiêu. These intellectuals approached social change through reform and do not fit the nationalist driven dichotomy of intellectuals as simply pro-colonial or anti-colonial.

³⁶⁷ “Association Franco-Annamite Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation pour la diffusion de l'influence française en Cochinchine et le développement intellectuel du peuple annamite par le bon livre et le livre à bon marché”

³⁶⁸ TVKHXX, OCTO, Folder 11453, *Association franco-annamite dite Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation pour la diffusion de l'influence française en Cochinchine et le développement intellectuel du peuple annamite par le bon livre et le livre à bon marché* (Saigon: F. H. Schneider, 1910).

³⁶⁹ For a detailed history on the intellectual lineage of the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation in France, see Affidi's dissertation, chapter 12. Emmanuelle Affidi, Université Paris Diderot - Paris 7, “Đông Duong Tap chi (1913-1919), une tentative de diffusion du discours et de la science de l'occident au Tonkin l'interculturalité, un enjeu colonial entre savoir et pouvoir (1906-1936)” (2006).

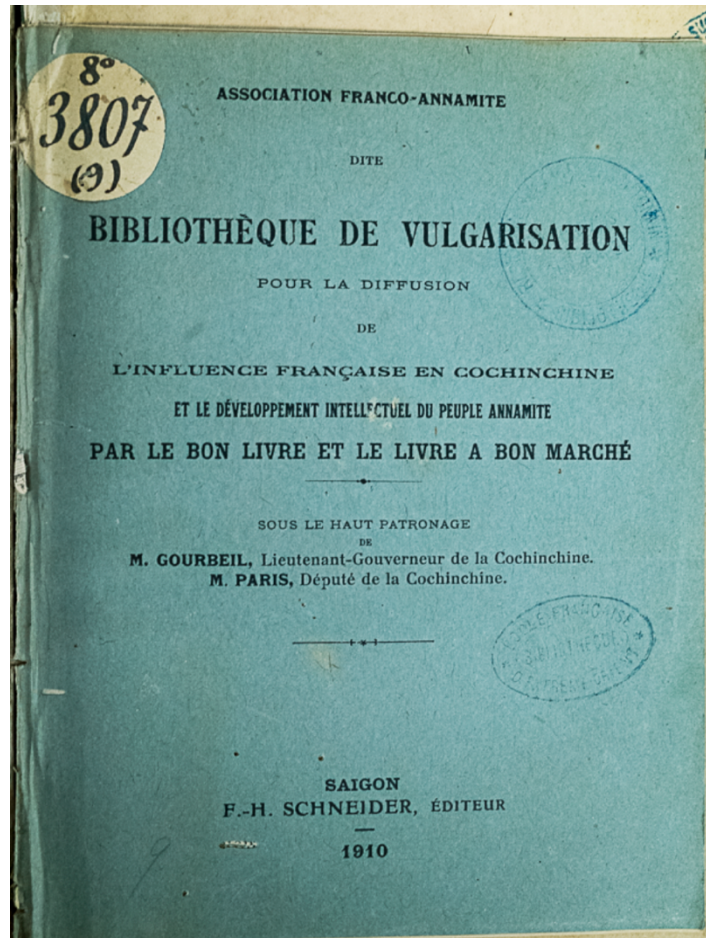


Image 3-3. Booklet of documents on the founding of the “French-Vietnamese association known as the Popularization Library for the Dissemination of French Influence in Cochinchina and the Intellectual Development of the Vietnamese People by Good Books and Cheap Books” published in 1910.³⁷⁰

Schneider included in this 1910 booklet an extensive report previously submitted to the Lieutenant Governor of Cochinchina on April 10, 1910. There he outlined his experience building up the Tonkin print industry and explained his project to create a new printing house which specialized in book printing and offered technical training for Vietnamese printing apprentices in Cochinchina. Besides his technical and entrepreneurial motivations, Schneider emphasized in his report that this *Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation* initiative served two interdependent purposes: colonization and education.

Firstly, Schneider believed that his publishing project served the purpose of cultural imperialism, described as “colonization by the book.” Schneider argued that in these past decades, the colonial government had neglected printing, publishing, and translation; Schneider described translation to be one of the most effective methods of colonization. Addressing French colonial administrators, Schneider argued,

³⁷⁰ TVKHXX, OCTO, Folder 11453, *Association franco-annamite dite Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation pour la diffusion de l'influence française en Cochinchine et le développement intellectuel du peuple annamite par le bon livre et le livre à bon marché* (Saigon: F. H. Schneider, 1910).

Under the pretext of ‘respecting the indigenous mentality and the national traditions,’ we refrained from surveilling the publications or where Vietnamese drew their intellectual and moral nourishment; we have left the field almost entirely free to Chinese [intellectual and political] thought in which millenarian forms of authority is perpetuated through continual production of a multitude of pamphlets in characters or in quốc ngữ. [These Chinese forms of influence], whatever one thinks of it, is the most formidable obstacle to the definitive establishment of our own [French] influence. In truth, is it not sad to think about the fact that Chinese translators have translated some of our best popular works, such as the *Histoire de la Civilisation Française* [*History of the French Civilization*] by Seignobos, and have presented it to the indigenous masses? *Traduttore, traditore* one says. Never has the treachery of the translator been as feared as it should be now.

Schneider argued that Indochina publishing, translation, and print circulation continued uncurbed and thus Chinese language texts and ideas had spread freely throughout Indochina. Schneider emphasized that this profusion of Chinese language texts throughout Indochina threatened French cultural monopoly over Vietnamese thinking. He described the rising threat of Vietnamese “becoming Chinese again” and “reversing their evolution,” and thus proposed the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation as a method to combat Chinese intellectual and cultural colonization over Vietnamese minds. In other words, control of print production and circulation could undermine China and pre-colonial Vietnamese forms of state authority. Compared to previous failed efforts of “colonization by the book,” Schneider emphasized that his business initiative would provide a sustainable source of capital for operations, equipment, and collaborators such as technicians, translators, and publishers.

Secondly, Schneider emphasized the important role of publishing in the realm of education. Schneider commended other similar translation and popularization projects for popular education such as the “Franco-Vietnamese Library” four-volume publication by Director General of Public Instruction Monsieur Gourdon.³⁷¹ Schneider also mentioned the success of his first education publishing project, the “Bibliothèque des Écoles” conducted under the direction of Inspector of the Schools of Cochinchina Henri Russier and a committee of Vietnamese teachers and secretaries. This first collection of the Bibliothèque des Écoles was aimed towards Vietnamese provincial and communal schools. This series included books on the French language (taught according to the Carré method), geography, math, the metric system, the history of Annam, morality and manners). Schneider proposed the publication of a second series of French works directed towards provincial schools. Schneider also requested the Lieutenant Governor of Cochinchina Gourbeil for support of another publishing project, the *Bulletin de l'enseignement* edited by A. Colin. This bulletin would function as manuals for teachers and would be paid through subscriptions directly from the schools itself rather than from the budget of the local administration. Finally, Schneider affirmed the important role of his printing house by proposing to the Lieutenant Governor that the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation function as a kind of a professional school, called the “École professionnelle libre l'imprimerie [Free Professional Print School].” The printing school would operate as a free apprentice workshop to encourage and train young Vietnamese with the specialized skills of the book industry and

³⁷¹ This volume series included “Notions of Hygiene, Accounting, Geography of Indochina, and History of Annam.”

printing.³⁷²

The bounded volume also included the vision for the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation, approved on May 7, 1910 and submitted to the Lieutenant Governor of Cochinchina. According to the first clause, the French-Vietnamese association called the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation aimed to “spread modern instruction especially in quốc ngữ for the masses of the indigenous population in Cochinchina, through the publication of previously unpublished manuscripts, the adaption of works published in France, (in particular from the book stores of Armand Colin and Larousse), of which the diffusion [of works] in Cochinchina would be deemed useful.” Placed under the Lieutenant-Governor and deputy of Cochinchina, the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation was directed by Schneider and assisted by a committee of French and Vietnamese readers comprising of Messieurs Baudet, Diệp Văn Cường, Eutrope, Girerd, H. Gourdon, Hoareau, Lê Quang Bẩy, Lương Khắc Ninh, Mercier-Beaune, Négrignat, Nguyễn Văn Mai, Prêtre, and Russier. The committee examined all the manuscripts for publication and translation and worked together with Schneider on tasks such as profit sharing and securing copyrights. Besides the committee, active members also formed a core part of the association and received some of the profits from book sales.

Attached to the association rules were lists of books already published or in preparation. The works included French and Vietnamese educational reference and reading guides, dictionaries, maps, novels, books on sciences, industry, geography, history, moral and civic instruction, hygiene and domestic economy. Many of the works were authored by the committee members, such as Diệp Văn Cường’s *Petit dictionnaire français-annamite usuel illustré* [*A Short, Common, and Illustrated French-Vietnamese Dictionary*], *Manuel de politesse française à l’usage des Annamites* [*Manual of Polite French Manners for Use by Vietnamese*], and *Thuy-Kieu* [*Tale of Kieu*]. Examples of translated French materials into quốc ngữ include the following: Gourdon’s *Première lectures scientifiques: Les Corps* [*First Scientific Readings: The Body*], Russier & Brenier’s *Géographie élémentaire de l’Indochine (2nd édition)* [*Elementary Geography of Indochina*], and Maybon & Russier’s *Notions d’histoire d’Annam (2nd édition)* [*Ideas on Vietnam’s History*]. The Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation listed works in preparation for publishing such as those by Cornielle, Molière, and Perrault.

Schneider’s volume of documents concludes with a letter from Lieutenant Governor of Cochinchina Gourbeil to Schneider on May 18, 1910. Gourbeil expressed his tremendous support for Schneider’s three interrelated projects: the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation, the *Bulletin de l’enseignement*, and the printing professional school. Gourbeil also added that Schneider should also publish a Teaching Bulletin to help teachers find books for their classes. Gourbeil agreed that a printing house could function like an apprenticeship program: “a kind of free professional school and to encourage the admission of young Vietnamese from our schools to the book industry.” On behalf of the local administration, Gourbeil supported the project with interest and encouragement, emphasizing the important goal of “the diffusion of the French influence by cheap books and for the intellectual development of Vietnamese people.”

³⁷² In the report, Schneider summarized his administrative and technological challenges in the development of the new printing workshop and publishing house project, the Popularization Library in Cochinchina. First, Schneider sought out quốc ngữ printing technologies and equipment to handle the Vietnamese diacritical marks, and he collaborated with M. Tuleu of the Deberny foundry in France. Second, he sought out publishers for support of his project. Schneider decided to collaborate with the two Parisian bookstores and publishers A. Colin and P. Larousse to introduce their collections of French classical books and popular works. This Free Professional Print School might have been influenced by similar technical and practical educational programs such as the 1907 Đờng Kinh Nghĩa Thục, of which Schneider was associated.

Between Public and Private: The Disaggregated Popularization Library Publishing Project, 1910-1919

After the 1910 documents on the founding of the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation in Cochinchina, the project continued in a decentralized manner within the overall landscape of commercial printing throughout Vietnam. From 1910-1919, the essential Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation mission of publishing, dissemination of good reading, and ‘colonization by the book’ shaped F.H. Schneider and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh’s private publishing projects. Schneider and Vĩnh’s journals *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, *Đông Dương Tạp Chí*, and *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* often used the term “vulgarisation” to describe the journals’ mission to popularize Western thinking and quốc ngữ translations.³⁷³ For example, Schneider described *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* as the “indigenous publication for vulgarization in quốc ngữ.”³⁷⁴ A few issues of *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* described itself as “*Đông Dương Tạp Chí: Bibliothèque de vulgarisation*” on its covers. Schneider and Vĩnh also titled a collection of new translations, the “*Bibliothèque Franco-Annamite de vulgarisation - Phổ thông giáo khoa thư xã*,” which would advertise recent translations and other publications.³⁷⁵ For example, issue 126 of *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* published on June 17, 1917 advertised the following under the section titled “Bibliothèque Franco-Annamite de vulgarisation”: Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh’s translation of La Fontaine’s *Les Fables [Thơ Ngụ Ngôn]* and *Les Contes de Perault [Chuyện Trẻ Con Perrault]*, Trần Trọng Kim’s *Leçons de Morale [Sơ Học Luận Lý]*. In preparation for sale were the following works: the translations titled *Télémaque Phiêu lưu ký*, *Gil Blas de Santillane*, *Gulliver Du Ký* by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh; translations of the 13th century play *Tây Sương Ký* (Kim Thánh Thán’s edition) and the nô poem *Song Phụng Kỳ Duyên* by Nguyễn Đỗ Mục; and the quốc ngữ publications *Sư Phạm Giáo Khoa [Pedagogical Course]* and *Nam Sử Sơ Học [Manual of Annamese History]* by Trần Trọng Kim; *Việt Nam Phong Tục [Vietnamese Customs]* by Phan Kế Bính; the Vietnamese language column on education, *Gõ đầu trẻ - Opinion d’un professeurs de caractères [Teaching Children]* by Nguyễn Đỗ Mục.³⁷⁶

During this time, the colonial government supported the mission of cultural imperialism and colonization by the book, but control of publishers and content still primarily remained in the private industry. In his letter requesting the Governor General of Indochina permission to open up *Đông Dương Tạp Chí*, Schneider emphasized that during his many years as director of *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, he never needed governmental intervention and financial support.³⁷⁷ He boasted

³⁷³ In 1912, Schneider developed a new method of self-learning to read and write quốc ngữ called “La Clé du quốc ngữ” [The Quốc ngữ Key]. The method was based on the “Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation” mission to increase literacy through simplified instructional texts and appeared on the pages of of *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, its newly expanded branches *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* and *Trung Bắc Tân Văn*.

³⁷⁴ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Letter from Schneider to Governor General of Indochina on December 30, 1912.

³⁷⁵ Affidi analyzes the history of the *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* as a publishing initiative to carry out the work of popularization [vulgarisation] of French thinking through translation. Emmanuelle Affidi, Université Paris Diderot - Paris 7, “Đông Dương Tạp chí (1913-1919), une tentative de diffusion du discours et de la science de l’occident au Tonkin l’interculturalité, un enjeu colonial entre savoir et pouvoir (1906-1936)” (2006).

³⁷⁶ *Đông Dương Tạp Chí*, Number 126, June 17, 1917. Born in Sơn Tây, Nguyễn Đỗ Mục (1882-1951) was a writer and translator from a Confucian scholarly family. Mục wrote the column “Gõ đầu trẻ” in *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* and also for *Trung Bắc Tân Văn*.

³⁷⁷ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Letter from Schneider to Governor General of Indochina on December 30, 1912.

that out of a subscription number of 800, the Cochinchina Government only contributed one subscription. On the other hand, Resident Superior of Tonkin Le Gallen expressed in a letter to the Governor General Ernest Roume on November 15, 1915 the importance of colonization through language, culture, and the book.³⁷⁸ Le Gallen argued for the urgent need for the government to work with a private printing company such as Schneider to implement a ‘methodic propaganda’ to support and cheaply provide pro-colonial indigenous language publications. However, it was not until Schneider’s retirement from the print industry in 1919 that his print and publishing businesses were officially transferred to government operations.

Although Schneider and Vĩnh’s publications received authorization for official publication, the colonial administration still monitored closely the publications and expressed concerns over the content of the publications. On May 14, 1913, the governor of Cochinchina reported to Governor General Sarraut of several “tendentious articles” published by the quốc ngữ newspaper *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, and especially of the suspicious attitudes of many of his indigenous collaborators, such as Gilbert Chieu.³⁷⁹ However, Sarraut reassured the Governor of Cochinchina that he had already warned Schneider: “I have given him [Schneider] the necessary advice both in regard to the staff of *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* and the type of conduct in which the newspaper must conform. Monsieur Schneider formally promised me that he would take all necessary measures to avoid the criticism which certain articles of his journal had given rise to, and to supervise very closely the suspicious plotting that his indigenous employees might engage in.”³⁸⁰ The heads of state of Annam, Cochinchina, Tonkin and the Governor General of Indochina exchanged several other confidential letters on the “suspicious activities” that appeared in Schneider’s newspapers. On December 7, 1914, the Resident Superior of Annam quoted in length and translated an article in Number 78 of *Đông Dương Tạp Chí*.³⁸¹ The article was written by a Vietnamese professor of the mandarin school in Hanoi, Thân Trọng Huề, who openly criticized the recently deceased mandarin S.E. Nguyễn Thân. This critique alarmed the Annam colonial administration, who believed that “publication of texts containing personal criticism” had no place in publications such as the *Đông Dương Tạp Chí*. Condemning this type of behavior as improper, the Resident Superior of Annam also mentioned that we must preserve the efforts of the *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* or else “be struck down by the intellectual classes of Annamese who are so closely influenced by the court.”³⁸² These documents reveal the concern of the colonial administration about the politically subversive potential of colonial publications among Vietnamese intellectuals. The colonial administration was suspicious of all publications including those that were considered more pro-colonial and cultural in nature such as *Đông Dương Tạp Chí*.

Government involvement in Schneider and Vĩnh’s work varied over the years, ranging from verbal endorsement of the publication’s mission to direct subsidies and subscriptions for government departments. On June 1914, the Resident Superior of Tonkin issued a contract that

³⁷⁸ TTLT1, RST, Folder 21425 "Rapport du resident supérieur au tonkin une entente entre le gouvernement de l'indochine et schneider en vue créer un journal indigène pour suivre l'oeuvre politique," Document: Report from the RST Le Gallen to the GGI on November 15, 1915.

³⁷⁹ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: "Au sujet de l'envoi gratuit à M. schneider du Bulletin administrative." Confidential letter from GGI to Governor of Cochinchina on June 1, 1913 regarding the controversial writings published in *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Letter from Resident Superior of Annam on December 7, 1914.

³⁸² Ibid.

outlined the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation collaboration between Schneider and the RST.³⁸³ According to this contract, the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation would comprise of two organs: 1) the *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* [Revue de l'Indochine] described as a magazine of popularizing (vulgarizing) literature, science and pedagogy and 2) *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* [Gazette du centre du Nord] described as a journal of political and economic information written in quốc ngữ. However, on December 20, 1915 the Governor General of Indochina wrote to the RST objecting to the formal contract between the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation and the administration because it implied that the administration was in charge of the actual production and distribution of the publications. Instead the GGI revised that the official contract should only outline the colonial administration's subscriptions to Schneider's publications. The GGI proposed that Schneider supply 10,000 copies of *Pháp Việt* and 10,000 of *Công thi báo* for a fixed subscription price.

On May 23, 1918, Schneider wrote to the Resident Superior of Tonkin reporting that he would not renew the contract from April 1916 with the colonial administration due to the limited budget provided for his publications. In response, the Resident Superior of Tonkin wrote to GGI (Direction of political and indigenous affairs), evaluated Schneider's publication efforts, and judged if they were effective tools of colonial governance.³⁸⁴ The Resident described Schneider's publications in the following way: *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* (newspaper), *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* (pedagogical review), *Pháp Việt* (two newspapers for the villages that offered succinct summaries of administrative acts), and *Công thị báo* (news of the war in Chinese characters). The RST reported that the above newspapers had already received 54,400 piastres in subsidies from the protectorate, but Schneider still complained that it was not enough resources. The RST argued that *Công thị báo* and *Pháp Việt* could merge into a single publication and should only cost 6,000 a year. In comparison, the RST noted the important impact of *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* not only for the residents of Tonkin, but also for those of Cochinchina and Annam:

The pedagogical journal, I must admit, has continued for quite some time now in a very interesting way; its manuals have a real pedagogical value; the ease of bringing together in separate booklets the various subjects makes it possible to constitute a small Vietnamese library. I am ready to encourage this enterprise by subscribing to this journal for the schools, and even subsidizing it. But it should be noted that Tonkin should not be the only one interested in this work. Its work addresses the needs of all the countries of Vietnamese language and benefits all the schools. It would seem logical to me that all those who benefit from this assistance should bear their share of expenses. I would therefore be obliged to ask my colleagues in Annam and Cochinchina if they could participate in the subsidy.

As for *Trung Bắc Tân Văn*, the RST emphasized its importance as a crucial propaganda tool and argued that the Indochina General Budget should subsidize the publication:

³⁸³ TTLT1, RSTAF, Folder 46538-02 "A.s. des publication dong duong tap chi, phap viet thong bao de 1908-1914 ditées par Schneider phap viet thong bao, cong thi bao, luc tinh tan van, dong duong tap chi editées par schneider en l'année de 1915 à 1916. TTLT1, RST Folder 21425 "Rapport du resident supérieur au tonkin une entente entre le gouvernement de l'indochine et schneider en vue créer un journal indigène pour suivre l'oeuvre politique," Document: Report from the RST Le Gallen to the GGI on November 15, 1915.

³⁸⁴ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Letter from Resident Superior of Tonkin to the Governor General of Indochina (Direction of Political and Indigenous Affairs).

With regard to Trung Bắc, it functions as an organ of political and economic propaganda in the indigenous circles which should not disinterest us. The government would make a serious political mistake by letting the native press fall into other's hands. The only way to prevent this is to give a subsidy to Trung Bắc which allows the publisher to sell at a [lower] price which it cannot afford on its own. But again, it does not seem that the entire work of propaganda for the Vietnamese masses should rest on the shoulders of only the budget of Tonkin. The General Budget provides funds for propaganda in the press. You have kindly told me at Dason, that you were willing to grant me some credits for this purpose. I would be obliged, when I begin talks further with Monsieur Schneider, to let me know if and to what extent I can count on the help of the General Budget; furthermore I would like to know if the views I have outlined above about administrative intervention in the Vietnamese language publications raises any objections on your part.³⁸⁵

1910s-1920s Cultural Imperialism and Translation: The Circulation of Books as Cultural and Civilizing Objects

The political strategy of 'colonization by the book' and the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation characterized three decades of French colonial policy on publishing and print control from the 1910s to 1940s. The colonial state was invested in the dissemination of 'good' reading matter through publishing initiatives, libraries, and schools. However, the actual implementation of 'colonization by the book' was less a top-down regimented state project than a collaboration with private commercial initiatives based on changing reader demands and the political climate of publishing. Individual publishers, translators, editors, and writers such as Schneider and Vĩnh, determined the direction of Vietnamese publishing, and debated over the cultural, political, and moral power of translation and mistranslation.

On January 15 and 16, 1917, a commentator who went by the pseudonym Tây Dương [Westerner] summarized the dangers of translation in the article "Indigenous Press" in the newspaper *L'Avenir du Tonkin* [The Future of Tonkin].³⁸⁶ The author drew attention to the dangerous popularity of Alain-René Lesage's eighteenth century novel, *L'histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* [The Story of Gil Blas of Santillane] which famously caricatured social misfits and the lower class, from thieves and tricksters to licentious women and ignorant men. The story was translated by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and serialized in the pages of *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* throughout 1916. According to the commentator "Tây Dương," *Gil Blas's* depiction of social vices could dangerously encourage naive readers: "All in all, [*Gil Blas*] is a painting where only the shadows stand out. Therefore, [it is] a false genre, dangerous for the inexperienced reader who is given an inaccurate idea of society, unhealthy for those who are weak and impressionable, who find in the story encouragement to commit crimes." The commentator warned that Vietnamese might easily misread *Gil Blas*: "In my opinion, apart from an elite person, the reading of *Gil Blas* will be rather fatal to the Vietnamese. There will be consequences for readers to read about the numerous immoral characters in *Gil Blas*..." Furthermore, Tây Dương criticized Vĩnh's translation of *Gil Blas*, who "softened the ingratitude of Gil Blas to his mother... The translator seems to ignore that the vices—like virtues, remain—and that the deliberate and habitual

³⁸⁵ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Letter from Resident Superior of Tonkin to the Governor General of Indochina (Direction of Political and Indigenous Affairs).

³⁸⁶ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Excerpt from *L'Avenir du Tonkin* January 15 and 16, 1917 labeled "Press Indigène." The pseudonym Tây Dương literally translates to "Westerner," often referring to Frenchmen.

violation of the five great Confucian relations inevitably lead to the collapse of others...Judging by the popularity of Trung Bắc, *Gil Blas* is now all over Hanoi, and it would be foolhardy to rely on the translation of Monsieur Vĩnh to reduce the number.”

The commentator Tây Dương also criticized *Trung Bắc Tân Văn*'s next serialized publication: *The Three Musketeers*. He had hoped that *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* would publish “one of the many French novels, or some other work that exalted patriotism, marital fidelity, or filial piety. Our protégés could then recognize that noble characters and virtuous heroes do in fact exist in France, instead of just seeing only human foibles. Instead, they announced to us *The Three Musketeers*...What civilizing effect does this novel have on the indigenous masses? What opinion will indigenous form from a work of literature which offers them only the escapades of a knight who duels and partakes in pleasures, and the fabulously impossible adventures of a bawdy Achilles? ...There must be something better to give them than *The Three Musketeers*.” The author emphasized that many of the readers were students and that newspapers (as well as the theater) had a duty to publish “proper” and “morally elevating” content, not lewd, sensationalist sinful stories which border on “pornography.” The commentator Tây Dương continued to emphasize the duty of translators to introduce morally beneficial reading matter: “It is important to not confuse liberty and license. And an essential character of liberty is that it must not harm the right of others. That these men of the press and the theater behave as they please in their private life, is a matter between them and their conscience. But when they write for the public, especially when their works address students of our schools, they must respect their readers. These gentlemen have a very important responsibility. We must remind them when they forget!”

This commentary is important because it sheds light on concerns of the moral value of translation, literature, the press, and theater. The commentator critiqued the popularity of *Gils de Blas* and *The Three Musketeers* — stories he claimed to be morally depraved, overly simplistic, and a negative influence on ‘naïve’ Vietnamese readers. He even went so far as to compare these popular works of moral depravity as pornography. Reading could be potentially dangerous and corrupt young minds and new readers. The commentator reminded the men in the press and theater industry to uphold their duty to the public and to carefully self-censor their work for student audiences.³⁸⁷ This criticism shows the concerns over reading matter and reminded publishers, translators, and writers of their responsibility to shape reader tastes and consumption.

The circulation of ideas was an important topic of discussion— what types of reading and ideas should be translated and distributed throughout the colonies? Debates conceptualized books as influential information objects to be exported and controlled. In a newspaper article titled “The French book to the foreigner,” the author discussed the important task of exporting French books around the world.³⁸⁸ “The exportation of the French book should be encouraged because it is not only of monetary interest, but also because it can contribute to the diffusion of our culture to the world.” The article emphasized the importance of shipping French books to places like Indochina, whose readers have actively sought out French reading matter in bookstores in Hanoi and Haiphong.

However, the author of the article argued that more publishing and distribution initiatives should prioritize the creation of better-quality and more affordable editions. Many masterpieces were priced at the high costs of 15 to 20 francs a volume and carried an export surcharge, making

³⁸⁷ Affidi argues that this document takes a Catholic stance to critique morally “depraved”, secular Republican translations. Emmanuelle Affidi, “*Đông Dương Tạp chí (1913-1919)*” P. 658.

³⁸⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4 “Archivage des Articles des Journaux dans la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques à Hanoi 1918,” Article: “Le livre français à l'étranger”

it difficult to purchase. Conversely, recent popular editions of Dumas, Balzac, Baudelaire, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Chateaubriand priced at around 4 francs have been of poor printing quality. Besides the production quality of books, the author emphasized that the recently founded private initiative, the “Society for the Export of French Books”, must also bear the responsibility to discern the “moral quality” of reading matter distributed. The author argued against cheap, low-brow literature:

Enough of Fantomas, Arsene Lupine, and other platitudes of the same caliber. Among French literature, Father Dumas or Balzac have not yet had subsequent [literary] rivals worthy of comparison. Similarly, enough of this filthy literature that pretends to be libertine but is so plainly pornographic. Again, Restif, Laclos, or Casanova today only have a few successors. French literature has in all of its genres enough authentic masterpieces that we can make a very wide selection by eliminating systematically all that is too low quality...The Society for the Export of French Books can find a vast collection to choose from and make an excellent business, while serving in the best way to spread the influence of our country [France].

Here again, the author criticized certain types of literature as lowbrow, repetitive, unimaginative, and bordering on pornographic. This hierarchy of ‘good’ literature is even more pronounced in this critique because the author emphasized the importance of exported French books as a tool to spread French culture around the world.

In another article in the periodical *Courrier d’Haiphong*, an author emphasized the importance of spreading French influence into Asia as well as increasing knowledge of the Far East in France.³⁸⁹ The author argued that the following French authors on Asia should receive more attention: Jacques Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand, Fromentin, Leconte de Lisle, Gobineau, Gautier, Loti, Paul Bonnetain, Boissiere, Émile Nolly, Alfred Droin, and Jean Marquet. The author also argued for increased recognition of important works on the Far East such as *Sao van di* by Ajalbert, *Hien Le Maboul* and *Barque Annamite* by Émile Nolly (who also went by the pseudonym capitaine Détanger), *Les Civilisés* by Claude Farrère, *Le Kilometre* by Henry Daguerchers, and *De la rizière à la montagne* by Jean Marquet. The author complained that “all of these works are lost to the general [French] public, as will probably be the subsequent books for the youth because the [books on the subject of] ‘Indochina’ are very poorly organized and difficult to access and thus Indochina is difficult to come to know and understand...” The author critiqued the lack of publishers and organized distributors to spread the literature on Indochina to French readers.

Emphasizing that French literature on the Far East “deserves more than obscurity,” the author argued that access to this body of work could spark important French interest in the colonies and the Far East. “These books written by Frenchmen on Indochina bring to our literature a new perspective; and if they were more known to those born in the Metropole, [this literature could instill] a curiosity for our France of the Far Orient—its passages of dreams, its races and ancient civilizations on the periphery of our knowledge.” Similar to how Paul Boudet argued that access to libraries could reduce colonial officers’ apathy and ignorance, the author of this *Courrier d’Haiphong* article claimed that Indochina literature could increase knowledge and interest of its colony to metropole French readers.

³⁸⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 4 “Archivage Des Articles Des Journaux Dans La Direction Des Archives et Des Bibliothèques à Hanoi 1918,” Article: *Courrier d’Haiphong*, January 12, 1918

The author called for a publication of an anthology of French poets and prose writers on Asia, with its costs paid for by the government. The author also demanded the newly established literary group [*Cenacle*] to function like a “protector of letters and arts;” the literary group could help support literature by examining new works, awarding prizes, and securing government support for publishing costs. These two 1918 articles in *Courrier d’Haiphong* present the circulation of books between Indochina and France as important information objects to be exported, disseminated, collected, and consumed. In comparison to the first two *L’Avenir du Tonkin* articles concerned about the moral corruption of Vietnamese readers, these two *Courrier d’Haiphong* articles focused on the circulation of French books around the world, and the influence of Indochina literature back to French readers in the metropole.

The End of the Schneider Era: From Commercial Publishing to State Project of Propaganda

On February 24, 1918, Schneider informed the colonial government of his desire to retire and find a successor for his publishing houses. Schneider wrote: “I am tired by my long stay in Indochina, and especially by my recent efforts during the difficult times of war to develop my periodicals and my library of vulgarisation. I have not been able to ever take a day off. Thus, I must pass my duties over to younger hands.”³⁹⁰ Schneider announced his desires to retire from his work in colonial publishing and sought to pass on partial print operations to Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh. Over several decades, Schneider and Vĩnh had worked closely to manage and carry out publishing operations in Hanoi and Saigon. By this point, Schneider had expressed his political position for his newspapers much more explicitly as a tool of cultural propaganda in support of the colonial mission and Sarraut’s cultural policies. Schneider believed that education and the popularization of French thinking benefitted both France and the local population: “Popularization [vulgarisation] of our most practical French sciences, books on the questions of teaching, commerce, agriculture and local interests...the introduction to the indigenous public to the methods of order and work will create in Indochina a France of Asia...”³⁹¹

In a letter to the Political and Indigenous Affairs Office of the Governor General of Indochina on May 23, 1918, Schneider demanded that the local administration increase their subscription numbers to *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* and proposed the handover of all operations of *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* and *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* to Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh. Schneider would remain the owner in name, but Vĩnh would carry out all the duties of this publication.³⁹² In a response on June 14, 1918, the Governor General of Indochina rejected this proposition.³⁹³ The colonial government was hesitant to pass on operations to a Vietnamese individual and suspected Vĩnh’s political intentions in his translations. For example, the administration worried about Vĩnh’s decision to translate to quốc ngữ Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* which French colonials claimed to be “a popular work among revolutionaries.” Émile Vayrac, a colonial

³⁹⁰ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Letter March 15, 1919 Schneider to GGI summarizing the February 24, 1918 letter.

³⁹¹ "Gazette de Cochinchine" (Organe de Vulgarisation des Methodes economiques francaise), n. 1 July 15, 1917, Schneider’s new periodical which was a French edition of *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*. As cited by Emmanuelle Affidi, "Đông Dương Tạp chí (1913-1919)" p. 482.

³⁹² ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407 “Propagande par la presse indigène,” Document: Letters from Schneider to the Cabinet of political and indigenous affairs on May 23, 1918 and August 8, 1918.

³⁹³ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407. “At this moment, we will ignore the request to cede operations of these journals to Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh.”

administrator and Vĩnh's close friend, later summarized the colonial administration's suspicions as follows:

M. Vĩnh then, did not have all the confidence of the administration. He appeared a little rebellious and oppositional. He had translated French philosophers who had prepared the way for revolution. I found out that he had translated six or seven translations of the Social Contract, which he had done so secretly.³⁹⁴

After much debate and consideration from 1918 to 1919, the Resident Superior of Tonkin, the Governor General of Indochina, and Schneider agreed to replace Schneider's position with the former director of the secret police [Sûreté Général], Louis Marty.³⁹⁵ In a report to the GGI from the Cabinet of Political and Indigenous affairs on March 18, 1919, the director justified the decision: "The choice of Monsieur L. Marty to succeed [Schneider] is justified by the fact that he has specialized during his entire time [here] as a civil servant in matters of indigenous politics, and that therefore makes him the most qualified to maintain the work created by Monsieur Schneider. Furthermore, the choice of Marty reassures the Government that the government will be able to exercise very close control of the publications in question."³⁹⁶ The Resident Superior emphasized the importance of a loyal Frenchman who could supervise the Vietnamese language publications:

What matters the most for local administration is to have a respondent in which we can have full confidence [to manage] the material conduct of the enterprise and the political direction of published newspapers in the Vietnamese language. If Monsieur Marty substitutes Monsieur Schneider, it should also be specified that in the case that Marty is absent from the colony, he must be replaced by another Frenchman approved by the local administration of Tonkin. The Frenchmen must be capable of supervising the moral content of the publications and possess the linguistic knowledge indispensable to the effective direction of the publications.³⁹⁷

With the employment of Marty, Schneider's publishing business thus passed from private hands to official state authorities. On March 17, 1919 the director of Political and Indigenous Affairs Office reported to the Director of Finances in Hanoi (Note 1726) that the Governor General would directly acquire Schneider's two offices in Hanoi and one office in Saigon for 26,000 piastres and all of their printing equipment for 56,000 piastres. In a letter from the Governor General Albert Sarraut to Louis Marty on March 10, 1919, Sarraut laid out specific stipulations for the handover of the printing business to Marty; the conditions laid out included

³⁹⁴ ANOM, RSTNF, Folder 5219 "Retour de M. Vayrac à la Tête des Publications du "Tú Dân Văn Uyển," Document: "Au sujet des efforts faits au tonkin depuis vingt-cinq ans environ pour fournir de bonnes lectures aux annamites," February 17, 1937. Vayrac stated that he dedicated several years to convince Vĩnh that political works were dangerous to Vietnamese society because Vietnamese were in "the beginning states of their evolution..." Instead, Vayrac urged Vĩnh to translate less political works into Vietnamese, for example, "universally admired works such as the Fables of Fontaine and the Tales of Perrault."

³⁹⁵ Louis Marty had worked as the head of intelligence and secret police since 1917. He worked closely with journalist, publisher, and neo-traditionalist scholar Phạm Quỳnh on the state sponsored serial *Nam Phong*.

³⁹⁶ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407 "Propagande par la presse indigene."

³⁹⁷ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407 "Propagande par la presse indigene," Document: Letter 3371 from RST to GGI Monguillot March 21, 1919.

ownership clauses, rent costs, and operation details such as maintaining the standard format for newspapers and a maximum consumer price of .02 piastres per issue. Sarraut explained to Marty that the purchase and handover of Schneider's business authorized "the government of the colony to be the owner of the buildings and material given by Schneider after his retirement in February." The colonial government rented out to Marty the buildings and materials at a minimal cost, and provided a subsidy of 30,000 piastres for 1919, and 25,000 piastres for the following four years from the General Budget. Additionally, the director of Political Affairs of the General Government directly oversaw the publications and Marty's duties. According to article 4, Sarraut specified to Marty "You must make your books available to [the director of political affairs of the General Government] when he requests them, and he will always have access to your establishments. You must comply to his instructions regarding political directions in your publications and the editors appointed by you can be fired on his request." These specific instructions signify the direct management of Schneider's printing house, its publications, and its editors by the colonial state.

As seen in the acquisition of Schneider's printing business in 1919, indigenous printing had become an important tool of colonial political security, propaganda, and information control. In the letter from interim GGI Henri Monguillot to Schneider on April 7, 1919, Monguillot summarized the important contributions of Schneider to the colonial tasks of propaganda and printing since 1912: with a "tireless zeal," Schneider "was the first to realize in this country the methodical organization of a healthy propaganda by the organ of the indigenous press and acquired positive results that justified this initiative."³⁹⁸ Addressing Schneider and his contributions to "National Defense," Monguillot highlighted how Schneider's operations increased recruitment for volunteers during the war and subscriptions to various national bonds. Most importantly, Monguillot emphasized Schneider's role in building a "good spirit" among Vietnamese: "Your incessant labor has contributed to maintaining the good spirit of the native populations, and in short you have been working in the realm of devoutly supporting National Defense." Monguillot praised Schneider's important contributions to France and the colonial mission; he also described Schneider as "the father of printing in [Indochina] and one of the most precious craftsmen of French influence."

The transfer of Schneider's printing houses into official state hands in 1919 was a dramatic shift in the cultural politics of publishing in Indochina. Under Schneider and Vĩnh's management in the first two decades of the twentieth century, their publishing projects found security through minimal financial support and approval from the colonial state. The local administration also subscribed to several of the publications, contributing a regular source of income for the publications to stay afloat. However, on a day to day level, the content of the publications, the intellectual debates, and cultural project still retained some autonomy from official censors. Schneider and Vĩnh's vision for the *Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation* began in 1910 as a private publishing, translation, and distribution initiative to spread quốc ngữ texts considered valuable for popular education, cultural modernization, and linguistic enrichment. However, by the 1920s and 1930s, the *Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation* project became integrated into an Indochina wide official state cultural policy of information control, cultural propaganda, and expansion of colonial influence into the countryside. The study of state control of print media—from production to distribution—will be the topic of chapter 4.

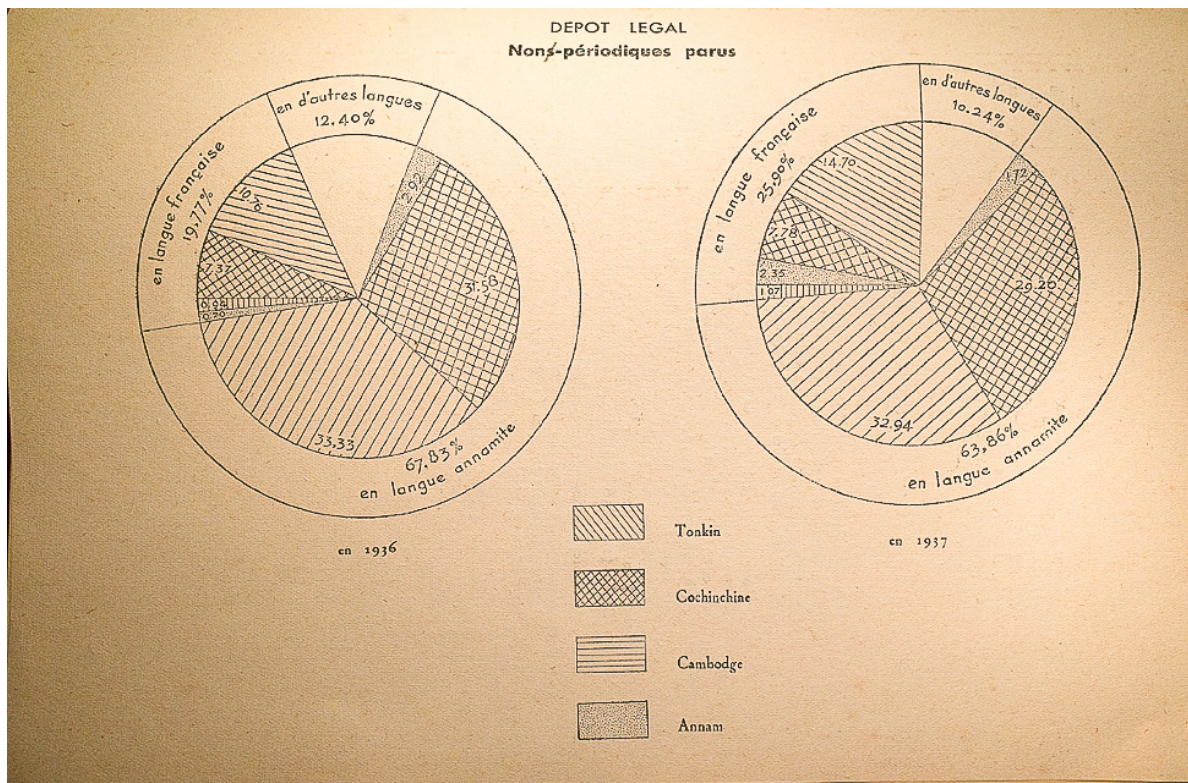
³⁹⁸ ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407, Document: Letter number 606 API from Secretary General of the Governor General of Indochina, Monguillot to F.H. Schneider at 20 Boulevard Carreau Hanoi on April 7, 1919.

Part 2

Alternative Spaces of Reading: Practices of Book Collecting and Association Reading Rooms in late Colonial Vietnam, 1920s-1940s

Linguistic and Regional Breakdown of the Print Industry through Legal Deposits

Colonial state sponsored publishing was embedded within a vibrant world of print matter and reading—Vietnamese commercial publishing in French and quốc ngữ provided new genres of print matter, translations, specialty interest books, low-quality affordable leaflets, as well as luxury collectible editions. By the 1930s the Indochina print industry published unprecedented numbers of books and periodicals. In 1936, the Indochina Legal Deposit recorded 755 deposits of new publications, and in 1937 the number of deposits increased to 938 new works.³⁹⁹ It is important to note that these legal deposit numbers do not account for the large number of publications which did not adhere to publication rules requiring legal deposit. However, from the recorded legal deposits, the linguistic breakdown of publications (books, excludes periodicals) demonstrates the significant majority of new Vietnamese language publications (67.8% in 1936 and 63.9% in 1937) compared to French (19.8% in 1936 and 25.9% in 1937). While the legal deposit received a higher percentage of Vietnamese books than French, when comparing periodicals, the legal deposit recorded more French periodicals than Vietnamese periodicals (see the following diagrams).



³⁹⁹ However, the total legal deposits in the years 1936 and 1937 were significantly less than previous years such as 1,008 works in 1919 and 1,053 in 1935. Paul Boudet, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1937-1938)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1938).

Diagram 3-4. This chart published in the Directorate's annual report breaks down the percentage of legal deposits of non-periodical books by language and region. In both 1936 and 1937 the legal deposit received a higher number of Vietnamese language works than French. In 1936 and 1937, the number of legal deposits by region rank with the highest from Tonkin, followed by Cochinchina, Annam, then Cambodge.⁴⁰⁰

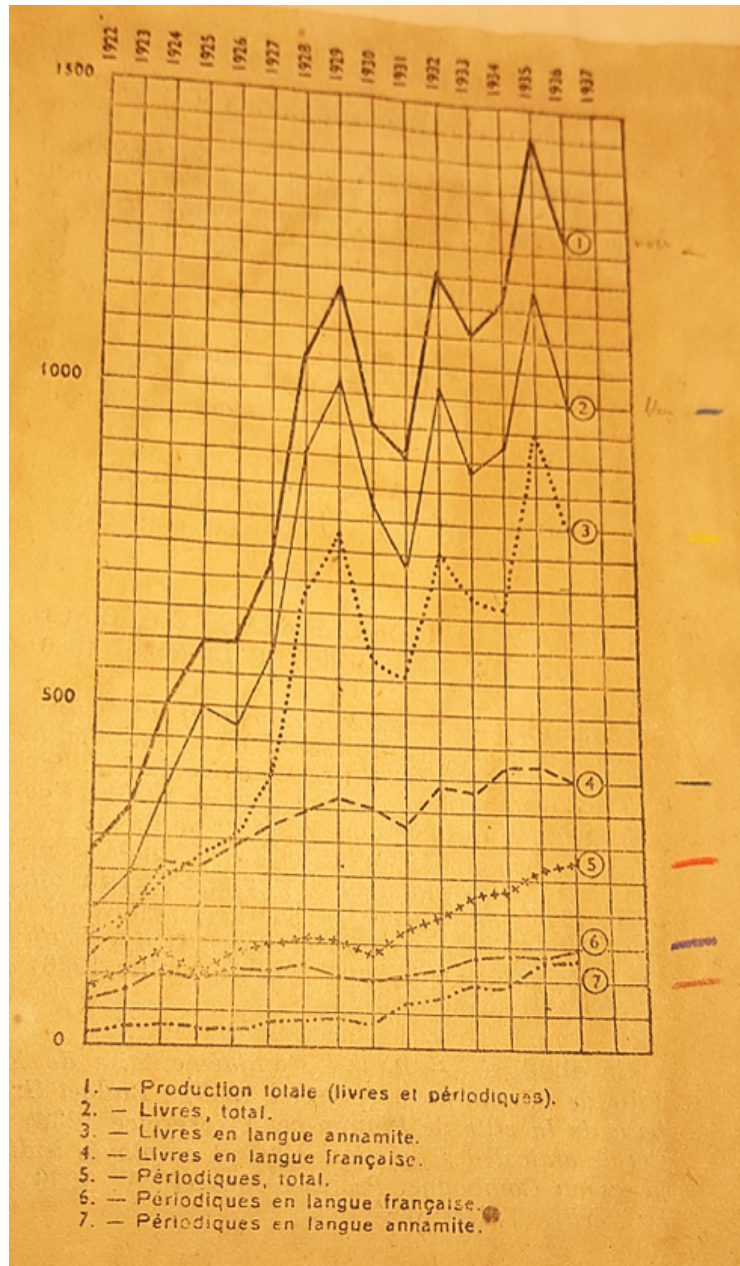


Image 3-5. This undated graph produced by the Directorate demonstrates the overall total increase of legal deposits of books and periodicals from 1922 to 1937. Note how Vietnamese books start to double that of French in 1928, while French periodicals surpass that of Vietnamese from 1922 to 1937. This graph only records the number of works officially filed to the legal

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

deposit and does not record the total print production of all books in Indochina (those which defied legal deposit law). Also, the drop in legal deposits from 1930 to 1931 could be due to the economic crisis which caused the drop in overall print production and/or the drop-in adherence to legal deposit law.⁴⁰¹

Cultural Practices of Book Collecting and Private Libraries

With the development of the Vietnamese printing and publishing industry, new cultural practices emerged around book collecting and building a household library. From 1934-1935, the Hanoi based *Phong Hoá* magazine published a series titled “Tủ Sách Gia Đình [Family Library]” written by Nhị Linh.⁴⁰² Nhị Linh (“Two-Zero” 貳零) was one of the many pen names of Trần Khánh Giur, more commonly known as Khái Hưng (1896-1947).⁴⁰³ Khái Hưng was one of the most influential modern novelists and was part of the literary group Tự Lực Văn Đoàn [Self-Reliant Literary Group].⁴⁰⁴ The series called readers to curate a collection of ‘good’ and ‘valuable’ reading matter for the household and emphasized the importance of book collecting as a distinctly modern practice of conspicuous consumption. In the first article published on August 10, 1934, Nhị Linh argued that “chơi sách”—the practice of reading and collecting books—was a distinct rupture from previous Vietnamese forms of book collecting.⁴⁰⁵ He argued that in the past, book collection served only a functional purpose for scholars to prepare for civil service examinations. Furthermore, scholars in the past relied upon memorization of texts rather than building a large collection of reference books. Nhị Linh described that previous family libraries might only contain Chinese Confucian essential works such as the Four Books and Five Classics, chronicles, and possibly ancient literature or a few Chinese novels. Drawing comparisons with westerners who “lived in this modern moment and needed a wider knowledge base,” Nhị Linh called for Vietnamese to follow Western practices of building a household book collection.

[Westerners] cannot just rely upon a few limited books. They need a library of over 100, or even 1000 books. Even though they know there is a library where they could consult materials to understand everything they want, it is still ridiculous to have to journey long distances such as over 100 kilometers to go to the library and find answers to their questions! Thus, Western households all have a family book collection of varying sizes depending on their financial means.

⁴⁰¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1640 “Graphiques sur le nombre des lecteurs fréquentés et des livres consultés à la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi 1922-1937,” Document: “Dépôt légal” s.d.

⁴⁰² Tủ sách literally translates to a bookshelf or bookcase.

⁴⁰³ Khái Hưng’s novels were serialized in the TLVD magazines *Phong Hoá* and *Ngày Nay* (founded by Nhất Linh whose pen name was (“One-Zero” 壹零). In this series on the Family Library, Khái Hưng went by the moniker Nhị Linh.

⁴⁰⁴ Martina Nguyen’s research on the Self-Reliant Literary Group and their Đời Nay Publishing House emphasizes the interwoven roles of commercial viability of publishing and cultural practices of reading. Thank you to Martina Nguyen for directing me to the Family Library series in *Phong Hoá*. Although *Phong Hoá*’s influence and readership was strongest in Hanoi, Martina Nguyen notes that it also had a large geographic reach to Saigon, Haiphong, and Hue. For the history of the Tự Lực Văn Đoàn, see the comprehensive dissertation, Martina Nguyen, “The Self-Reliant Literary Group (Tự Lực Văn Đoàn): Colonial Modernism in Vietnam, 1932-1941” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

⁴⁰⁵ Nhị Linh, “Tủ Sách Gia Đình”, *Phong Hoá*, Number 110, August 10, 1934.

Not only did Nhị Linh call for Vietnamese to develop a family library, but he also argued that Vietnamese readers must demand for higher quality production of Vietnamese language books. Nhị Linh criticized the dismal state of Vietnamese quốc ngữ publishing as pitifully underdeveloped in both print quality and content:

Among our young people, there are lots of people who also like to “chơi sách.” However, most of their books are western books. What about quốc ngữ books? There are no books to collect! Should we display in our glass bookshelves the paper-thin books with only a few pages, sold for only 3 sous to a hào? ...These books are amateurish projects, the printing itself is blurry, unclear, with uneven lines...

Nhị Linh argued that Vietnamese lacked the technical and cultural knowledge of discerning between good and bad literature in both form and content. Vietnamese readers commonly purchased novels, and thus publishers continued to publish novels to turn a profit. Nhị Linh claimed that the demands for novels resulted in an absence of writers and publishers of works on history, geography, science, and philosophy. Drawing a direct connection between reader tastes and production quality, Nhị Linh believed that readers could advance and refine the print industry through their consumer demands for better quality books and a wider range of topics.

If we had the knowledge to select books that are interesting and beautiful, then publishers would then appeal to our demands and would thus produce better quality books. Thus, in order to encourage artists, distributors, and publishers, then we ourselves must develop an interest in book collecting. We must follow the Westerner and create a beautiful and interesting library collection in our home.

In the following issue on August 18, 1934, Nhị Linh further explicated his argument on the relationship between consumer demands, development of the print industry, and social change: “I go so far to say...that if the citizens know how to spend and consume in the economy, the industries in this country will develop...Printing artistic and beautiful books have a greater benefit—not just for a certain individual, but also for the possibility of future growth of the country.”⁴⁰⁶ In other words, Nhị Linh believed that both publishers and readers held a social responsibility to contribute to the advancement of Vietnamese publishing industry, and by extension, Vietnamese intellectual culture. A prolific writer and member of the Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (whose publishing house published much of Nhị Linh’s work), Nhị Linh was also personally invested in the overall development of Vietnamese print industry. If Nhị Linh could convince readers to invest in purchasing higher quality print matter, readers might also be keener to support his group’s publications and creation of luxury editions.

Nhị Linh insisted that the perception of ‘artistic and intellectual value’ in books was just as important as the actual contents of books.

By printing beautiful books, we are able to create a movement and practice of book collecting in the same way as those who like to collect antiques. For example, a book collector who sees a valuable book (valuable in regard to appearance), will immediately feel compelled to purchase the book and display it in their own glass bookshelf even if

⁴⁰⁶ Nhị Linh, “Tủ Sách Gia Đình”, *Phong Hoá*, Number 111, August 18, 1934.

the individual does not even want to read the book, even if the book is about philosophy or morality (since generally these topics require a bit more thinking and contemplation).

Nhị Linh believed that collecting beautiful books would then result in social and intellectual improvement because “sooner or later collectors would read the book.” Through his series “The Family Library,” Nhị Linh advanced an interconnected three part argument: 1) Vietnamese readers must develop a practice of book collecting and creating household libraries 2) the current Vietnamese print quality must be improved in both form and content 3) consumer tastes and demands for better quality books will lead to change in the print industry as well as the socio-cultural development of the country.

Nhị Linh advanced a powerful line of argumentation: there was a direct connection between consumerism and modernity, material products and socio-cultural change. Consumption of specific products such as books signaled the participation in ‘modern’ practices, the importance of individual purchasing power, and access to global knowledge. As George Dutton has argued in his studies on advertising and modernity, the pursuit of material objects such as beauty products and medicines reflect attempts to ‘partake’ in modernity in its “talismanic form.”⁴⁰⁷ Individual consumers could thus purchase ‘modernity’ through ‘modern’ objects and practices. Books were not just carriers of knowledge but performed a cultural and economic function. According to Nhị Linh, modern book collecting broke away from traditional Confucian libraries and could empower readers to expose themselves to more works of ‘value.’ Furthermore, Nhị Linh believed that through the practice of book collecting and the outward display of books on shelves, readers could push the Vietnamese industry of book production forward.

Alternative Reading Spaces: Shared Library Resources in Mutual Aid Societies and Associations in Cochinchina

From 1920s to the 1940s, an increasing number of formal and informal professional associations, mutual self-help societies, and reading circles developed around specific needs and across geographic divides throughout Indochina.⁴⁰⁸ With the rise of population and literacy in urban and trade centers in Hanoi, Haiphong, and Saigon, associations emerged and contributed to the development of a print sphere and civil society. After February 21, 1933, French colonial law permitted the creation of secular associations. Throughout the 1930s, a large number of associations officially registered with the colonial state and submitted a decree on their mission, members, and fundraising capacity.⁴⁰⁹

Cochinchina has a distinct history from the rest of Indochina. With French conquest in Cochinchina since the 1850s, colonial institutions such as education, administration, and

⁴⁰⁷ George Dutton, “Advertising, Modernity, and Consumer Culture in Colonial Vietnam,” in *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam*, ed. Van Nguyen-Marshall et al., (Singapore: Springer, 2012), 21–42. P. 22.

⁴⁰⁸ Since the late nineteenth century, formal and informal associations formed around religious spaces (temples, churches, shrines) and local community interests such as education and professional trades.

⁴⁰⁹ However, many associations functioned in a liminal official and unofficial state. Not all associations registered their organization with the local government and the colonial police worked in limited capacity to enforce the law, monitor behavior, and restrict illicit activity. In this way, many associations such as secret societies, religious organizations, and labor unions sporadically organized, disbanded, or went underground due to different reasons such as limited funding, discontinuity in association leadership, or investigations by colonial police.

integration into the global economy was more deeply entrenched in Cochinchina. Furthermore, Cochinchina was governed as a direct colony of France which meant that on an everyday level, the colony operated with a comparatively more liberal policy on publication and associations, and provided some local government representation in the Colonial Council.⁴¹⁰ Saigon-Cholon was also the most populous urban center in Indochina with over 300,000 inhabitants by 1931. These structural factors contributed to the evolution of a distinctive and diverse Saigon-Cholon social and political climate.⁴¹¹ Philippe Peycam argues that the rise of voluntary associations or solidarity groups [hội] were inseparable from the the history of the colonial city. He describes associations as “collective, horizontal structures, organized around criteria of belonging (geographical, professional, educational), which individuals willingly joined and participated in on equal terms.”⁴¹² For example, Peycam reveals how groups such as the Société d’enseignement Mutuel de Cochinchine [Mutual Society for Encouragement of Education in Cochinchina] created an important forum of intellectual debate among diverse individuals such as Bùi Quang Chi ầu, Nguyễn An Ninh and Diệp Văn Kỳ. The society also created its own general library, organized conferences, and provided educational classes. Peycam argues that the proliferation of associations and print journalism promoted the “...creation of new patterns of social integration” expanding beyond traditional marks of allegiance and cohesion to family, village, or location.⁴¹³

Especially prevalent throughout Cochinchina, a vibrant civil society of associations, businesses, and printing houses developed around special interests ranging from language and literacy to sports and travel. In order to achieve the shared goals and interests such as professional development or literacy, many groups dedicated their efforts to build a library of information and resources. In this way, the library was a tool of continuing education, individual empowerment, and collective improvement. For example, in 1906, the Bibliothèque amicale de Baclieu (Baclieu Friendly Library) in Cochinchina issued its official association statutes which included forming a mutual aid society and establishing an indigenous library to “improve our knowledge of the French language and to study amicably and collaboratively the means to improve our fate.”⁴¹⁴ On November 25, 1937, the self-help association Workers of the Book of Tonkin [Travailleurs du Livre du Tonkin or Bắc kỳ Ấn công Ái hữu hội] was officially established and declared its two primary goals:

- 1) To develop the artistic tastes and intellectual capacity of its members, through opening up reading rooms, building libraries, and creating classes for professional development. In regard to instruction, the association follows the current law, regarding private

⁴¹⁰ In principle, the French metropolitan civil code and penal code were applied to Cochinchina and the subjects were considered “indigenous French subjects.” However, in application ‘colonial law’ was much more abstract and variable on a case by case basis. The rest of Indochina was ruled as protectorates where local indigenous authority remained in power on an official or symbolic level.

⁴¹¹ Peycam also shows how these structural transformations in Cochinchina resulted in an urban structural dualism between the Saigon-Cholon city and the countryside villages. Philippe Peycam, “From the Social to the Political: 1920s Colonial Saigon as a ‘Space of Possibilities’ in Vietnamese Consciousness,” *Positions* 21, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 497–546.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 526-527.

⁴¹³ For a thorough study on the rise of the “Newspaper Village [làng báo chí] as a political force and new political culture, see Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism*. P. 39.

⁴¹⁴ TTLT2, GC, Folder 11966 “Dossier Relatif à la Création des Bibliothèques à l’intérieur années 1920-1927.”

education in Indochina and 2) To help as much as possible the members of the Association when their family are victims of misfortune.⁴¹⁵

These self-help associations created a mutual aid system of shared resources—from professional knowledge and educational resources to a collective fund to support its members in times of economic need. The Association of Primary Teachers in Ben Tre declared new statutes in January 8, 1941 to develop a library to help their association members.⁴¹⁶ The Association of Primary Teachers was organized in 1931 under the direction of Monsieur Bizot and Madame Bizot. According to the association's founding documents, Monsieur Boizot was the director of another scholarly group and served as the provincial inspector; Madame Bizot was the director of the girls' school in Ben Tre. The statutes emphasized the importance of creating a library for "the purpose of improving the moral and intellectual culture of the members through reading books and newspapers." The statutes included a list of its members, the majority of whom were Vietnamese teachers.

In the same archival dossier are countless other requests to develop the mutual help societies throughout Cochinchina. For example, the Indochinese Circle founded in September 1937 had over 150 French, Vietnamese, and Chinese members. Its goals included the creation of a meeting space for its Indochinese members that facilitated mutual understanding, cooperation, and moral and intellectual improvement through lectures, publications, and study circles; to help with young Indochinese influenced by Western culture with morals and resources to continue to learn and develop in Indochina; and to bring together other mutual associations and social assistance groups to cooperate in a *Maison de la Mutalité* [Mutuality House] to be built on the corner of Taberd and Verdun streets in Saigon-Cholon. On November 4, 1939, the leaders of the Indochinese Circle and the Mutuality House requested a grant of 6,000 piastres to assist in the collaboration of mutual self-help associations throughout Cochinchina. These diverse associations included mutual self-help groups of teachers, engineers, civil services, unions, and regional groups throughout Cochinchina.⁴¹⁷

Mutual self-help societies gathered together financial and education resources and promoted certain "healthy" forms of educational leisure and social life in the provinces. For example, in Hà Tiên in the Western Mekong Delta, a reading circle formed in 1931 with the "aim to constitute a meeting of people of good company desiring to see, learn, and enjoy together as much by conversation as by reading; furthermore, to bring people together through various games and leisure activities (festivals, dinners, parties, etc...). The locals enjoy and call [this group] by the name "Hatien Circle" a source of leisure granted to the community free by the

⁴¹⁵ TVQG, M113311 "Travailleurs du Livre" du Tonkin. Status - Association des "Travailleurs Du Livre" du Tonkin, (Hanoi: Imprimerie Ngo Tu Ha, 1938).

⁴¹⁶ TTLT2, GC, Folder 51050 "Dossier Relatif à la Capacité Juridique, Au Projet de Status, Activités de l'Association de La Bibliothèque Des Maitres de l'enseignement Primaire Années 1931-1935."

⁴¹⁷ However, by May 4, 1940, the request for the government subsidy still had not been approved. The list of self-help groups included the following: Cochinchina Mutual Education Society; Friendly association of former students of the chasseloup-laubat college; Federation of cochinchine unions; Association of Annamite engineers and technicians; Indigenous associations of different Cochinchinese services: civil services, friendly associations of indigenous officials of cochinchina, education, land registry, customs and rules, post and telegraph, judicial services; Friendly associations of different provinces of Cochinchina such as baria, bentre, bienhoa, cantho, gocong, sadec, soctrang, travinh, tanan, tayninh, and vinhlong.

provincial administration.”⁴¹⁸ Colonial law forbade these reading circles to engage in political, religious, or gambling activity. Sponsored by the provincial administration, these reading circles must explicitly promote cultural and educational activities. In 1925 the “Cantho Library Circle” was established as part of the Cantho club with the mission to “learn through conversation, reading of newspapers and books, and various trading games as well as all the other leisurely elements.” The Cantho club’s library would open every day from 8 to 11 in the morning and 3 to 6 in the afternoon. Members of the society were permitted to consult newspapers, periodicals, and reference materials on site and to borrow 6 volumes for not more than 15 days.

Petitions to Open Private Libraries and Reading Rooms: Surveillance and Print Control in Cochinchina

During the reading boom of the 1920s and 1930s, many Vietnamese individuals and associations petitioned the colonial government to open up more self-help societies, libraries, and reading rooms in cities and provincial capitals. With the rise in literacy, urbanization, and communications, the demand for reading materials and education was not met by the handful of governmental libraries— the Central Library in Hanoi and the Cochinchina Library in Saigon— nor the existing French-Indigenous school system. These requests for more reading spaces are significant because they demonstrate the demands and popularity of reading and the limitations in official colonial libraries and the education system. Additionally, the extensive paperwork necessary within these requests show a strict colonial state wary of its Vietnamese protégés— requests were met with suspicion and applicants were considered circumspect until extensive surveillance by the Sûreté police cleared the Vietnamese petitioner. The following cases trace petitions to open up reading rooms. The cases illuminate the social and political history of reading and Vietnamese civil society in the 1920s to 1940s as a process of bureaucratic exchanges, political surveillance, and unmet reader demands. Furthermore, the cases focus primarily on petitions from Cochinchina associations and individuals, reflecting a distinctive public sphere and civic community in the Cochinchina colony.

Officially sanctioned libraries and reading rooms had to meet the following regulations: “1) The reading room must close by 9PM 2) The list of French and Vietnamese periodicals available in the reading room must be displayed in a well-marked place and 3) The reading room is prohibited from meetings of more than twenty people, political or religious discussions, and gambling.”⁴¹⁹ These strict regulations over the function of libraries and reading rooms demonstrate the colonial government fears of political or religious organizing and behavior as well as the distribution of censored texts. For example, On April 10, 1932 former director of the printing house Ho Van Sao requested to open up a salon of reading on 51 Rue du Colonel Grimaud Saigon called the “*Bình dân Thư Viện*” [People’s Popular Library]. The Resident Superior approved the request but required that the indigenous popular library be relocated to a different area, on account that Rue du Colonel Grimaud was prone to many political demonstrations and police crackdowns. The colonial government feared that the opening up the

⁴¹⁸ TTLT2, GC, Folder 51124 “Dossier relatif à la capacité juridique, aux status, fonctionnement, reunions, des cercles de bibliothèques des provinces de Can Tho, Ba Ria, Ben Tre, My Tho, Soc Trang, Thu Dau Mot, Ha Tien années 1904-1945”. Other reading clubs include the “French-Vietnamese library circle of Bentre” established in 1940.

⁴¹⁹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 17005 “Dossier Relatif à la Demande d’ouverture des Salles de Lecture des Bibliothèques Années 1931-1935.”

People's Popular Library at that location could heighten the concentration of intellectuals, readers, and thus lead to more politically 'dangerous' activity.

Requests to open a reading room or library must also submit their book and periodicals list to the official censor for prior approval. For example, on November 17, 1931 primary school teacher Phạm Văn Chiêu of Govap, Giadinh requested to open a small library for young students and civil servants in the village of Hanh Thong, open Monday to Friday 5PM-9PM, Saturday 3PM-10PM, Thursday and Sunday 7-11AM and 3PM-10PM. Chiêu submitted a list of books to the Resident Superior and censor. The book list included French classics by authors such as Diderot, Descartes, Fenelon, Voltaire, as well as the popular Vietnamese classics Kim Vân Kiều and Lục vân Tiên. The list also included works by Vietnamese poet Nguyễn Công Trứ, twentieth century cultural commentator Phạm Quỳnh, and novelist Hoàng Ngọc Phách known for his modernist novel *Tố Tâm* published in 1925.⁴²⁰ By November 28, 1931 the Resident superior approved Phạm Văn Chiêu's request on the condition that he submit his books to the censor, post the book list in the reading room, and never permit the total number of readers in the library to exceed 20 persons. In this way, the content, purpose, and physical location of libraries was heavily monitored by the colonial government and police to prevent political organizing.

Furthermore, the Vietnamese petitioners themselves were subject to extensive investigation involving the office of indigenous political affairs and the local police. On June 18, 1932, An Ngọc Phụng requested permission from the governor of Cochinchina to open a library of small classical works and popular novels in Giadinh on Ham Soi road where "currently there does not exist a library for European and Indigenous civil servants to have a spiritual distraction." Phụng continued to explain how the library could introduce French language works and "civilize the intellectual culture of the poor Vietnamese youth." He attached a three-page list of works to be included in the library. However, on August 10, 1932, the resident superior notified the administrative leader of the province of Giadinh that An Ngọc Phụng's request could not be approved. The results of the local chief of police investigation on Phụng's political background revealed a longer history of local police surveillance due to his production of subversive books. From the detailed police report the following personal information was uncovered: An Ngọc Phụng (who also went by the pseudonym Phùng), originated from the province of Phủ Thọ (Tonkin). Phụng finished his studies at the l'école normale de Hanoi and worked as a journalist for the popular periodical *Phụ nữ tân văn*. Phụng translated the 1924 book on Mahatma Gandhi by French novelist and essayist Romain Rolland. Phụng's translation titled *Lòng Bác Ái, Lịch sử ông thánh Gandhi* was banned by the French authorities on November 1929. He also wrote another subversive work titled *Mười Năm Tù Quốc sự* [Les 10 ans de prison d'un condamné politique].

The report revealed that even without government approval, Phụng had already created a small book collection for youth to study free of cost; the library was financed through a fee service for loans of books to the affluent. Additionally, the police report brought attention to the dangerous contents of Phụng's library list; four of the works had been officially banned by the Cochinchina Government and other brochures were labeled as 'tendentious' (meaning politically opinionated and subversive to the colonial administration) by the Office of Translations. The list included the banned works such as the 1927 volume of collected works on Phan Châu Trinh (*Gương chí Sĩ Phan Tây Hồ Lịch Sử Toàn Biên*), controversial works on topics such as Vietnamese self-governance (*Nam Quốc Dân Tự Trị*), women's issues, Trung Sisters,

⁴²⁰ See Appendix B for list of books in Phạm Văn Chiêu's library. TTLT2, GC, 17005 "Dossier Relatif à la Demande d'ouverture des Salles de Lecture des Bibliothèques Années 1931-1935" Document: Petition, November 17, 1931.

colonialism, and biographies of Chinese political leaders such as Kuomintang nationalist Phùng Ngọc Tường and political activist and journalist Lương Khải Siêu (Tiểu Sử và Tập Viên Văn Lương Khải Siêu). Similar to the project of the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation, the colonial state sought to control print circulation and reading in associations and smaller libraries. The state enforced stringent policies of print control such as censorship and banning of politically sensitive reading matter, requirements to report and publicly post library reading lists, and even the direct shut down of libraries that hinted at any politically subversive collections.

On top of the legal challenges to gain colonial authorization, association libraries struggled to financially support their operations and to build a book collection. Library founders often reached out to Vietnamese newspapers to publicize requests for financial support and book donations. On April 13, 1933, the office of the administrator approved Madame Nguyễn Thị Trang's request to open up a public reading room in the cul-de-sac of Rue d'arras between Boulevard Gallieni and Rue du General Leman in Saigon.⁴²¹ According to her extensive background check, Trang was 23 years old, studied at the Maternité de Cholon to be a midwife in the delivery house of "Tran-Ngoc-Sanh" located in Chasseloup-Laubat street, between the streets of Verdun and the Brothers Guillerault. The proposed reading room would include works concerning mainly agriculture and would not include any works or brochures forbidden by the government. A few weeks before the designated opening of the Reading Room, Nguyễn Thị Trang requested the readers of the popular magazine *Phụ nữ tân văn* to donate Vietnamese, French, Chinese, and English language books to the reading room. The article concluded with an image of a female Vietnamese reader in front of a library book shelf.⁴²² The reading room officially opened on April 20, 1933 and on November 17, 1933 moved and re-opened at 44 Reims street in Saigon.



⁴²¹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 17005 "Dossier Relatif à la Demande d'ouverture des Salles de Lecture des Bibliothèques Annees 1931-1935."

⁴²² Nguyễn Hội, "'Phòng đọc Sách' đường Arras," *Phụ nữ tân văn*, Colum : "Cuộc đời với ý tôi," June 22, 1933, p. 3-4.



Images 3-6. An image of a reader was the emblematic logo of the popular Saigon-based periodical *Phụ nữ tân văn*. Besides an image of a solitary woman, other icons depicted reading as a social act. In another iteration of the *Phụ nữ tân văn* cover, three Vietnamese women (symbolizing the three regions of Vietnam) read the pages of the periodical together. Source: *Phụ nữ tân văn*, 1933.

A few months after the opening of Nguyễn Thị Trang's reading room, a public incident called attention to the educational mission and financial needs of the reading room. On the night of January 20, 1934 the municipal theater organized a fundraising event to help the victims of the natural disasters in Binh Phu and to support Nguyễn Thị Trang's reading room on Reims street.⁴²³ At 8:30PM the director of the fundraiser Dinh Cong Thong read a letter from Mademoiselle Nguyen Thi Phuong Hue, General Secretary of the reading room on Reims Street on the issue of "the quốc ngữ problem." But after reading the letter, Thong continued to personally express his own frustration at the lack of financial support from the local Vietnamese press for the reading room. Thong argued that newspapers must also be invested in building up

⁴²³ Targeting his biting critique at the newspaper *Saigon*, Thong was escorted off the stage. In the audience, Van Trinh (who was Trần Văn Giàu, the vocal writer at *Saigon* newspaper), stood to defend his newspaper and was welcomed by screams and applause. Shortly after, the police arrived to escort Thong and Van Trinh. The police report summarized that Thong created a violent incident by attacking the newspaper *Saigon* (a newspaper led by the spouses Nguyen Duc Nhuan).

libraries. He declared that libraries and newspapers belonged to the same mission of “knowledge diffusion” which he described as “the spread and increase of essential knowledge to masses” through the production and circulation of print. This incident reveals the important interconnected mission of libraries, newspapers, and associations to provide popular education through the production and circulation of “essential knowledge.”

Associations provided a space to develop new modes of community and urban sociability around shared norms, moral values, and visions for social reform and public services. Su Lin Lewis describes this vibrant civil society of associations as not simply proto-nationalistic, but cosmopolitan—defining urban civic culture and new modes of citizenship. In other words, the associations produced dynamic, diverse “publics” who defined larger social needs and engaged with other civic organizations, public services, and unofficial channels to provide resources and accomplish specific missions.⁴²⁴ These associations focused on diverse goals such as technical trade, education, research, and community fundraising.⁴²⁵ Some organizations also organized around the dissemination of literacy and writing in quốc ngữ, such as the active Hội truy ền bá quốc ngữ [Association for the Expansion of Quốc Ngữ] founded in 1938 and led by Nguyễn Văn Tố.⁴²⁶ Furthermore, groups such as Tự Lực văn đoàn and magazines like *Phụ nữ tân văn* engaged with civic life through fundraisers for projects to help the impoverished, develop reading rooms, and raise awareness over urban issues such as disease, housing, and education. The creation of shared educational and knowledge resources was central to the mission and success of these self-help associations. Many associations and self-help groups formed their own libraries and reading rooms to provide access to valuable, domain specific knowledge to inform and supplement traditional schooling of the association members. In this way, the development of a Vietnamese civil society and associational culture directly relied on the ability to access to information, reading matter, and educational resources.

Conclusion

The development of the Vietnamese print industry relied upon specific technological innovations in mass print, the development of mass literacy in French or Vietnamese quốc ngữ, and the urban concentration of intellectuals committed to writing, publishing, and reading. On top of the structural and social transformations, print media developed a distinct form of cultural significance during the late colonial period. For French colonial publishers and translators such as Schneider and Vĩnh, print was a tool to transmit ‘culture’ (modern genres, Western sciences, global literature) and to popularize literacy in Vietnamese quốc ngữ in the 1890s to 1920s. For the Hanoi-based *Phong Hoá* magazine in the 1930s, the building of one’s own private library of valuable books implied the cultural responsibility of readers to advance the book industry

⁴²⁴ Lewis, Su Lin, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism Southeast Asia, 1920-1940*, (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁴²⁵ For a study of the ‘learned society’ in Southeast Asia as a space of sociability, intellectual exchange, and scholarly culture, see Su Lin Lewis, “Between Orientalism and Nationalism: The Learned Society and the Making of ‘Southeast Asia,’” *Modern Intellectual History* 10, no. 02 (August 2013): 353–374.

⁴²⁶ Between 1938 and 1945, this association spread and instructed an estimated number of 51,000 people to read quốc ngữ language throughout Tonkin; the association also had sister branches in Cochinchina and Annam. One of the key leaders of Hội truy ền bá quốc ngữ include the future general secretary of the Indochinese Communist Party, Trường Chinh. The development of literacy went hand in hand with other nationalistic developments of national culture through arts and literature in the late 1930s. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Héméry, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (University of California Press, 2011). P. 345.

through their consumerist behavior. For Saigon-based associations and provincial mutual aid societies in the 1930s to 1940s, the creation of reading rooms provided spaces of education and social empowerment.

Through the examination of these historic cases of print media, this chapter demonstrated how publishers, readers, and writers conceptualized print media as a shared community resource and as a display of cultural intellectualism. In this way, print media was not only a valuable educational resource, but also carried symbolic meaning. By analyzing the print industry and spaces of reading, I demonstrate how readers moved between and contributed to different spaces of reading such as state libraries, social and political organizations, reading rooms, and private libraries. Furthermore, this chapter examined the multifaceted arenas of publishing and reading in late colonial Vietnam which often moved faster than official colonial legislation. The next chapter considers how the colonial state attempted to implement a top-down information policy to control print production and dissemination from 1920s to 1940s.

CHAPTER 4

Colonial Control of Print Media: State Publishing, Libraries, and the Politics of Information, 1919-1945

This chapter examines the policies, practices, and limitations of state control of print during the French colonial period. I argue that the French colonial state attempted to control the production and circulation of print in order to spread pro-colonial propaganda, to monopolize cultural and political influence over Indochina, and to counter the circulation of anti-colonial revolutionary ideologies. I reveal how control of print developed in three distinct historical phases involving various state and non-state actors as well as the institutions of libraries, publishers, and offices of print management. This chapter traces the history of state attempts of print control from the 1920s comparative colonial projects of centralized publishing, distribution, and mobile libraries, to authoritarian methods during the Vichy period in the 1940s.

In order to demonstrate the historical continuities and changes of print control, I will situate the private *Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation* initiatives by François Henri Schneider and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, analyzed in chapter 3 within the context of colonial state control of print. This chapter is divided into three parts according to the three historical phases of print control. The first part examines the 1930s integration of the earlier private *Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation* publishing project into an official state apparatus in order to control the production and dissemination of information through publishing, libraries, and propaganda. Drawing from comparative projects such as the Dutch East Indies *Balai Pustaka*, American public libraries, and French book wagons [*bibliobus*], Governor General of Indochina Pierre Pasquier sought to create a comprehensive system to control the production and circulation of reading matter.

The second part analyzes the diffuse negotiations and fragmented implementation of an official system to control the publishing and distribution of print throughout the regions of Indochina. Colonial administrators proposed different ways for state control of print media— from a completely new centralized system of publishing and libraries to collaboration with local administrators, libraries, publishing houses and Vietnamese scholarly associations. The project was not simply a top-down, consistent and evenly distributed state policy. Instead, state and non-state actors debated how to vernacularize reading matter in order to advance popular education and literacy as well as to promote a positive, civilizing image of French colonialism. For example, colonial administrator Émile Vayrac proposed the creation of ‘indirect propaganda’— state sponsored print media that conveyed French colonialism in Indochina as benevolent and modernizing. In comparison, Director of the Indochina Archives and Libraries Paul Boudet focused on expanding access to reading matter for the countryside through provincial libraries and circulating book wagons. These projects to strengthen and centralize print control emerged out of colonial fears of rising urban radicalism, anti-colonial revolutionary ideologies, and religious spheres of influence in the 1920s and 1930s.

The third part examines more authoritarian and direct methods of propaganda, information control, and censorship used during the Vichy period in Indochina (1940-1945). The Vichy state positioned libraries as a tool to disseminate pro-Vichy National Revolution and political support in the context of World War II. When situated within a longer history of colonial print control, Vichy methods of propaganda had its roots in the 1930s initiatives of

indirect propaganda and pro-colonial publishing. Furthermore, this part considers how wartime strains on the economy affected library procedures and reading practices.

This chapter offers three major contributions to studies of information politics. First, I analyze information politics and control of print through the roles of state and non-state actors within the interconnected fields of publishing, libraries, and propaganda.⁴²⁷ This multi-directional approach challenges simplistic notions of propaganda as a blatant, top-down state project of “brainwashing.” I propose that propaganda and control of print was an elaborate apparatus shaped by the following: collaboration with translators, publishers, and printers; economic realities such as reader demands and competing reading matter; and the various degrees of state sponsorship of print through subsidies and subscriptions.

Second, this chapter reveals how control of information was part of the *raison d'état* and functioned as a technology of statecraft to maintain legitimacy, curb political agitators, and carry out cultural imperialism throughout Indochina. Colonial influence and institutions such as libraries were concentrated in the urban and administrative centers Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh. Initiatives to collaborate with local associations, to create circulating libraries, and to distribute reading matter to the provinces reflect state projects to extend colonial influence throughout Indochina by way of culture, language, and popular education. Third, this chapter shows the transnational networks of information governance and colonial control. The French colonial state directly engaged in transnational debates on print control and applied models of libraries and publishing from the Dutch East Indies, France, and the United States of America. Contributing to studies of information politics and comparative colonialism, this chapter offers new insight on the historic transformations and different strategies of information control through print, popular libraries, publishing, and propaganda.

Part 1

The State Control of Print Media: Comparative Colonial Models, Institutions of Print Control, and Indirect Propaganda, 1919-1930s

Comparative Models of Libraries and Control of Print: Balai Pustaka, Popular Publishing and Libraries in the Dutch East Indies

As shown in the previous chapter, the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation was not a singular nor well-defined French colonial project. The Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation had its origins in 1910 as a private, commercial publishing enterprise led by F.H. Schneider and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh. The task of ‘*vulgarisation*’ included publishing efforts to disseminate translated French literature and simplified technical knowledge, and to popularize the use and learning of quốc ngữ. These early initiatives were framed as part of a cultural imperialism to spread ‘civilizing,’ ‘good’ reading and to monopolize French cultural influence over Vietnamese. However, by the 1920s and 1930s, the colonial administration grew increasingly concerned over the circulation of ‘dangerous reading matter and ideas.’ During this period, the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation

⁴²⁷ This chapter expands upon Robert Darnton’s approach of studying the larger system of media circulation as an “information society” shaped by state and non-state actors as well as producers and consumers of information. Robert Darnton, “An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (February 1, 2000): 1–35. Darnton’s approach challenges a linear understanding of information and communications as sender and receiver, but rather as converging actors, technologies, and spaces.

transformed into a broader state sponsored project of print control spanning indigenous publishing and libraries.

During the 1920s to 1930s, different governmental bodies such as the Governor General, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, local administration, and scholarly associations discussed the creation of a network of provincial libraries and a central organ to publish, translate, edit, and distribute books. These state initiatives revolved around the question: how can the colonial state control the circulation of print media and information among Vietnamese readers? How can the state implement a colony-wide cultural policy on publishing, translation, distribution, reading, and libraries?

The French colonial administration drew extensively from the Balai Pustaka state publishing project in the Dutch East Indies. The first exchanges between the French colonial administration and the Dutch East Indies on the topic of popular libraries and publishing dates to 1928.⁴²⁸ In preparation for his visit to the Dutch East Indies scheduled for April 9 1929 to April 20, 1929, the new Governor General of Indochina Pierre Pasquier commissioned an extensive study on the Dutch East Indies publishing and popular libraries project. Pierre Pasquier was a conservative, pro-monarchy colonial administrator who advocated the centralization of publishing, distribution, and control of print in Indochina. Beginning on May 9, 1928, the French Consul General to Batavia Albert Bodard corresponded with the Governor General of Indochina regarding the “Department for Popular Literature in the Dutch East Indies [Service pour la littérature populaire aux indes néerlandaises]” and emphasized its possibility as a model for Indochina.⁴²⁹ Later, Bodard submitted a comprehensive study titled “The Volkslectuur” on October 24, 1928 to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, and then later to the Governor General of Indochina. The Volkslectuur (short for Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur or Bureau for Popular Literature), also went by the Indonesian name Balai Pustaka.

⁴²⁸ The 1928-1930 planning documents on the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation and the Balai Pustaka are scattered throughout the Hanoi, Saigon, and Aix-en-Provence colonial archives. I write the historical narrative of this project drawing mainly from the following dossiers: TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451 “Création des bibliothèques populaires aux provinces en Annam 1928-1935”; ANOM, GGI, Folder 47457 “projet de création de bureaux de publications indigènes et de bibliothèques à l'usage des annamites”; ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458 “création de bibliothèques populaires à l'usage des indigènes”; ANOM, GGI, Folder 65407 “propagande par la presse indigène”; TTLT2, GC Folder 19621 “Correspondances du Cabinet du GouCoch avec le Consulat general de France aux Indes Néerlandaises relatives à la politique, culture, bibliothèque au commerce...années 1926-1930.

⁴²⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451 “Création des bibliothèques populaires aux provinces en Annam 1928-1935” Document: Report titled “Volks-Lectuur” from A. Bodard French Consul General to Batavia to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the GGI on October 24, 1928 (original correspondence began May 9, 1928).

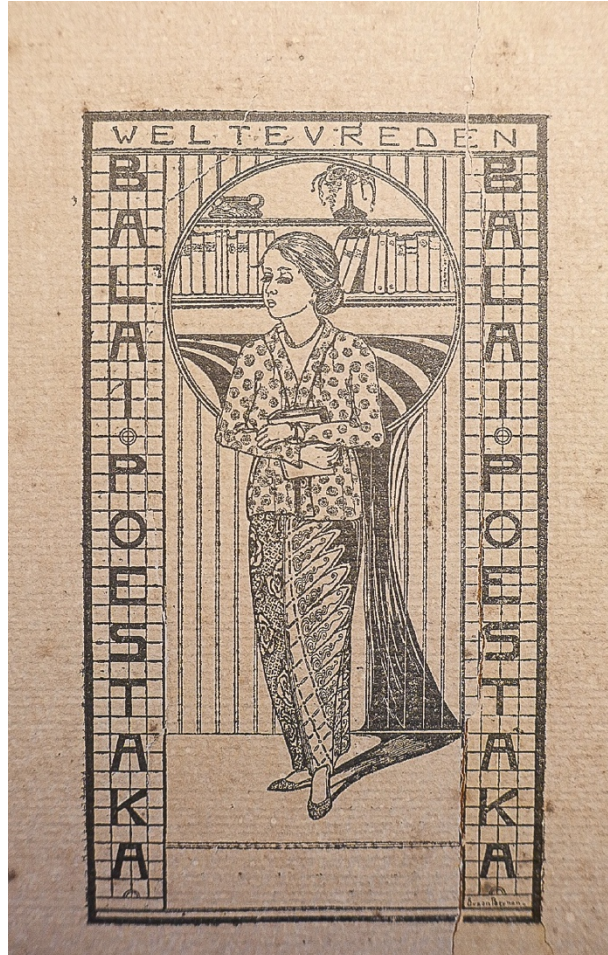


Image 4-1. A logo of the Balai Pustaka “Office of Popular Literature” in the Dutch East Indies from the French colonial dossier of research documents on the Balai Pustaka, 1925.⁴³⁰

The Balai Pustaka originated first in 1908 within the Department of Education, formed its own office in 1917, and over time became the leading state sponsored publishing bureau, distribution office, and library system in the Dutch East Indies. From the 1920s to 1940s, the Balai Pustaka published and distributed state sponsored print media to school libraries and built a network of libraries throughout the Dutch East Indies. Balai Pustaka libraries were housed in government buildings, hospitals, barracks, and prisons. By 1930s, there were over 2,500 Taman Pustaka [Gardens of Reading] libraries mainly in Java. Works available in the Taman Pustaka ranged from print versions of oral legends and traditional literary treasures, Javanese versions of the Mahabharata, to translations into Malay of Western adventures stories such as *The Three Musketeers*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *The Jungle Book*, and *De schaapherder*.⁴³¹ Scholars of the Balai Pustaka have debated its motivations and impact. Andries Teeuw emphasized how the Balai Pustaka contributed to expanding literacy and standardizing

⁴³⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451 “Création des bibliothèques populaires aux provinces en Annam 1928-1935,” Document: Report titled “Volks-Lectuur” from A. Bodard French Consul General to Batavia to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the GGI on October 24, 1928 (original correspondence began May 9, 1928).

⁴³¹ After Indonesian independence in 1945, Balai Pustaka resumed its activities as a governmental publishing house that primarily produced school textbooks rather than widely read literary works.

modern Malay through its publications and libraries. Other scholars such as Doris Jedamski argued that the Balai Pustaka was not just a publishing house but a form of indirect cultural propaganda and a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.”⁴³² Elizabeth Fitzpatrick argued that Balai Pustaka was also a “functional agency of socialization”—a system to control, introduce, and promote Western values into colonial society. Fitzpatrick adds that the corpus of government sanctioned reading material in the Taman Pustaka “consciously undermined tradition and guided their readers toward their positions as salaried consumers in the new colonial regime.”⁴³³

The existing scholarship on the Balai Pustaka focuses on moralistic judgments of the state. This approach isolates ‘the state’ and ‘culture’ into different static fields of analysis and assumes state cultural projects as a form of propaganda and encroachment into local culture. The major issue with this line of argument is that it flattens the complex ways in which the state sponsors, promotes, and defines culture through language and literacy projects. This binary approach overshadows the nuances of colonial state institutions and casts ‘the state’ as a singular, intentional, rational, and purely self-interested entity rather than a multifaceted institution that exists in conjunction with culture, society, and private industries. Furthermore, a binary judgment of the state as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ shrouds the personal politics and changing roles of the many actors of the Balai Pustaka—bureaucrats, agents, translators, interpreters, readers, and private entrepreneurs. This chapter intervenes in the historiography of the Balai Pustaka by demonstrating the transnational circulation of the Balai Pustaka model between the Dutch East Indies and the French Indochina through the cultural politics of Albert Bodard, Pierre Pasquier, and Émile Vayrac. Furthermore, I analyze how print control and publishing change over time under different colonial regimes, private initiatives, and historical contexts.

Publishing Officer and Cultural Translator Émile Vayrac: The Balai Pustaka Model for Indochina

Émile Vayrac was a French colonial administrator in Tonkin who contributed to the multifaceted landscape of control of print, through his work in publishing, Vietnamese language and translation, and as director of the Office of Indigenous Publishing in Indochina. Émile Vayrac was born on March 7, 1881 in Aveyron in Southern France to a farming family. He completed his studies in Toulouse and was accepted to work in the Civil Service in French Indochina beginning in 1906.⁴³⁴ By 1911, Vayrac became the director of the cultural and literary magazine *Revue Indochinoise*, and befriended Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh when Vĩnh submitted his translation of *Fables de la Fontaine* to *Revue Indochinoise* for publication. From 1912 to 1920, Vayrac was the director of the École des Mandarins of Tonkin. In 1919 Vĩnh and Vayrac founded the publication *Âu-Tây Tư Tưởng* [*La pensée de l'Occident*, Western Thought], a

⁴³² Andries Teeuw, “The Impact of Balai Pustaka on Modern Indonesian Literature,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 35, no. 01 (1972): 111–27. P. 120. According to Teeuw, during the pre-war years Balai Pustaka authors contributed to the standardization and spread of Malay, which influenced the nationalization of present-day Bahasa Indonesia. Doris Jedamski, “Balai Pustaka: A Colonial Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing,” *Archipel* 44, no. 1 (1992): 23–46. P. 43.

⁴³³ Elizabeth B. Fitzpatrick, “The Public Library as Instrument of Colonialism: The Case of the Netherlands East Indies,” *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 43, no. 3 (2008): 270–85. P. 280.

⁴³⁴ For more biographical information on Vayrac, see chapter 1. Emmanuelle Affidi, “*Đông Duong Tap chi* (1913-1919).”

literary translation magazine.⁴³⁵ In 1925, Vayrac worked as the head of the Governmental General Service of Propaganda and the Press. In 1928, Vayrac became the director of the Office of Indigenous Publishing [Bureau de la Presse Indigène] at the Resident Superior of Tonkin and the Governor General. During his time at the Office of Indigenous Publishing, Vayrac received Bodard's study of the Balai Pustaka, which was distributed to the local administration in Tonkin, Annam, Laos, Cambodge, Cochinchina, and the Director of Public Instruction in Indochina on November 26, 1928. Vayrac wrote and compiled his own comprehensive report from 1928-1929 titled "Notes on the Volkslectuur (popular libraries)." Vayrac contributed his own vision of a French Indochina system to control print, publishing, and libraries. Vayrac's study deeply influenced Governor General of Indochina Pierre Pasquier and circulated throughout the local administration.⁴³⁶

Émile Vayrac's report "Notes on the Volkslectuur," sheds light on French colonial administrators' concerns over the radicalizing potential of Vietnamese publishing and what Vayrac described as the "anarchical" circulation of information at the time. Vayrac argued that Vietnamese press and publications perpetuated dangerous criticisms of French colonialism and civilization: "Vietnamese literary production is struggling in anarchy and drags itself into insignificance. Apart from some re-publications of old poems or ancient moral guides, and a small number of serious works, the majority of Vietnamese print criticizes us and speaks poorly of our civilization." Praising the Dutch East Indies, Vayrac argued that the Balai Pustaka created libraries in schools, police stations, hospitals, and instituted an office of publishing which produced and distributed 'good' print matter throughout the country. Vayrac argued that the Balai Pustaka's network of libraries and publishing circulated pro-colonial propaganda material within the competitive milieu of "over 200 private indigenous journals in the Dutch East Indies." Vayrac surveyed the existing publications in Indochina, and noted that only a few initiatives paralleled the popularization mission of the Balai Pustaka: Phạm Quỳnh's series "Works to Make Known French Civilization to Educated Vietnamese," "*Lectures Tonkinoises* [Tonkinese Reading]" founded by the Resident Superior of Tonkin Monguillot, and "*La Pensée de l'Occident* [Western Thought]" edited by Émile Vayrac and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, and founded by René Robin. *Lectures Tonkinoises* functioned as a 'library of translations' and consisted of three types of translated works 1) classical or modern works (cream cover), 2) popular French or foreign works (red cover) and 3) instructional works of popularization (green cover).

Vayrac proposed a series of changes to centralize the different popularization publications and to develop a new office of indigenous publications. First, Vayrac suggested the improvement of existing publications such as *La Pensée de l'Occident* through financial support directly to Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh for technical improvements. *La Pensée de l'Occident* must be integrated with *Lectures Tonkinoises* to create a collection of literary works for the Vietnamese reading public. The state must financially provide a budget for this integrated series; the budget could be used for (1) Direct remuneration for recruited authors and translators, (2) "Bonus" awards to Vietnamese who submit articles and translations to the reading committee, and (3) Financial incentive for Vietnamese language translations of European works approved by the resident superior. Second, Vayrac proposed the creation of a publishing office modeled after the

⁴³⁵ ANOM, RSTNF, Folder 5219 "Retour de M. Vayrac à La Tête des Publications du "Tứ Dân Văn Uyển," Document: "Au sujet des efforts faits au tonkin depuis vingt-cinq ans environ pour fournir de bonnes lectures aux annamites," February 17, 1937.

⁴³⁶ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458 "création de bibliothèques populaires à l'usage des indigènes," Document: "Notes on the Volkslectuur" by Émile Vayrac (c. 1928-1929).

Balai Pustaka; the office would focus on publishing, dissemination, circulation of key texts such as *Fables of Fontaine* or *Tales of Perrault* as well as the development of libraries. The office would have three branches focused on publications of European literature, Chinese literature, and Vietnamese literature; furthermore the office would commission publication of modern literary, scientific, technical works and children's books. Compared to the Balai Pustaka, Vayrac's proposal for an office of indigenous publications would be based mainly in Tonkin, rather than throughout all of Indochina. The new office could replace the Office of Indigenous Press in the Resident Superior of Tonkin and could "coordinate and encourage good work of existing authors and editors."⁴³⁷

Translation, Propaganda, and Counter Propaganda: Vayrac's Program for the Recovery of the Public Spirit in the Context of Vietnamese Radicalism

Why were French colonial administrators Albert Bodard, Pierre Pasquier, and Émile Vayrac invested in developing a system of print control in Indochina? Colonial administrators were keenly aware and threatened by the rise and influence of anti-colonial sentiment and political organizing in Indochina. In the 1920s to 1930s, a new generation of urban, French or French colonial educated Vietnamese radicals and revolutionaries emerged. A series of crucial events in 1924-1927—the trial of revolutionary patriot Phan Bội Châu, the death of Phan Chau Trinh, the arrest of Nguyễn An Ninh, the development of the Chinese Communist Party (1921-1927), and the attempted assassination of the Governor General of Indochina by Vietnamese activist Phạm Hồng Thái (1896-1924)—sparked the organizing of Vietnamese nationalist and anti-colonial associations, mass student-led strikes, and underground publishing of political tracts and critiques of the government. Politicized urban and cosmopolitan youth such as Nguyễn An Ninh and Hồ Chí Minh shaped the politics of youth organizing, drawing from transnational political and social theories of Marxism-Leninism, Sun-Yat Sen inspired Chinese nationalism, French socialism, anarchism, and communism. Scholar Hue-Tam Ho Tai described the rise of an individualist, experimental "political mood", and social consciousness in the late 1920s; this radicalism strove for an anarchist and iconoclastic emancipation from tradition and social institutions.⁴³⁸ David Marr describes this new intelligentsia as a shift from traditional scholar gentry anti-colonialists into a new generation of 'modern' intelligentsia committed to "thinking, talking, reading, and writing about change."⁴³⁹ The 1920s to 1930s was a period of variegated political and cultural mentalities, debating social change through various political approaches including constitutionalism, restoration, patriotic reform, and cultural conservatism. By the 1930s and 1940s, mass politics and Marxist-Leninist class-based arguments dominated Vietnamese political organizing. Revolutionary parties formed throughout Vietnam such as as Jeune Annam, Secret Society of Nguyễn An Ninh, Tân Việt Cách Mệnh Đảng [New Vietnam

⁴³⁷ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458 "création de bibliothèques populaires à l'usage des indigènes," Document: "Notes on the Volkslectuur" by Émile Vayrac (c. 1928-1929).

⁴³⁸ Hue-Tam locates the emergence of radicalism among a specific generation of Vietnamese intellectuals—mostly urban, French or French colonial educated, youth who came of age in the political climate of the 1920s and expressed themselves through student strikes, associations, and newspapers.

⁴³⁹ David G Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). P. 31.

Revolutionary Party], Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng, and Thanh Niên [Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League].⁴⁴⁰

In the last essay “Program for the Recovery of the Public Spirit” from his “Notes on the Volkslectuur” report, Vayrac elaborated on the colonial administration’s anxieties over Vietnamese radicalism. Vayrac described the existing threat of Bolshevik political ideas, Chinese influence, and anti-French sentiment among a growing generation of ‘dangerous’ young, urban Vietnamese radicals eager for change:

The Bolshevik propaganda and the action of anti-French agitators of all sorts ended up creating among our protégés a detrimental state of spirit. Fortunately the true people—those of the countryside, are still not yet contaminated. But the population of the cities welcome subversive ideas with a complacency that brings dangerous risks to public peace and gradually brings disorder to the indigenous society. The workers, the students, and even the school children especially have received a taste of indiscipline and disorder. All the serious Vietnamese are worried about the insubordination and insolence of the new generation. The children no longer want to obey their parents; the Vietnamese family, which was so strongly organized is threatened to disintegrate. On the other hand, the evil spirit is even in the primary schools, so that all the sons of those who collaborate with us are insulting us daily. An irresistible desire for change, a thirst for new order, a sort of evil arrogance is quickly spreading throughout all classes of society.⁴⁴¹

Vayrac called attention to the pervasiveness of Bolshevik and anti-French agitation amongst urban Vietnamese, especially workers, students, and youth. This “spirit” of subversion undermined the ‘Vietnamese family,’ corrupted the minds of young students, and could potentially permeate into the countryside.

Within this context of increased radicalism, the colonial administration developed new strategies to control the quickly ‘spreading evil’ of propaganda and insubordination among the ‘outspoken Vietnamese.’ Vayrac believed that carefully crafted and widespread propaganda messages could counter the rising political anti-French and revolutionary sentiment of the Vietnamese urban youth. Calling for the “revival of the Vietnamese public spirit,” Vayrac proposed a four-part propaganda project: 1) Counter propaganda, 2) Indirect, discrete, and unperceivable propaganda, 3) Propaganda through actions, and 4) Propaganda through public image. Vayrac emphasized the urgency to fight against Bolshevik and anti-French propaganda in Vietnam, or else face “the most monstrous and criminal” undoing and “destruction of civilization (in Indochina)” that the French painfully acquired and developed over the last years. According to Vayrac, the method of counter-propaganda required the careful selection of “events around the world and discrete commentary on the benefits of the white race and the European civilization to guide the world and provide new ideas and new knowledges, discoveries and inventions which inherently benefit all the peoples of the earth.” Additionally, the task of counter-propaganda included instilling fear through reports of the “numerous examples of the danger of revolutionary agitation to generate the worst catastrophes.” Through counter-propaganda, Vayrac hoped to

⁴⁴⁰ Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, “Resistance, Nationalism, and Social Movements, 1900-1939,” in *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 281–335. P. 306.

⁴⁴¹ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458 “création de bibliothèques populaires à l'usage des indigènes,” Document: “Notes on the Volkslectuur” by Émile Vayrac (c. 1928-1929).

“show that progress can only be achieved by good will, conscientiousness, and devotion to order and peace.”⁴⁴²

In Vayrac’s words, indirect propaganda must be strategic and prudent in order to be effective among the Vietnamese:

It must be avoided at all costs that propaganda resemble advertising... Indirect propaganda alone will be effective. It is indispensable that propaganda is exercised in a very discrete manner and remains unrecognizable. It is not sufficient to only popularize useful knowledge and practical education for the masses. [Instead indirect propaganda] will take the form of a direction of conscience, of perpetual teaching, of advice to writers, of constant encouragement to progress in all aspects without neglecting the humblest [people]. This enlightened soliciting is for the good of the people and especially for the well-being of the countryside inhabitants.⁴⁴³

Vayrac again emphasized the importance of the rural population—the group that he considered not only the humble “true people” of Indochina, but also the population most vulnerable to the political ideologies propagated by urban intellectuals. Vayrac suggested two effective methods of indirect propaganda: propaganda through action (such as building projects, improving the agricultural production of rural peasants, providing water supply and fertilizer to the countryside) and propaganda by appearance and imagery (through positive imagery of French modernity). For example, propaganda by appearance would insert images, graphs, and simplified diagrams of ‘French modernity’ into indigenous press as well as publicly display positive pro-French imagery in posters, postcards, and photographs. The visuals should convey French colonial progress and modernity. Vayrac listed the following examples: a comparative image of Haiphong in 1885 and 1927 with the small Annamese junk compared to a large modern steamer with detailed measurements of each; images of the irrigation projects in Kep, Vinh-Yen, Du Song-Cau, Thanh-Hoa; and a comparison of the Tonkin dykes reinforcement on the eve of French colonialism and in the contemporary period. Vayrac emphasized the power of visual propaganda: “...the ignorant people are educated only by the eyes. And everyone including us, we easily retain that which has strikingly impressed us or that which ‘leaps to our eyes’ (that which is obvious).”⁴⁴⁴ The essay concludes with an attached list of European works to translate to Vietnamese. Vayrac argued that the best works to translate for Vietnamese readers should include French popular literature from the middle ages (such as Tales of Perrault, La Fontaine’s Fables, Renart’s novels), moral works (such as Dr. Paul Carton’s naturalist philosophies and other works on healthy living), and proverbs. This list focused primarily on instructional, apolitical texts that could civilize and morally uplift Vietnamese readers.

Vayrac’s report and essay demonstrate the immense racism embedded within colonial projects to control the production and circulation of print media. Colonial administrators such as Vayrac described Vietnamese as primitive, easily persuaded, and corruptible. Thus, Vietnamese are rendered as passive recipients rather than as autonomous, intellectual actors. At the same time in these colonial documents, Vietnamese are portrayed as ‘outspoken’ and must be manipulated skillfully with a strategic, indirect form of propaganda.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

This document signifies how the state project of propaganda and the control of information sought to permeate popular imagery, consciousness, education, and news. Scholar Penny Edwards described French colonial propaganda of womanhood and gender in Cambodia and Vietnam as a “subtle saturation” rather than a “blitz” of imagery.⁴⁴⁵ Vayrac believed that an effective propaganda program must be discrete, multifaceted, and encompassing of all social aspects. A comprehensive system of direct and indirect propaganda could steer Vietnamese public opinion on France and the French colonial administration.

Propaganda was intertwined within the project of creating popular libraries and publishing. The project of building libraries and expanding publishing might appear on the outside as a benevolent project of spreading literacy, literature, and education. In reality, the colonial state saw a direct political interest in indigenous publishing and libraries to produce and disseminate a pro-colonial message. The list of European works to be translated and the types of promoted imagery of building projects sought to present an image of a benevolent, civilized, and advanced French colonialism. Vayrac’s study is only one example of the extensive documentation from the colonial administration in the three Vietnamese regions of Indochina that show how control of publishing and libraries was essential as a propaganda tool for the colonial state.

From 1928-1930s, the colonial administration proposed two primary solutions to control the publication, circulation, and distribution of print media in Indochina: the Central Publishing Office Project and the project to create popular extension libraries. Inspired by the Balai Pustaka in the Dutch East Indies, Vayrac suggested the creation of a central publishing office which collaborated with and sponsored the work of carefully selected local publishers, translators, and distributors. At the same time, Director of the Archives and Libraries Paul Boudet initiated efforts to create popular libraries, provincial libraries, a distribution network, and book wagons [*bibliobus*] through the existing infrastructure of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina.

Part 2

Geographies of Reading: Circulating Libraries and Centralizing Print Control throughout Indochina

Paul Boudet’s Central Service for Distribution of Books in the Provinces: International Research on Public Libraries and Circulating Book Wagons [Bibliobus] for Indochina

Since the founding of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in 1917, director Paul Boudet proposed to create provincial libraries throughout Indochina. Inspired by the Balai Pustaka, Pierre Pasquier officially enlisted Boudet to research public libraries and book wagons around the world. On February 28, 1929, Paul Boudet wrote to the American Library Association office in Paris and requested documents to study the American “bibliobus”—a circulating book wagon or book shipment service—in order to develop a similar project in

⁴⁴⁵ Penny Edwards, “‘Propagender’: Marianne, Joan of Arc and the Export of French Gender Ideology to Colonial Cambodia (1863–1954),” in *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 116–30. P. 116. Edwards argues that this colonial propaganda ultimately shaped new meanings of woman and nation in Cambodia.

Tonkin.⁴⁴⁶ Boudet was particularly interested in the practical methods used by automobiles for the distribution of books. From here begins an extensive exchange of letters between Paul Boudet and libraries from all around the world. Boudet received extensive replies and research resources from the American Library Association (ALA) in Paris, the central ALA office in Chicago, and the California State Library in Sacramento. American libraries shipped hundreds of recent pamphlets, legal documents, book catalogs, and newspapers for Boudet to study the organization of circulating libraries and book wagons in America.⁴⁴⁷ The research materials included documentation on school libraries and public libraries in Oakland, Cleveland, Toledo, and Detroit, and research pamphlets on library development such as “The county library comes home to the people,” “How to start a public library,” “Books Wanted: Rural People Interested in County Library Plan,” and “The rural school with and without county library service.” These resources explored topics such as the curatorial responsibility of librarians, the importance of literacy, and access to ‘useful’ knowledge such as technological skills. On July 17, 1929, Paul Boudet responded to these letters and shipments, thanking the ALA and American libraries for sending over valuable research documents to develop a similar project in Indochina. Besides libraries in America and the Dutch East Indies, on May 16, 1930 Boudet also wrote to the Metropolitan Library in Beijing, China and the Mohun Dutt State Library in Baroda, India to request information on their circulating libraries program. By July 1930, Boudet had been in conversation with automobile companies, requesting catalogs of different trucks for his circulating library project in Indochina.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451 “Création des bibliothèques populaires aux provinces en Annam 1928-1935,” Document: Letter Number 195, February 28, 1929 from Paul Boudet to Director Burton Stevenson of the American Library Association Office in Paris.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. On April 20, 1929 Burton Stevenson from the ALA Paris office sent to Paul Boudet the booklet “Harriet Long’s County Book Service.” On May 9, 1929, Carl Milam from the ALA executive office in Chicago also responded to Paul Boudet with additional library resources.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. Letter from Director of Omnium Indo-Chinois to Paul Boudet July 3, 1930, which included a catalog of different truck wagons used to transport books.

Reprinted by American Library Association, Chicago.

"THE FARM PAPER WITH A MISSION"

American Farming

APRIL, 1929

Books Wanted

Rural People Interested in County Library Plan

By Julia Wright Merrill
Executive Assistant to Library Extension, American Library Association, Chicago

Most rural people are interested in the county library plan. This is shown by the fact that in many places the plan has been adopted. In a few places it has not, but the movement has only begun. The plan has been made known to rural people through the medium of the county library plan. This plan is being made known to rural people through the medium of the county library plan. This plan is being made known to rural people through the medium of the county library plan.

Each dot represents a county library.

From the top left corner, the text continues with details about the county library plan, its benefits, and how it is being implemented in various parts of the country. It mentions that the plan is being made known to rural people through the medium of the county library plan.

(Reprint: Library Occurrent)

BOOK TRUCK OF THE VANDERBURGH COUNTY LIBRARY

Reproduced with permission of Miss Ethel F. McCollough.

Every bit of outside space above the wheels has been utilized for books but every book can be reached from the ground by a person of average height. The boy next to the girl is resting his books on a slide which pulls out between the wheels. Below the shelf is a drawer which holds charging implements and accessories. The librarian is charging a book on the hinged shelf which pulls up by the driver's seat. This is especially good in stormy weather. The magazine racks are at the back of the book shelves on one side of the car. The rest of the space on the inside of the car is for boxes of books being taken to school stations, or returned to the library. The drawer at the back of the car underneath is for tools. The spare tire is carried underneath the car. All sliding shelves, drawers and doors lock.

QUELQUES MODELES DE VEHICULES INDUSTRIELS BERLIET

1 TONNE 2 CV. V.L.S.B.
1 TONNE 2 CV. V.L.R.
1 TONNE 12 CV. V.R.A.B.
2 TONNES 12 CV. V.R.B.
3 TONNES 12 CV. V.R.B.
4 TONNES C.S.A.
5 TONNES C.S.A. 4 roues
6 TONNES C.S.A. 4 roues
7 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
8 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
9 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
10 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
11 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
12 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
13 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
14 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
15 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
16 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
17 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
18 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
19 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.
20 TONNES 2 S.C.M.C. Poids Bruts: 12,500 Pds.

LES POIDS INDICUES REPRESENTENT LES CHARGES UTILES

Images 4-2. Examples of ALA research documents and automobile catalogs sent to Paul Boudet for his research on mobile libraries, 1929. 449

On March 6, 1929, Boudet submitted his study on libraries to the Governor General (Service of Legislation and Administration) and the Director General of Public Instruction in Indochina. In the comprehensive study titled "Report on the creation of provincial libraries and a central organ for the distribution of books," Boudet drew from his extensive research on

449 TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451 "Création des bibliothèques populaires aux provinces en Annam 1928-1935."

American, European, and the Dutch East Indies libraries and put forward a project to develop the “Central service for distribution of books in provinces” which would be managed through the Directorate of Archives and Libraries.⁴⁵⁰ Boudet reported that even by 1929, almost no provincial libraries existed. Boudet envisioned a future where at least one French-Vietnamese library existed in each provincial capital; however, that would require long term commitment of state funding and the development of a cadre of indigenous librarians.

In the meanwhile, Boudet proposed an intermediary organization that could help the development of provincial libraries: a central agency for the distribution of books in the provinces. In his March 6, 1929 report, Boudet outlined the framework for the central agency which would function almost like a circulating mobile library: “In the first stage of provincial libraries organization, there must be a very flexible organization which allows for the maximum use of the books, benefits the greatest number of inhabitants of the provinces, but with the minimum costs and personnel. To obtain this result, I have the honor to propose to you the creation of a central book distribution agency in the provinces, a sort of mobile library with frequent and easy turnover, which would supplement the collections of the local administration or a teacher.” Boudet referenced the success of the Dutch East Indies’ popular literature system with a central organization that published, collected, sold, and distributed books to the 25,000 designated libraries called the “*Jardins des lettres* [Gardens of literature].” Boudet praised and most likely exaggerated the extensiveness of the Dutch East Indies popular library system: “Each [library] has a collection of three to four hundred books and provided book lending services to indigenous [readers] for two hundred and fifteen days [out of the year]. In 1924, 210,000 readers from all classes of society borrowed 1,600,000 books.” Boudet also praised American library efforts “to bring the book closer to the reader” through systems of “circulating libraries” based out of the central county library. He detailed the system of American bookmobiles, admiring the county library of Santa Barbara, California which reportedly had 3 branches, 83 stations [for circulating libraries] in 1922, and recorded 330,122 book loans.

From these comparative library models, Boudet proposed his circulating library project—first to be implemented in Tonkin, and then later expanded throughout Indochina. The project consisted of the following:

- 1) Lending of French and quốc ngữ books in the provinces.
- 2) Distribution to the provinces popularization [vulgarizing] books and pamphlets published by indigenous writers and under official control.

In Hanoi and in each provincial capital, the creation of collections of books is overseen by a secretary of the Resident who is responsible to register book loans and will sell the popularization works.

A pick-up truck equipped for the transport of books circulates at regular intervals and each time brings a collection of new books in exchange for already read books which would then be transported to another province. The central branch in Hanoi would have a garage and storage to be supervised by a European library assistant and three Vietnamese

⁴⁵⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451 “Création des bibliothèques populaires aux provinces en Annam 1928-1935” and ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458 “Création de bibliothèques populaires à l’usage des indigènes,” Document: “Rapport sur la création de bibliothèques provinciales et d’un organisme central de distribution de livres” by Paul Boudet, March 6, 1929.

secretaries in charge of organization and accounting of the materials. The circulating branch would consist of a van operated by two drivers and a secretary [who managed] book exchanges.⁴⁵¹

Boudet proposed that the Indochina General Budget contribute to the costs of this project which totaled approximately 10,000 piastres. Recognizing the high costs of the project, Boudet emphasized the importance of provincial libraries and a book distributor for both the European and indigenous population. Boudet explained,

How can these expenses be justified? For the European population, this cost, which might appear high at first glance, is in fact very small, considering the important needs that it meets. It can be plainly justified by the fact that it can permit the organization of book loans to the Europeans dispersed throughout the provinces. In fact, according to the last official directory in 1928, the European population in Tonkin consisted of 2,807 inhabitants in Hanoi, and 3,719 inhabitants in the twenty three provinces and four military territories... In the provinces, many civil servants and settlers, deprived of leisurely distractions, living by themselves, or during the long Tonkinese winters, aspire to educate themselves and develop their intellectual culture. However, they are denied this due to the lack of libraries and the impossibility of purchasing all the essential books... One can affirm without a doubt that the success of the Circulating Libraries will be even greater than that of the now heavily frequented Lending Section of the Central Library (in Hanoi).

According to Boudet, a circulating libraries system could provide the European population a productive and educational leisure activity.

Boudet argued that the expenses could greatly benefit the indigenous population as well. "For the indigenous population, the costs following the creation of the Circulating Library will not be excessive... These libraries will also benefit the indigenous. The Vietnamese are avid readers and the success of sales of certain collections published by Vietnamese printers are expected." Boudet argued that the circulating library could help promote the Vietnamese book and publishing industry. Additionally, the circulating library project could combat the spread of politically "dangerous" reading matter among Vietnamese readers.

Most of these [existing Vietnamese book] productions are mediocre, some of them are dangerous because they are inspired by Bolshevik propaganda pamphlets widely distributed in China, and the censor does not always succeed in stopping them. The best way to combat the harmful influence is to intensify the production of works of intelligent popularization. The automobile library, which permits the distribution of these books not only in the provincial capitals, but even in certain *phus* and *huyens* [prefectures and districts] will be the best agent of distribution.

Similar to Vayrac's proposal for counter-propaganda initiatives, Boudet argued that circulating libraries could also combat the 'dangerous' influence of Chinese revolutionary texts. This counter-propaganda strategy sought to increase the availability of "politically safe" texts through

⁴⁵¹ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: "Rapport sur la creation de bibliothèques provinciales et d'un organisme central de distribution de livres" by Paul Boudet, March 6, 1929.

state sponsored distribution, libraries, and publishing, in hopes that these texts would flood the Vietnamese print market. By making safe reading matter more plentiful and at a lower cost, colonial administrators and Paul Boudet hoped to compete with the popularity of illicit reading matter among Vietnamese urban youth.

Wishing to garner support for his project, Boudet submitted this report to Governor General Pasquier, Resident Superior of Tonkin, and the Director of Public Instruction. Boudet summarized the significance of his project for all of colonial society—both indigenous and European inhabitants of the provinces as well as the colonial administration:

Such an organization, whose importance one cannot deny, is an indispensable complement to the libraries of large [city] centers: we should not deny the inhabitants of the provinces, French or native, the benefits of organized reading any longer. From the native point of view, these libraries would develop in parallel to the literary or scientific popularization collections; [from the point of view] of the Governor General and the local administration who are eagerly interested, [these libraries] would become an effective instrument.⁴⁵²

Pierre Pasquier's Implementation of a Popular Libraries and Publishing Office throughout Indochina: Annam and Cochinchina Respond to Circular 346-S June 7, 1929

From April 9 to 20, 1929, the new Governor General of Indochina Pierre Pasquier journeyed to the Dutch East Indies to study colonial infrastructure, information policy, and cultural programs. After Pierre Pasquier's return from the Dutch East Indies, he dedicated more resources to research, expand, and develop a publishing and libraries project in Indochina similar to the Balai Pustaka in the Dutch East Indies. Pasquier envisioned a network of popular French-Vietnamese libraries throughout Indochina as well as an office of publishing, translation, and distribution of selected texts on education, language, culture, and history. Pasquier worked together with the local administration in Annam, Tonkin, Cochinchina, and Cambodia to expand existing library initiatives and to create a completely new publishing and libraries network. Many French colonial administrators debated the feasibility of creating a completely new system of provincial libraries and publishing office in Indochina. On May 17, 1929, Pasquier's Secretary General Maurice Graffeuil critiqued Boudet's proposal to create new popular libraries, claiming that a new system would be too burdensome to execute and manage in Indochina.⁴⁵³ Instead, Graffeuil endorsed Vayrac's proposal to create a central Office of Indigenous Publishing for Indochina. Rather than creating an entire system of commissioning writers, translators, publishers, and distributors, Graffeuil preferred Vayrac's model of a central office (with a full editorial service, editing, and sales operations) which collaborated with existing printers and publishers. Modeled on the Balai Pustaka, this office would encourage existing publications without competing with them.

⁴⁵² ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Letter from Paul Boudet to the Rector of the Academy, Director General of Public Education in Indochina on March 6, 1929

⁴⁵³ ANOM, GGI Folder 47458, Document: Note from Graffeuil on the projects by Vayrac and Boudet related to the "diffusion d'une littérature franco-indigène en Indochine" May 17, 1929 to Lacombe, Director of Service of Indigenous Affairs. Maurice Graffeuil later became Résident Général à Hué from 1934-1940. Graffeuil also requested the Head of Service of Indigenous Affairs Moulin to comment on the popularization project. On June 10, 1929 Moulin responded with a detailed commentary titled "Création d'un bureau ou office des publications indigènes dans chacun des trois pays de langue annamite."

After the discussions with Boudet, Vayrac, Bodard, Graffueil, and Moulin, Governor General Pierre Pasquier officially announced the beginning of an Indochina-wide publishing and libraries initiative. Pasquier sought to expand beyond Tonkin to create popular libraries and publishing offices throughout Indochina which would facilitate “works with an instructive, educational, and moral character.” On June 7, 1929 GGI Pierre Pasquier published the important circular number 356-S on the “Publications and creation of libraries for use by Vietnamese.”⁴⁵⁴ Pasquier addressed the Governor of Cochinchina, Resident Superior in Annam and submitted separate circulars individually to the Resident Superior in Cambodia and Resident Superior in Laos. Pasquier expressed how he witnessed firsthand the success of the Balai Pustaka indigenous publication office in Java and proposed to officially implement a similar project throughout Indochina. Heavily influenced by Vayrac’s proposals, the circular outlined the motivations, framework, and functions of the popular publishing and libraries project in Indochina and requested heads of states of the five regions of Indochina to respond with feedback and their timeline for implementation.

Pasquier’s publishing and libraries project would “1) Facilitate and aid the publication of specifically chosen works and 2) Distribute these works and to open up popular libraries.” This project sought to fulfill the colonial administration’s vision for the indigenous to “learn to read in our schools, a healthy and sufficiently abundant literature both to distract and to instruct them [the indigenous], while protecting them from the temptation to devote themselves to the reading of insignificant or dangerous pamphlets.”

What did Pasquier mean by appropriate and specifically chosen works? Pasquier emphasized that the government must not intervene in the private initiatives to publish Vietnamese literature, translations or adaptations. Rather, the colonial administration should “awaken, coordinate, encourage, and reward the good works of authors and publishers.” In this way the administration should provide “advice” rather than “compete” with the current book market. In order to do this, Pasquier proposed to create a “Bureau de publications indigènes [Office of indigenous publications]” in each region of Vietnam. This office would be related directly to the head of the local administration and would have separate language branches (European, Chinese, and Vietnamese) and focus on different types of works (ancient literature, modern literature, scientific popularization, children’s literature, almanacs, images, and newspapers).

Pierre Pasquier argued that in order for this project to find success, the office must not appear “too official in the eyes of the public.” Furthermore, to incentivize good translations and publications, Pasquier laid out the different ways in which the government could provide financial support to the authors, translators, and editors. Lastly, Pasquier emphasized the distribution of ‘good works’ through popular libraries and bookstores. The office would have two separate European and Indigenous reading committees to provide guidance to libraries on how to build their collections. For example, a “list of healthy works” with the categories “recommended books,” “books commonly available at libraries,” and “books acceptable in the case of need,” could help libraries to decide how to build their initial library collections.

Furthermore, the circular suggested the creation of two types of popular libraries 1) First-degree Libraries intended purely for Vietnamese and located in libraries, barracks, hospitals, police stations, and 2) Second-degree French-Vietnamese Libraries similar to borrowing libraries in Java. Pasquier proposed a simple and self-sustaining library system associated with provincial

⁴⁵⁴ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Circular 356-S on the “Publications and creation of libraries for use by Vietnamese [Objet: A.s. De l’édition de publications et de la création de bibliothèques à l’usage des Annamites]”

capitals and managed by civil servants and local school teachers. Certain books must be made available for free checkout while others required a small fee in order to pay for the volunteer librarian. In terms of budget, Pasquier stated that the village should bear the costs of the initial book collection, but if possible, the provincial local budget and the general budget could also assist. In cases where the local and general budget provided any financial assistance to the development of the popular libraries, the local administration should receive free access to the library books. Pasquier outlined a comprehensive, vertically-integrated system to control both the production of reading matter and its distribution to readers through libraries. Additionally, Pasquier attempted to make the project as locally managed as possible, with civil servants and teachers serving as librarians and local offices in each of the five regions of Indochina.

Pasquier's circular also asked the regions of Annam and Cochinchina to contribute their own local perspectives. The most important part of these folders are the responses from Annam and Cochinchina because they provide a regional level survey of libraries, publishing, reading behavior, and the respective administrative apparatus in place to monitor them. Rather than a top-down Indochina policy, the responses from the Annam and Cochinchina administration show how local officials, directors of public instruction, and scholarly associations made important contributions to the development of a local and Indochina-wide publishing and libraries initiative.

Annam: Censorship Failures and Reader Demographics

The Resident Superior of Annam responded to circular 346-S with "Note on the conditions necessary to organize popular libraries in Annam."⁴⁵⁵ The Resident Superior of Annam confirmed that the office of publications could be easily implemented through the head of the Archives of the Resident Superior and that the administrative library could also provide assistance. However, the Resident Superior of Annam rejected Tonkin's proposal to create separate European and Indigenous Reading Committees. Rather, a joint committee would include indigenous intellectuals who could provide insight into indigenous language, culture, and society of which Europeans might not fully understand. This suggestion to create a joint Vietnamese-French committee mentioned two specific examples of 'misreading', where French colonial administrators misinterpreted the contents of the works. For example, the French Committee of Censure of Cinematography released without any censorship the film "Ben Hur". The document explained that as a consequence, many indigenous viewers interpreted the film as a "superb film of revolutionary propaganda." In comparison, the Sûreté of Cochinchina classified and forbade another book as a "subversive and dangerous work from the KMT", but it turned out to just be a translation of one of Voltaire's stories. The Resident Superior of Annam pointed to these two cases as evidence of the failures of the colonial censor to adequately suppress 'dangerous' materials such as the "Ben Hur" film, but also mistakenly label translations of Voltaire as dangerous. This case shows the concerns over the effectiveness of censorship and repression of 'dangerous' ideas circulating among Vietnamese readers.

In terms of the creation of popular libraries, the Annam administration supported Pasquier's proposal to create two types of libraries. However, the administration added the

⁴⁵⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451 "Creation des bibliothèques populaires aux provinces en Annam 1928-1935," Document: Report 1129-G June 2, 1930, "Note sur les conditions dans lesquelles pourraient être organisées en Annam des bibliothèques populaires."

following expectation: the administration should prioritize first-degree libraries and offer reading matter at no cost for indigenous, less educated readers; in comparison the second-degree library should be directed to more educated readers and cost a small fee. The Annam administration added that the goal for the first-degree libraries was to improve popular education through reading: “We must not lose sight of the fact that the goal pursued on behalf of the large part of the public is to create a taste for reading while also educating [the public]. It is therefore necessary, if we are to succeed, to introduce this new leisure, free from the slightest obstacle.” For the second-degree library readers, the goal was not “a matter of creating a taste for reading, but of developing and directing it. The library will include more serious works but also at a higher price.”

Attached to the Annam report was a note which listed the diverse clientele of the Annam bookstores and types of works purchased. This note reveals important insight into Annam reader demographics and their literary tastes, as recorded by the colonial administration. The commentary demarcates readers by gender, education, and employment and associates their background to reader tastes.

Bookstore Clientele	
Male Clientele	
Students	“Livres roses” (children’s literature) and collected works such as Flammarion’s yellow covered volumes series “The Best Classical Authors”
Employees of the French and Vietnamese government, commercial employees	Vietnamese novels Translations of theatrical works or French novels
Coolie workers	Popular poems
Female Clientele	
Students	“Livres roses” (children’s literature) and classical authors
Wives of indigenous civil servants and businessmen	Translations in quốc ngữ of Chinese novels



Images 4-3. Examples of “Livres roses pour la jeunesse” (a popular and affordable children’s series started by Hachette in the 1850s)⁴⁵⁶ and Flammarion’s “Les meilleurs auteurs classiques” titles.

There are subtle differences between the description of the consumption tastes of males and females in this record. According to this document, male readers purchase from the collection “The Best Classical authors” while female readers purchased an unspecified group of works by “Classical Authors.” Furthermore, the Vietnamese translations that women purchased are not French novels and theatrical works, but Chinese novels. A concluding note adds that

⁴⁵⁶ The “La Bibliothèque rose illustrée” was initially aimed at French children ages eight to fourteen, priced at two francs, and stocked at train stations. The books focused on “sentimental education,” morality, family life, and women’s socialization, but even expanded into certain concepts as race relations and colonization. The series continued until World War II and published over 260 titles in total. Ruth Carver Capasso, ““La Bibliothèque Rose”, Children, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century France,” *The French Review* 77, no. 2 (2003): 274–85.

currently there does not exist in quốc ngữ the work of scientific vulgarization like that of “Manuels Roret.”

A subsequent document emphasized the high demand for books throughout Annam, especially quốc ngữ works and books targeting female readers. The document stated that “all original work published in quốc ngữ can find in Annam 10,000 buyers...If the work published is specifically aimed at female clients, it is possible to expect a sales figure of at least 5,000 copies.” The document estimated that for any quốc ngữ book, at least 10,000 copies could be sold throughout Annam, with the following geographic distribution: 2,000 copies in the cities (200 in Thanh Hoa, 300 in Vĩnh, 500 in Hue, 1,000 in Tourane, Faifoo, Quinhon, and Nhatrang); 8,000 copies in villages). These two documents on Annam readers show a vibrant reading community of both men and women, rural and urban, eager for reading material. Between 1929 and 1931, the Resident Superior of Annam continued to correspond with the Governor General’s office to develop, fund, and organize a provincial libraries and popular publishing project in Annam.

Cochinchina: A “Not Too Official” Collaboration

Overall, the Cochinchina administration supported the popular libraries and office of publishing project, but proposed suggestions to balance the relationship between an official state institution and a private, bottom-up initiative. Many of the administrators from Cochinchina feared that an office of indigenous publication directly managed by the local administration would appear “too official and too much like an attempt to govern the minds.” Between September to November 1929, Saint-Marty the Curator of the Archives and Libraries in Cochinchina, Jean Bouchot the secretary general of the Society of Indochinese Studies, and the Governor of Cochinchina Jean-Félix Krautheimer responded to Pierre Pasquier’s 346-C Circular.⁴⁵⁷

On September 25, 1929, Saint-Marty wrote to the Governor of Cochinchina emphasizing the importance of intellectual nourishment for the Cochinchinese in the context of the rising popularity of the syncretic religion Caodaism. “In the outbreak of religious and philosophical doctrines such as Caodaism in our Cochinchinese colony, the attractiveness towards propaganda clearly indicates the necessity of providing to our protégés the elements of intellectual nourishment that counters the metaphorical claims of dangerous utopias.”⁴⁵⁸ In 1926, the messianic religion Caodaism (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ, “Great Way of the Third Time of Redemption”) was founded in Tây Ninh and gained tremendous popularity among Cambodians in eastern Cambodia and Vietnamese in southwest Cochinchina. Colonial administrators grew fearful of the rising influence of Caodaism and framed the widespread influence of Caodaism within the 1920s and 1930s rise of mass politics and threats to colonial power.⁴⁵⁹ Saint-Marty

⁴⁵⁷ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Responses from Saint-Marty, the Conservator of the Archives and Libraries in Cochinchina (Saint-Marty September 25, 1929 Number 1929), Bouchot, the president of the Society of Indochinese Studies (Bouchot 28 November 1929, number 1426), and the Governor of Cochinchina Jean-Félix Krautheimer to Governor General Pierre Pasquier. *Krautheimer* was governor of French *Cochinchina* from 1929 to 1934.

⁴⁵⁸ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Letter number 192 from Saint-Marty to Governor of Cochinchina on September 25, 1929 “Création de bibliothèques populaires indigènes en Cochinchine.”

⁴⁵⁹ Edwards examines how the Cambodia protectorate sponsored Buddhism as a geo-cultural divide to breakdown the transnational community between Cambodians and Vietnamese Caodaists. Furthermore, afraid of anti-colonial mass movements or subversions to its royal authority, the Cambodia protectorate shut down the spread of

stressed the important colonial responsibility to “direct the intellectual movement of the people” away from contending spheres of influence such as Caodaism. As a solution, Saint-Marty proposed exercising control over the indigenous language works similar to the Dutch East Indies. Saint-Marty praised (and most likely exaggerated) the accomplishments of the Balai Pustaka to create a network of 33,000 libraries of indigenous languages and 160 libraries of Dutch language works. Saint-Marty included details on the budget required for the Indochina popular libraries project which would include circulating libraries and distribution support for certain types of publications.

On behalf of the Society of Indochinese Studies [Société des Études Indochinoises], the secretary general Jean Bouchot expressed his concerns regarding the official nature of the proposed office for indigenous publications.⁴⁶⁰ Bouchot stated that “the organization of an official organ, an office or a department of Vietnamese publications, would appear too governmental, controlling, and intervening in the intellectual composition of publications. Official initiatives are effective and invaluable, but in literary matters [the initiative] would not be as effective if its influence were not discrete and exercised in an indirect and distant manner. It might even be better to substitute the [official] initiative entirely by private means.” In other words, a close relationship between publishing and the local administration would make the office appear “too official” and thus undermine its effectiveness.

Rather, Bouchot proposed the creation of a Reading Committee who would “propose the publications to accept, reject, or revise (requiring precise interpretation and revision of certain excerpts).” This committee could then “insinuate rather than direct” the governmental initiatives. Bouchot summarized that the Reading Committee should be drawn from the Petrus Ky commission—a commission established in 1928 comprised of select Vietnamese members of the Society of Indochinese Studies who sought to develop “a pure Vietnamese language based on tradition.” This committee would be tasked with reading and judging which works were to be published, revised, or edited, and submit their recommendations to the Society of Indochinese Studies and the Cochinchina Governor. Bouchot described the Reading Committee as a “semi-official organ, under the administrative control” but also distant enough from the Governor General to provide independent recommendations of works for publication.

As for the task of selecting library materials, Bouchot emphasized the importance of works that are ‘western leaning’ and written in indigenous languages. He added that the project should abandon translation projects to quốc ngữ that were too difficult. Bouchot emphasized the importance of ancient indigenous works (such as books on customs, beliefs, poetry, and legends) and popularization works on science, agriculture, and industry. He argued that the priority of library reading matter should be the following: “almanacs, ancient literature, works for children, works of scientific popularization, and then modern literature.”⁴⁶¹ This order of reading matter prioritized both didactic, instructional, and practical materials as well as literary and popular reading.

Bouchot’s more conservative plan built upon the existing infrastructure of the Society of Indochinese Studies rather than proposing a completely new system of publishing and libraries.

Caodaism, calling it “dangerous propaganda.” Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007). P. 198-201.

⁴⁶⁰ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Letter from Jean Bouchot to Governor General of Indochina Pierre Pasquier on November 14, 1929.

⁴⁶¹ ANOM, GGI Folder 47458, Document: Summary of Bouchot and Saint-Marty, Number 1426 by Governor of Cochinchina Krautheimer submitted to Governor General of Indochina on November 28, 1929.

For example, Bouchot proposed that the Society of Indochinese Studies manage the responsibility of financial bonuses to authors and editors and the encouragement of producing good publications. Furthermore, Bouchot argued against the new governmental office creating new newspapers, believing that it would not succeed in the competitive market in Cochinchina.

Bouchot commented on the Indochina-wide transportation constraints, environmental challenges for conservation of reading matter conditions, and hygiene limitations to facilitate a successful program of mobile libraries. Instead, Bouchot emphasized the creation of regional lending libraries in provincial capitals and in common areas. The Saigon department of Archives and Libraries would be in charge of centralization and organization of these provincial libraries. Bouchot concluded his statement with a demand to maintain hygiene and prevent spread of infectious diseases throughout the Indochina libraries: "It must not be forgotten, however, that in a country where epidemics are not rare and tuberculosis is particularly severe, books are the most terrible vehicles of microbes. Neither Java nor America seem to have to worry about this. However, this problem must worry us particularly here, not only for the provincial libraries but also for the library of the capital. It would be advisable to provide for a simple, effective method of periodic disinfection, which does not deteriorate the works. On this point the Committee notes its incompetence; this task is automatically done in the German and Scandinavian libraries." This last commentary shows the international scope of libraries development in Indochina which looked towards European, American and other colonial models to implement library organization and hygiene maintenance. Furthermore, Bouchot's commentary points to the issue of 'dangerous circulation' as both content and disease, and thus called for the urgent control of print. In other words, the content of books as well as its hygienic state must be carefully monitored.

On November 28, 1929, Governor of Cochinchina Krautheimer reviewed the two studies by Saint-Marty and Bouchot and submitted them to the Governor General of Indochina (Department of Political Affairs).⁴⁶² Krautheimer preferred the popular libraries model proposed by the Society of Indochinese Studies, rather than Saint-Marty's model which was considered "too administrative." He argued that a "flexible organization outside of the administration as much as possible, will give better results." On July 12, 1930, Governor General Pierre Pasquier approved the Petrus Ky Commission to operate as the publishing office, and to select and suggest reading matter for publication, translation and distribution for Cochinchina.⁴⁶³ Governor General Pierre Pasquier also approved of the project to create regional and communal libraries under the direction of the curator of the Saigon Cochinchina library.

Cambodge: Religious Realms of Influence

While the popular libraries and publishing office project focused on publishing and libraries in the Vietnamese territories of Indochina, the Governor General also considered ways to expand this project to Cambodge and Laos. Suzanne Karpelès, curator of the Buddhist Institute and the Royal Library of Cambodge, received Bodard's report and learned that the Governor General's proposal to implement a similar project in Indochina. On September 6, 1929, Karpelès requested that the Resident Superior of Cambodge provide more information on the

⁴⁶² ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Summary of Bouchot and Saint-Marty, Number 1426 by Governor of Cochinchina Krautheimer submitted to Governor General of Indochina (Department of Political Affairs) on November 28, 1929. Krautheimer also attached Saint-Marty and Bouchot's studies

⁴⁶³ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Letter number 2008-S from Pierre Pasquier to the Governor of Cochinchina on July 12, 1930 "Publications for indigenous usage and popular libraries."

project.⁴⁶⁴ Afterwards, she asked the Resident Superior of Cambodia several logistical questions regarding the “auto-librairie [mobile bookshop].” Karpelès asked for more information on the annual expenses for gasoline, equipment, and repairs, the distance and duration of the mobile library tours, the number of volumes in its collection, the price of the volumes, and if periodicals would be part of the mobile library. As director of the Royal Library, Karpelès initiated the widespread publication and distribution of religious and secular texts throughout the Cambodia provinces to local bookstands. Together with Buddhist reformist Huot Tath, Karpelès led educational missions in the 1920s to inform the Khmer Kraom populations in western Cochinchina about the Royal Library and distributed publications to pagodas and small towns. By 1930, Karpelès’ had contributed to the development of an impressive system of 57 provincial book depots and a monthly bibliobus that circulated throughout Cambodia.⁴⁶⁵ Penny Edwards summarized that these book depots and bibliobus tours provided readers with the possibility to buy reading matter or to freely browse the library collections of “ancient and modern manuscripts in Khmer, Siamese, Burmese, and French...”⁴⁶⁶ By 1930, the secretary of the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh sent over photos of the auto-librairie of the Royal Library and Buddhist Institute which traveled through to Cambodia and to south west Cochinchina with 1,996 books and 676 engraved works.⁴⁶⁷ Another letter in 1931 mentioned the success of a mobile library project in Tonkin, as well as book initiatives in Cambodia led by the Buddhist Institute and Karpelès at the Royal Library. The Cambodia initiatives to create libraries and distribute books via a book wagon were part of the widespread educational projects to expand literacy in vernacular Khmer.⁴⁶⁸

Fragmented Implementation: State Sponsored Publishing as Indirect Propaganda, 1930s-1940s

Throughout the 1930s, the governor general and local administration continued to discuss, revise, and implement aspects of the comprehensive project to develop popular libraries and an office of indigenous publishing throughout Indochina. However, many of these projects existed only as idealistic visions and administrative recommendations—there was little follow through with the proposed projects to fund local initiatives and monitor the effectiveness of publishing and library initiatives. Furthermore, the actual literary production and distribution was often left to the decisions of private commercial interests and local administrators.

An entirely centralized and evenly distributed system of popular libraries and indigenous publishing never materialized throughout Indochina. Scholar librarian Christiane Rageau and

⁴⁶⁴ ANOM, GGI, Folder 47458, Document: Letter number 2209 from Suzanne Karpelès curator of the Royal Library to the Resident Superior of Cambodia on September 6, 1929.

⁴⁶⁵ Sylvain Lévi, ed., *Indochine* (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931). P. 197-198. Guy de Pourtalés, *Nous à qui rien n'appartient* (Paris: Flammarion, 1931), p. 113 as cited in Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007), P. 193. By 1930, the Royal Library acquired a “camion-librairie” bookstore-truck which doubled the utilization and access to the library collection. “Chronique,” *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 30, no. 1 (1930): 487-647. P. 526.

⁴⁶⁶ Edwards, *Cambodge*. P. 193.

⁴⁶⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451, Document: Letter number 265 from Indigenous institute for study of Buddhism in Phnom Penh to the Governor General of Indochina on November 20, 1930.

⁴⁶⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451, Document: Letter number 482 from Resident Superior of Tonkin to Resident Superior of Annam on April 7, 1931. Penny Edwards, “Making a Religion of the Nation and Its Language: The French Protectorate (1863-1954) and the Dhammakay,” in *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 63–84.

Claudine Salmon argue that there was a hold-off in colonial implementation of the popularizing office and libraries due to the economic crisis, political insurrections such as Yên Bái mutiny (1930) Nghệ Tĩnh Soviets uprisings (1930 and 1931), and the subsequent period of violent repression under Pasquier.⁴⁶⁹ Between 1929 and 1933, the colonial government also tightened censorship and suppressed a wide range of political texts deemed ‘dangerous,’ subversive, Communist, or anti-French. Pasquier suddenly died in a plane crash in 1934, ending a period of conservative cultural policy. Furthermore, under the Popular Front government in France from 1936 to 1938, a period of brief colonial liberalism emerged in French Indochina. Under the leadership of Léon Blum in France and Minister of Colonies Maurice Moutet, widespread left-wing inspired reforms took place regarding labor and political representation. During the short-lived Popular Front period, colonial repression in Indochina decreased. Within this timeframe, colonial censorship eased and Cochinchina radicals such as Nguyễn An Ninh vocally advocated for colonial reform and democracy.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the ambitious project for a centralized office of indigenous publishing and libraries manifested in various ways: a few literacy popularization magazines, and periodic bibliobus dispatches around Hanoi, Saigon, and between Cambodia and Cochinchina, and the emergence of a scattered and underfunded provincial libraries. Nevertheless, the arguments towards creating and promoting “good reading” and print control continued to influence state policy on propaganda, education, publishing, and libraries throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Émile Vayrac, the former administrator of the Office of Indigenous Publishing in in Tonkin, continued to argue that publishing functioned as an effective way of “indirect propaganda” to spread French influence and pro-colonial, civilizing ideas and norms. In his comprehensive 22-page report written in 1937, “On the subject of efforts made in Tonkin for 25 years to provide good reading for Vietnamese,” Vayrac summarized the history of publishing and print control in French colonial Indochina.⁴⁷⁰ Vayrac described the importance of publishing and translation to bridge the cultural gap between French and Vietnamese. He lamented the cultural misunderstandings between French and Vietnamese:

The ignorance of the French with regard to the Vietnamese is certainly great; that of the Vietnamese in regard to us is prodigious, tremendous, and unimaginable. The French, generally civilized, is accustomed to reflection and study, and managed to obtain a fairly exact idea of Vietnamese in order to fulfill their everyday duties in affairs with the protégés. The Vietnamese masses completely ignore us. The vast majority does not understand anything about us. They consider us to be “hot-blooded” whimsical, irritable, inconsistent, and a people whose reactions cannot be predicted.

Reminiscing on his long-term friendship with writer, publisher, and translator Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, Vayrac identified Vĩnh as the reason for his own understanding of Vietnamese culture and society: “I was lucky to make friends with several eminent Annamese, notably M. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, the greatest Annamese writer of our time...If I understand anything about indigenous society, if I experience any bit of delightful Vietnamese popular literature...it is to this friend

⁴⁶⁹ Claudine Salmon and Christiane Pasquel Rageau, “Un Projet Colonial En Indochine Inspiré de Balai Pustaka (1928-1930),” *Archipel* 44, no. 1 (1992).

⁴⁷⁰ ANOM, RSTNF, Folder 5219 “Retour de M. Vayrac à la Tête des Publications du “Tứ Dân Văn Uyển,” Document: “Au sujet des efforts faits au tonkin depuis vingt-cinq ans environ pour fournir de bonnes lectures aux annamites.”

that I must attribute. It was he who led me, little by little, to fathom the gulf that separates us from the Annamese masses. And we asked ourselves by which means we could manage to bridge this total incomprehension.” Both Vĩnh and Vayrac believed that one of the greatest issues of colonial society was the cultural and information gap between French and Vietnamese. The two dedicated their lives towards bridging this divide through the work of publishing and translation. Vayrac wrote, “I deliberately sacrificed my career, at the age of thirty, to try to accomplish a work that I believed and still believe, more than ever, simply if not to bring the rapprochement between Vietnamese and French, at least to dispel some of the reciprocal ignorance in which the two people live.”⁴⁷¹

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, state subsidies for certain pro-colonial newspapers and censorship of politically dangerous reading matter continued. The colonial state supported projects of cultural and linguistic popularization that abstained from more political topics. For example, on March 1935 Governor General René Robin approved Émile Vayrac’s *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* publication project.⁴⁷² *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* also went by the French names “Jardin de la littérature populaire [Garden of popular literature], Le jardin des lettres pour les quatre classes de la société [The garden of letters for the four social classes], and Lecture pour Tous [Reading for All].” The naming of this cultural review was inspired by the Dutch East Indies “Garden of Reading” or Taman Poestaka project that was part of the Balai Pustaka.⁴⁷³ *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* comprised of three parts: a Vietnamese language magazine, a literary society, and an almanac. Of the three parts, Vayrac regretfully admitted that by 1937 he was only able to bring the language magazine into fruition due to a limited budget.

For the first two years, the *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* was able to self-fund its operations through sales and advertisements. By 1937, Vayrac sought more administrative support in the amount of 7,000 subscriptions or 7,500 piastres a year. This amount would also help fund his trip back to Indochina as well as subsidize free copies to be distributed in schools.⁴⁷⁴ In a series of confidential letters between Auguste Tholance and Yves Chatel from the office of the Resident Superior of Tonkin, Vayrac, and the GGI (Press Office), the administration approved Vayrac’s proposition to continue the work of propaganda through publishing and discussed the extent of administrative financial support for Vayrac’s publications. By February 1938, the GGI and Vayrac agreed upon an annual subsidy of 4,500 and subsidized transit back to Indochina for Vayrac and his wife paid for by the General Budget.⁴⁷⁵ In his note to the Governor General, Chatel added that Vayrac’s magazine *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* had tremendous potential to expand beyond Tonkin. Chatel argue that *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* could provide “a very healthy intellectual influence to the middle classes; it must also compete with Chinese novels which most of the time

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Prior to 1935, Vayrac had worked in the Indigenous Publishing Office of the Superior Residence of Tonkin.

⁴⁷³ Other publishing initiatives also appear to be influenced by the popularization libraries and publishing in the Dutch East Indies, such as the French publication “Le Jardin des lettres: revue mensuelle de tous les livres français et du mouvement intellectuel contemporain” published in the 1930s in Paris.

⁴⁷⁴ Vayrac wrote this report on February 17, 1937 from France, where he had to return for family reasons. Vayrac called on the colonial government to sponsor his return back to Indochina to continue his publishing work with *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển*. Vayrac exclaimed, “in full physical strength as well as intellectual strength, in France, I am a lost force, an idler who is bored. [In Indochina], thanks to thirty years of experience, I am a useful force of which the government may use for their needs.” ANOM, RSTNF, 5219 “Retour de M. Vayrac à la Tête des Publications du “Tứ Dân Văn Uyển,” Document: “Au sujet des efforts faits au tonkin depuis vingt-cinq ans environ pour fournir de bonnes lectures aux annamites.”

⁴⁷⁵ ANOM, RSTNF, Folder 5219 “Retour de M. Vayrac à la Tête des Publications du “Tứ Dân Văn Uyển,”

are a very incomprehensible hodgepodge for the minds of our protégés (Vietnamese); thus [the magazine] forms a useful instrument to counterbalance the diffusion of inexperienced ideas. The protectorate thus has a major interest in continuing this work, skillfully led by M. Vayrac.”

In his February 17, 1937 report “On the subject of efforts made in Tonkin for 25 years to provide good reading for Vietnamese,” Vayrac emphasized the necessity of a practical, strategic plan of for publishing and propaganda. Rather than creating an entirely new publishing, distribution, and libraries system modeled on the Dutch East Indies Balai Pustaka, Vayrac repeated his decade long argument that ‘indirect propaganda’ and collaboration with existing publishing and printing initiatives such as the I.D.E.O. and his *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* would yield a more efficient and beneficial result: “In short, I am convinced that we can achieve the desired result, by many means more modest. On the other hand, I have always thought that for the Vietnamese who are such a fine and witty people, official propaganda is as harmful as it is useless. The only door left is indirect propaganda.”⁴⁷⁶ He concluded his report with a list of proposed works for immediate publication: all the works of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh scattered throughout Vietnamese journals, *L’Annam Nouveau*, and his unpublished materials; works of history and literature on Italy, Greece, and France such as *Le Parfum des Humanités*, *L’histoire de France*, and *Guirlande de Julie*.⁴⁷⁷

From the Center to Periphery: Circulating Book Wagons and Reading in the Provinces, 1930-1942

The development of mobile libraries and provincial libraries also continued throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, albeit with fiscal limitations and uneven implementation throughout Indochina. Paul Boudet and other library administrators continued to research and plan circulating mobile libraries which could share and distribute reading materials from the Cochinchina Library in Saigon and the Central Library in Hanoi. The 1930s and 1940s circulating libraries project in Indochina drew from similar models of book wagons and book shipment services from libraries all around the world such as America, France, the Dutch East Indies, Australia, and Germany. Described as a method where “books must find the readers,” these types of libraries served remote areas with limited access to books by bringing book collections via boxed book shipments or book wagons. Boxed book shipments were shipped out to remote areas to create a small library which then circulated its books between other provinces. In comparison, the book wagons or “bibliobus” transported a book collection in a vehicle with double sided shelves to display the books for readers to consult and borrow.⁴⁷⁸ A librarian accompanied the van and would catalog the inventory and maintain a loan registry of checkouts. The bibliobus catalog might be sent in advance to the regions so that readers could request in advance the books they wished to borrow.

A 1930 map of Cochinchina titled “Itinéraire des bibliothèques circulantes [Itinerary of Circulating Libraries]” traced the primary routes planned for a circulating library throughout

⁴⁷⁶ ANOM, RSTNF, Folder 5219 “Retour de M. Vayrac à la Tête des Publications du “Tứ Dân Văn Uyển,” Document: “Au sujet des efforts faits au tonkin depuis vingt-cinq ans environ pour fournir de bonnes lectures aux annamites.”

⁴⁷⁷ Claudine Salmon and Christiane Pasquel Rageau, “Un Projet Colonial En Indochine Inspiré de Balai Pustaka (1928-1930),” *Archipel* 44, no. 1 (1992). The authors conclude that Vayrac managed the publication *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* until 1943. *Tứ Dân Văn Uyển* had a few pauses in 1941 and at times also appeared as a supplement together with the publication *La pensée de l’occident*

⁴⁷⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1276 “Manuel D’apprentissage du Classement des Bibliothèques,” 1936.

Cochinchina, following main roads and railroad routes from Saigon to Biên Hoà, Ba Ria, Cap Saint Jacques, Thủ Dầu Một, Tây Ninh, and Bến Cát.⁴⁷⁹ This document shows how a bibliobus had been planned since 1930 as part of the Archives and Libraries at 34 Rue Lagrandière street in Saigon. From 1932 to 1935, Paul Boudet reached out to the Anonymous Society of Renault Factories present at the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris to inquire about their Renault automobiles for purchase.⁴⁸⁰ On March 1936, the first “bibliobus” or mobile library was created, circulating throughout nine provinces of Cochinchina with a collection of 832 volumes. The 12CH vehicle toured through the provinces every two months and served 10,000 readers. Secretary Lê Văn Khá from the Cochinchina Library accompanied the library and was paid one piastre for each day the library operated.⁴⁸¹ The book wagon encountered many delays and accidents. For example, on September 1, 1937 on the way from Ba Ria to Biên Hoà the book wagon swerved to avoid hitting a seven-year old girl who was in the street. Consequently, the book wagon struck a tree stump, severely damaging the wagon which required one month of repairs.⁴⁸² The bibliobus continued its route on November 15, 1937 from Saigon through the Transbassac (Western Mekong Delta region) following this schedule:

Province	Date	Time	Location
Gò Công	November 15, 1937	4PM to 6PM	In front of station 0
Mỹ Tho	November 16, 1937	10AM to 12PM and 2PM to 5PM	In front of the French Circle or at the front of the primary school (in case of rain)
Bến Tre	November 17, 1937	7AM to 11AM	In front of the C.F.A.
Sadec	November 18, 1937	7AM to 11AM	In front of the Public Works Inspector office or garage (in case of rain)
Trà Vinh	November 19, 1937	7AM to 11AM	In front of the S.I.C.A.M.
Vĩnh Long	November 19, 1937	4PM to 6PM	In front of the Inspector office or provincial garage (in case of rain)
Tân An	November 20, 1937	10AM to 12PM	In front of the C.F.A.
Gia Định	November 22, 1937	7AM to 9AM	In front of the Inspector Office

⁴⁷⁹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 1210 “Listes des Ouvrages Empruntés et Rendus par les Provinces de la Bibliothèque Circulante Année 1942,” Document: “Itinéraire des bibliothèques circulantes.”

⁴⁸⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 436 “Demande d’achat d’un bibliobus à l’exposition coloniale de 1931 formulée par la Société Anonyme des Usines ‘Renault’. 1932-1935,” Letter dated August 1, 1932.

⁴⁸¹ TTLT2, GC, Folder 12629 "Dossier individuel des personnels en service à la Bibliothèque du gouvernement de la Cochinchine années 1930-1945 - Le van Kha." Lê Văn Khá was recruited for the new circulating libraries project in Cochinchina on December 1935. He only served for a short period and was dismissed on September 22, 1937 due to health reasons.

⁴⁸² TTLT2, GC, Folder 29904 "Dossier relatif à l'indemnité à accorder au personnel de la conservation des Archives et Bibliothèques du Gouvernement local accompagnant de bibliobus dans leurs tournées année 1937," Document: Letter from Simone de Saint-Exupéry Curator of the Archives and Libraries of Cochinchina to Governor of Cochinchina (Cabinet) on November 17, 1937, Number 381 “Tournées du second bibliobus dans les provinces du Transbassac” and “Bibliothèque circulante de la cochinchina.”

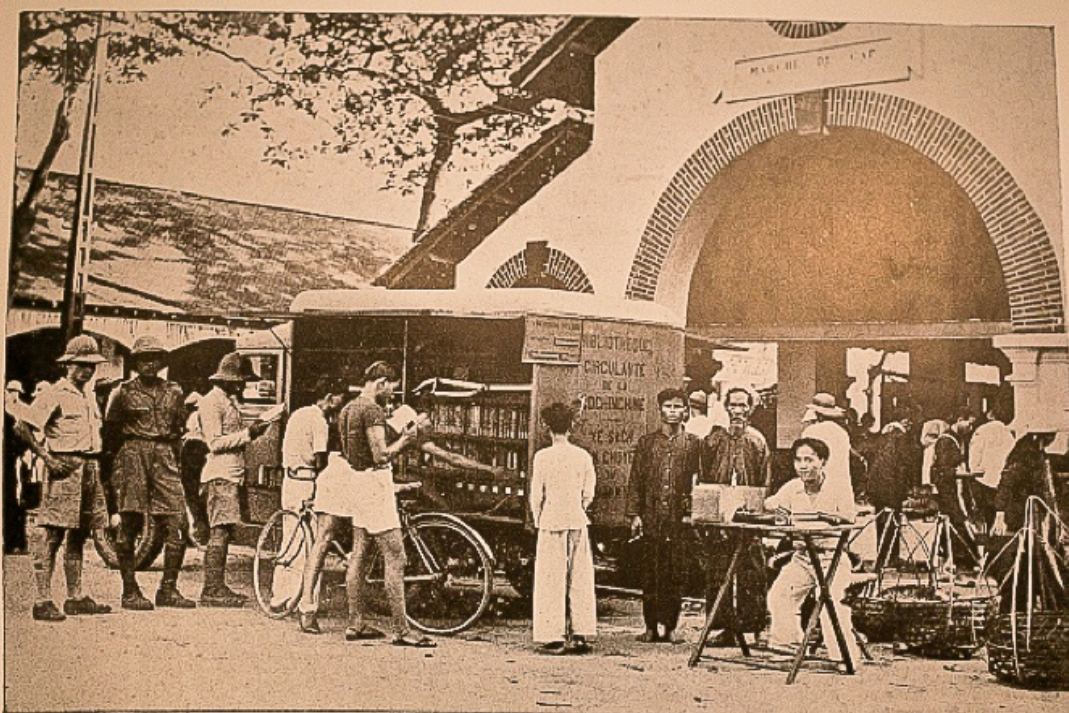
Thủ Dầu Một	November 23, 1937	7AM to 9AM	In front of the Inspector Office
Ba Ria	November 24, 1937	7AM to 9AM	In front of the C.F.A.
Biên Hòa	November 24, 1937	3PM to 3:30PM	Mental asylum
Biên Hoà	November 24, 1937	4PM to 6PM	In front of the Inspector Office or front of the primary school (in case of rain)

Table 4-4. Schedule for the first bibliobus after repairs, departing from Saigon on November 15, 1937. Note the limited opening hours of the bibliobus at each stop as well as its central location in front of administrative offices, schools, or hospitals.⁴⁸³

Due to the success of the first Cochinchina bibliobus, on December 1937 a second bibliobus traveled through eight other provinces of Cochinchina (Bạc Liêu, Cà Mau, Rạch Giá, Hà Tiên, Châu Đốc, Tây Ninh, Gò Công, Ba Ria, and Cap Saint Jacques). Paid a monthly salary of ten piastres each, the secretary Lỗ Công Lạc and driver Trần Văn Trà accompanied this bus wagon as it made its way slowly throughout Cochinchina. This second bibliobus in 1937 served 21,542 readers compared to the first bibliobus which served 10,016 readers in 1936.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 29904 "Dossier relatif à l'indemnité à accorder au personnel de la conservation des Archives et Bibliothèques du Gouvernement local accompagnant des bibliobus dans leurs tournées année 1937," Document: Letter from Lỗ Công Lạc and Trần Văn Trà to the Simone de Saint-Exupéry Curator of the Archives and Libraries of Cochinchina on September 1, 1937.

⁴⁸⁴ Rémi Bourgeois, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1938-1939)*, (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1939).



Un des « Bibliobus » de la Cochinchine devant le marché du Cap St Jacques (p. 15)

Image 4-5. Photograph of the March 1936 Bibliobus of Cochinchina in front of the central market of Cap St. Jacques, published in the 1937-1938 annual report of archives and libraries.⁴⁸⁵ The side of the bibliobus reads “bibliothèque circulante de la cochinchine - Xe sách vãn chuyên [Circulating Library of Cochinchina]”

⁴⁸⁵ Boudet, Paul, *Rapport sur la direction des archives et des bibliothèques (1937-1938)*, (Hanoi, Vietnam: Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1938).



Image 4-6. Photograph of a bibliobus circulating library parked in Saigon, at the Garnier Plaza and in front of the Continental Palace on Rue Catinat. C. 1936-1940.⁴⁸⁶

The 1936 “Learning Manual on Classification of the Libraries” proposed an idealistic pan-Indochina “Central Book Distribution Agency” to lend books to the public in the provinces. With a central headquarters in Hanoi, the agency could work with local provincial capitals, loan and sell books in French and quốc ngữ, and ultimately expand French colonial reach through providing popularization works for Vietnamese.⁴⁸⁷ This proposed agency echoed the visions of the 1929-1930 Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation project. On January 1937, an experimental “bibliothèque et pharmacie roulante” (rolling library and pharmacy) circulated throughout Tonkin, lending books and providing a limited number of medicines free of charge. Equipped with over four hundred works in quốc ngữ and French, the library moved between central markets within a radius of thirty kilometers.⁴⁸⁸

The directorate continued to organize circulating libraries sporadically in the 1940s throughout Tonkin and especially throughout Cochinchina. A 1946 report argued that circulating libraries brought “French culture to the outer isolated regions of Cochinchina, which served as a healthy leisure activity.”⁴⁸⁹ The report estimated that circulating libraries brought more than 23,000 books to the provinces of Cochinchina from 1936 to 1946. Archival folders document the

⁴⁸⁶ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940.”

⁴⁸⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1276 “Manuel d’apprentissage du Classement des Bibliothèques,” 1936.

⁴⁸⁸ Christiane Pasquel Rageau, “Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine Française,” in *Histoire des Bibliothèques Françaises*, ed. Martine Poulain (Paris: Promodis-Ed. du Cercle de la librairie, 1988), 110–114. P. 113.

⁴⁸⁹ ANOM, PB, Folder 83 “Les bibliothèques de l’Indochine,” C. 1946.

Marty actively attempted to track down the books by working together with the local government and local police to find the readers and their home addresses.⁴⁹³ However, many of these attempts were futile. On November 4, 1942, the head of the local government of Cochinchina responded to Saint-Marty's request for help to recover overdue books.⁴⁹⁴ The local administrator expressed that it had been impossible to track down the new addresses of the borrowers from the list of overdue books. Instead, the administrator emphasized that in the future the circulating library should implement a system of guarantors or deposits before permitting readers to lend from the circulating library. Subsequent documents show the continual pursuit of these readers.

On November 28, 1942, the curator Saint-Marty submitted the list of readers who worked for administrative offices in hopes that their department employers would demand fines from the overdue borrowers. The list included a diverse number of readers such as teachers, police officers, nursing assistants, copyists, secretaries, and mechanics. However, by December 17, 1942, the head officer named Arrivets updated Saint-Marty that all of these workers were in fact lower-level employees who had moved on from their positions and were thus unreachable. This exchange of documents shows the important bureaucratic 'control work' involved in making books accessible and sustainable through the circulating library. Saint-Marty attempted to track down readers who violated their library privileges by never returning the books they borrowed. However, there was no protocol enacted to incentivize readers to return the books, except for the threat of losing their borrowing privileges. Since the circulating libraries did not rotate regularly throughout the provinces, some readers possibly chose not to deal with the hassle and costs of mailing their borrowed books back to Saigon Cochinchina Library. Arrivet strongly suggested the French model of guarantees and deposits, but unlike the Saigon Cochinchina Library and the Central Hanoi Library, this guarantee system was not yet implemented in the circulating libraries. Instead, the circulating libraries operated in a decentralized manner with limited staff and unofficial regulations.

Part 3

Wartime Technologies of Information Control: World War II, Vichy Indochina, Wartime Reading, and Direct Propaganda

Authoritarian Censorship and the Bureau of Information, Press, and Propaganda

World War II was a critical turning point in modern Vietnamese history—the beginning of post-colonial Vietnam, a transitional power vacuum for the rise of Vietnamese communism, and the internationalization of Indochina into global military and ideological conflicts. This section shows how World War II and the Vichy state ushered in more authoritarian, direct, and interventionist forms of information control through libraries, publishing, and the press. These policies had their roots in the 1930s French colonial period, as seen in the administrative debates over propaganda strategies such as the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation, central publishing offices, and circulating libraries to counter the spread of anti-colonial sentiment and print media with 'safe' reading matter.' During the 1920s to 1940s under the French Third Republic, the colonial

⁴⁹³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 50342 "Dossier Relatif à la Non-Restitution de Livres Empruntés aux Bibliothèques Année 1942," n.d.

⁴⁹⁴ TTLT2, GC, Folder 50342, Document: Letter number 475-5b from Monsieur Arrivets head of fifth office of local government to the curator of the archives and library of the government in Saigon, November 4, 1942.

state enacted cultural imperialism through more subtle strategies of ‘indirect propaganda.’ Projects to ‘modernize’ schools, sponsor publications, and expand the use of quốc ngữ were expressed through the language of republicanism, public education, literacy, and colonial benevolence. With the military defeat of France in World War II, on June 22, 1940, Marshal Philippe Pétain commanded the signing of the French-German armistice which dissolved the French Third Republic and created an authoritarian regime under Vichy in southern France and the colonial empire. Around the same time, Japanese troops had continued to move into Southeast Asia, occupying Indochina but leaving most administrative procedures and bureaucracy in the hands of the French Vichy colonial government. This political arrangement continued until 1944 with the collapse of Vichy France, followed by a Japanese-led coup de force on March 9, 1945 which officially toppled the French colonial government in Indochina.

In the context of war, authoritarianism, and political ideologies of exclusion and racism, the fascist Vichy administration pursued a much more aggressive policy of direct control of information in the domains of censorship, publishing, distribution, and libraries. The Vichy administration issued new decrees on publishing or reinforced previously lax rules regarding submission of all publications to the censor offices. In the confidential statement on December 5, 1941, the Vichy Governor General of Indochina Admiral Jean Decoux issued to the heads of the local administration a list of newspapers and periodicals “to encourage, to not encourage, or to ignore.”⁴⁹⁵ Decoux explained that the administration could encourage the publications in the following ways: “subsidies, administrative subscriptions, advertisement and insertions of news or interviews by the administration.” Conversely, periodicals not to be encouraged by the administration would not benefit from this source of revenue and support. Works to encourage included the French language periodicals *Impartial*, *Renaissance Indochinoise*, *France-Annam*, *Patrie Annamite*, *Indochine*, *Responsables*, *Ralliement*, *Sports d’Indochine*, and *Legionnaire*. Indigenous language periodicals included *Báo Mới*, *Trung Bắc Chủ Nhật*, *Trung Hoa Nhật Báo*, *Việt Báo*, *Trí Tân Tạp Chí*, *Dân Báo*, *Sài Gòn*, *Trăng An*, *Pathet Lào*, and *Nagaravatta* (Khmer language newspaper since 1936). Periodicals to not encourage included *Voix d’empire*, *Dépêche d’Indochine*, *Tribune Indochinoise*, *Cahiers de la jeunesse*, *Écho d’Extrême-Orient*, *Quotidien d’indochine*, *Nouvelles*, and *Cờ Chiến*.

On June 1941, the Service of Information, Propaganda, and the Press was created with a central Hanoi office and local offices throughout Indochina. The IPP managed the production, control, censorship, and distribution of information and publishing throughout Indochina during the Vichy period.⁴⁹⁶ The IPP also authorized free publishing of official statements, functioning as a public service to distribute administrative news and communiqués. Navy Commandant Marcel Robbe served as the first head of the IPP, followed by Maurice Michaudel from 1944 to March 1945. Michaudel was a colonial administrator in Laos and served as chief of the office of the Lao Resident Superior (1942-1944). The IPP also had local offices throughout Indochina. For example, long-time conservative colonial administrator, Jean Cousseau, served as the head of the local Information Office for Propaganda and the Press in Tonkin [Service local de l’information

⁴⁹⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2135 "Instruction du Gougal de l’Indochine sur la Censure de la Presse et l’épuration des Electeurs et Ouvrages dans les Bibliothèques Publiques en Indochine." Confidential statement 80-S/IPP from Jean Deoux to the Heads of General Services. Document: "Discrimination à faire dans la presse, au point de vue des abonnements administratifs, des insertions payantes et autres avantages." December 5, 1941. Admiral Jean Decoux served as the Governor General of Indochina from July 1940 to March 9, 1945. Decoux applied Vichy legislation and policy in Indochina such as a cult of personality of Marshal Petain against “dissidents” from the circular number 57 CAB on October 31, 1940 and 49/S CAB April 17, 1943.

⁴⁹⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 895 “Réglementation de l’insertion des communiqués dans la presse 1941-1943.”

de la propagande de la presse du Tonkin] from April 1943 until the Japanese coup de force on March 9, 1945. Although created during the Vichy period in 1941, the IPP carried on the legacy of conservative information politics and surveillance from the high colonial period. For example, in the 1930s Jean Cousseau had worked closely with director of the secret police Louis Marty on Governor General Pierre Pasquier's surveillance campaigns of Vietnamese communists.⁴⁹⁷

On August 25, 1942, Navy Commandant Marcel Robbe the head of the Service of Information, Propaganda, and the Press (IPP) sent a confidential statement 1860-IPP/S titled "Instructions on the Censure of the Press" to all the censors located in Hanoi, Haiphong, Hue, Saigon, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, all local offices of the IPP, and the Hanoi and Saigon l'Office Français d'Information.⁴⁹⁸ The instructions replaced all previous censorship policy and reminded censors that all publications (its contents and advertisements), including administrative periodicals, must be submitted to the censor. The instructions began with general censorship principles to censor or delay any suspicious or ambiguous text which might "harm the prestige of France or Indochina, cause unwanted reactions, reveal confidential information, make the Japanese authorities doubtful of our good faith in implementing the common defense agreement." Instructions mandated proofs of all print matter be submitted to the censor at least 24 hours prior to publication.

The report outlined specific themes to be censored for each reading audience such as Japanese, German, Chinese, American, French, and Indochinese readers. For example, to Japanese readers, all content that suggest to Japanese readers the following must be censored: "that our sympathies rest with opponents of [the Japanese], that we do not accept the principles of "Co-Prosperity Sphere", that we have neither confidence in Japan or respect for Japanese things, that we seek to divert the Indochinese to have an alliance with us, that we seek to know or divulge their military secrets." The instructions were most detailed on the topics to be censored for Indochinese readers:

It must be censored all that can give the Indochinese the impression of French contempt for them to bring them to think:
That they are oppressed
That their interest should be in solidarity with people of yellow or Asian race rather than with us.
That France is in moral decline, that the period when France was a Republic was harmful to them
That Indochina is destined sooner or later to detach itself from France, that it is not an integral and essential part of the Empire
Any infringement of the federal idea
Any misplaced expression with respect to the ruling administration and their families
Any gratuitous reference to the corruption of the Indochinese officials

⁴⁹⁷ Cousseau was born in Northern Vietnam and graduated from the École nationale des langues orientales vivantes in Paris. A fluent Vietnamese speaker, Jean Cousseau worked with the director of the Secret Police, Louis Marty, on a colonial intelligence mission to monitor and spy on Vietnamese communists at the Son La prison in northwest Tonkin in 1932. For more on Cousseau, see Christopher E. Goscha, *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954): An International and Interdisciplinary Approach* (NIAS Press, 2015).

⁴⁹⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2135 "Instruction du Gougal de l'Indochine sur La Censure de la Presse et l'épuration des Electeurs et Ouvrages dans les Bibliothèques Publiques en Indochine." Document: Confidential Statement 1860-IPP/S "Instruction sur la censure de la presse," August 25, 1942."

In comparison, a wide legion of topics was censored for French readers: “all that is contrary to the doctrine of the National Revolution defined by the Marshal Petain and the successive Heads of Government” and “all that is likely to awaken old political quarrels.” Besides the censorship of topics for particular audiences, Robbe also listed the following specific topics to censor more seriously and carefully: “France and the National Revolution, French-Indochinese questions, French-Japanese relations, Japanese foreign relations, Japan’s situation in Indochina, and relations with Allied powers (China, Great Britain, United States).” Specifically, for the topic of French-Indochinese questions, censors must remove reading matter alluding to pan-Asian solidarity or Indochinese patriotism at the expense of the French, such as “nationalism and indigenous patriotism or in other words everything that casts doubt on Indochina’s relationship to France; the union of the three Annamese regions; criticism of the previous regime in Indochina; the lowering of the moral and intellectual values from the West (especially if they are French values); ironic assessments of Indochinese literature and customs, of French-Indochinese culture, of the faults of men and women of Indochina; or the memory of physical ill-treatment of the Indochinese.”

Robbe’s confidential instructions reveals official Vichy Indochina policy on information as authoritarian, anti-oppositional, and top-down. These explicit rules on censorship strictly suppress any political, cultural, or social critique of Japan or France, revealing a fragile state authority fearful of dissent. The general Vichy censorship policy forbade elaborate and multi-perspective discussions on contemporary wartime events. Furthermore, the censorship rules show state anxieties over Vietnamese nationalism, Indochinese patriotism, and pan-Asian solidarity together with Japan that ultimately threatens to overthrow Vichy colonial power. Topics must be removed from the press that undermined French authority or instigated revolutionary pan-Asian thinking among Indochinese or a global divide between “the oppressed” and “the oppressors”. Furthermore, Robbe specifically outlined that only news sources directly from Japan such as the national publication *Dōmei*, the *Office Français d’Information (O.F.I.)*, and *Transocean* could be inserted into publications. Other global news sources such as *Reuters*, *United Press*, or *Tass* could only be used if quoted by the three permitted publications. Robbe concluded with a reminder that censorship should occur similarly between French and Indochinese language presses. Remarking that in the past, there was more leeway with overt criticism of French or Westerners in French language presses, Robbe reminded that French and Indochinese are “of the same family” and should thus equally censor the French and Vietnamese language press.

Robbe’s instructions reinforced Decoux’s campaign to spread the “National Revolution” throughout Vichy Indochina—a conservative anti-Semitic, anti-foreign, and anti-Communist Vichy political and ideological program. On December 27, 1942, the GGI Decoux and the IPP addressed the general corps of the Army, Superior Commander of the Troops of Indochina, heads of local administration, director of political affairs, and the director of the archives and libraries regarding the availability of reading matter related to the National Revolution available in libraries.⁴⁹⁹ Decoux requested the names of French works sent to Indochina since the armistice and the books available “in all the military libraries, public and private, in all the libraries and local commissions of Postal Control.” Decoux noted that many of the books sent to Indochina on the topic of the National Revolution have only a limited number of copies and thus should be

⁴⁹⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2313, “Modification à la réglementation des lecteurs indigènes à la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi.” Document: Letter Number 144-N/IPP from GGI Admiral Jean Decoux and the office of the service de l’Information de la propagande et de la Presse.

republished. Governor General Decoux and the IPP pushed the private and public libraries throughout Indochina to spread National Revolution by supplying reading matter on the topic. Shortly afterwards, a department in Vichy France sent over a hundred volumes to Indochina on the National Revolution, economics, biographies of Roger Secretain, Pierre Maurice, and Jack Sanger, and the Leo-Paul Desrosiers' novel *Les opiniâtres (roman de conquête canadienne)* (1941).⁵⁰⁰ An administrator additionally vetted the shipment of books and stated that he "removed a large number of books because they mention our defeat in a heartbreaking and degrading narrative; because they are too subjective, confined to an unbearable individualism; because they are marred by political considerations, thus they deserved to be left in the storage; or they were too novel-like and did not bring any element to moral, social, or economic improvement." From newspapers to libraries, the Vichy period advanced a direct anti-oppositional policy on information and print control through a multi-leveled system of formal and informal censors.

Libraries for Propaganda: Debates to Purge Libraries

How did control of information and print impact the function, content, and role of libraries in Vichy Indochina? Decoux monitored the contents of library collections and prioritized several building projects for the Central Library and Archives in Hanoi.⁵⁰¹ On February 24, 1942, navy commandant Robbe of the IPP studied the existing Indochina publishing, libraries, and distribution system.⁵⁰² Robbe examined the following documents from 1935-1938: reports on the creation of provincial libraries, studies on the American bibliobus, official statements from the Dutch East Indies Balai Pustaka project, and other reports from the Direction of Archives and Libraries of Indochina. Drawing inspiration from 1930s information politics, popular libraries, and distribution networks, Robbe called for the development of more public libraries at the provincial and communal levels for the purpose of distributing official IPP publications. Writing to the heads of local IPP branches in Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, and the heads of local services in Cambodia and Laos, Robbe declared that these new libraries should be furnished with the following:

All works made by the offices of publication and the books vetted by the Office of Censorship of Indigenous publications. In addition to the propaganda pamphlets, these libraries can receive a modest collection of French-Vietnamese books carefully selected by qualified personnel. It would be appropriate on this subject, for Tonkin in particular to solicit the advice of the Service of Archives and Libraries notably in which it concerns

⁵⁰⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2313, Document: Report addressed to the Governor General of Indochina (Service of Information, Propaganda, and Press) on January 29, 1943.

⁵⁰¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 911, "Fonctionnement de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine, 1943-1945," Document: "Note de Documentation destinée à Radio Saïgon (4eme trimestre 1943) from Paul Boudet 6 January 1944 to Monsieur le Gouverneur General (Service de l'I.P.P.)" Paul Boudet reported that by 1943, two important events occurred in the Directorate of Archives and Libraries: the building of a new storage facility to house the increasingly large collection of 130,000 books and newspapers of the Central Library, and the organization of the Imperial Archives of Annam under the first Vietnamese Chartist, Ngô Đình Nhu. Another architectural achievement during 1944 include the building of a wall to secure the central repository from possible aerial bombing.

⁵⁰² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451, Document : Letter number 392, February 24, 1942, le chef du service de l'information, de la propagande, et de la Presse (Bureau de la Propagande Hanoi).

the commissioning of a mobile library attached to a radio-cinema-bus currently in development. I draw your attention again to this matter, which seems to have been somewhat forgotten.⁵⁰³

Besides using the library and bibliobus system as a distribution tool for IPP propaganda, the Vichy administration also recognized the politicizing potential of libraries to inspire a dangerous “spirit of critique.” On March 30, 1942, Captain Pericaud, a military administrator in Saigon wrote to the director of the Saigon Censorship Office requesting the removal of certain politically sensitive material from the municipal, lending, and circulating libraries.⁵⁰⁴ He stated that a certain number of works present a “true danger” and instigate animosity between Vietnamese and French. For example, Jean Marquet’s book *Le Jaune et le Blanc* [The Yellow Race and the White Race] has been read frequently by Vietnamese, who add copious anti-French annotations to the page margins. The administrator argued that certain controversial books such as *Le Jaune et le Blanc* invite anti-French sentiment by Vietnamese readers.⁵⁰⁵

On August 6, 1942, Jean Decoux wrote to Paul Boudet of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in a proposal titled “Purge of the Public Libraries.”⁵⁰⁶ Decoux explicitly forbade in the libraries the “reading of violent assessments of the French in Indochina that inspired a spirit of critique.” Decoux emphasized that the suppression of certain works must also be kept confidential and hidden from readers. Decoux suggested a series of excuses librarians could use such as pretending that certain books were currently checked out to other readers or were in repair in order to prevent reader access to politically sensitive reading matter.

Characterizing the task as a “serious and delicate question,” on October 2, 1942 Boudet responded to Decoux’s demand for widespread suppression of dangerous texts with a thorough study on existing techniques and possible consequences of ‘purge of the public libraries.’⁵⁰⁷ Boudet categorized two existing types of libraries in Indochina by 1942: 1) working libraries such as the central libraries in Hanoi, Saigon, Phnom Penh open to Indochinese and French and 2) lending libraries “with the purpose to give the public a pure distraction or popularization of literary and scientific works.” Boudet reported that working libraries granted the most freedom of access to readers, except for some daily newspapers and works in Hanoi which “are hidden from the eyes of the readers that which we do not want to be seen or read discriminately.” Boudet proposed to Decoux that the following types of works should be added to the category of “restricted”:

1. All the works which are clearly hostile in any way to French colonialism in Indochina or in other colonies;

⁵⁰³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 451, Document : Letter number 392, February 24, 1942, le chef du service de l'information, de la propagande, et de la Presse (Bureau de la Propagande Hanoi).

⁵⁰⁴ TTLT2, GC, Folder 38019 "Dossier relatif au retrait, vol...de livres à la bibliothèque années 1942-1943." Document: Letter from Captain L. Pericaud to the head of the Office of Censorship in Saigon, March 30, 1942.

⁵⁰⁵ However, on August 5, 1942 curator of the Cochinchina Library Saint-Marty pushed back against Pericaud’s complaint and explained that “graffiti” inscriptions such as the marginalia in library books was in fact a historical practice since the early ages of humanity and does not reflect a contemporary display of political dissidence.

⁵⁰⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2135 "Instruction du Gougal de l'Indochine sur la Censure de la Presse et l'épuration des Electeurs et Ouvrages dans le Bibliothèques Publiques en Indochine," Document: "Instruction sur la censure de la presse" August 25, 1942.

⁵⁰⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2135, Document: Confidential letter from Paul Boudet to the Vice Admiral Jean Decoux October 2, 1942.

2. All the works which exceed the moral point of view. Obviously the criteria of morality is difficult to define. For example, the classics such as *Phèdre*, *Candide*, or the works of Zola, are defined by their literary flourish and passionate depiction of manners, and thus cannot be restricted and hidden.⁵⁰⁸

Boudet's list of restricted reading matter appeared to only superficially appease Decoux's strict demands for a purge of the public libraries. The first type of works restricted include overt anti-French works; but the second category regarding morality suggest a more nuanced approach. The Vichy regime promoted ideals of the tradition, family, and nationalism, often relying upon morality as a tool to convey militaristic paternalism and patriotic community.⁵⁰⁹ Boudet seems to signal to Vichy moral pragmatism, suggesting to restrict works which went beyond "a moral point of view." For example, Boudet added Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* to the list of restricted works given that were overtly sexual. Yet, Boudet pushed back against an absolute judgment of literature as moral or excessive. He argued that a 'morality criteria is difficult to define' and censor, for example in complex literary classics such as Jean Racine's dramatic tragedy *Phèdre [et Hippolyte]*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and the works of Émile Zola. Furthermore, Boudet concluded that it would be impossible to restrict all political, philosophical, and literary subjects or else end up removing all the essential collections of the libraries.

In his thorough response to Decoux, Boudet classified the types of readers in the libraries as students, autodidacts, officials, and businessmen. Of this group, Boudet continued to critique the students, described as "the worst clientele, the least careful with books, the least disciplined without exception." He described Vietnamese non-student readers as "autodidacts...who show an ardor against frivolous distractions" and that the library should control more closely the circulation of books to this group of self-motivated readers. Besides expanding the list of restricted works, Boudet proposed to raise the minimum age of admission to the library from 16 to 18 years for working libraries. Boudet concluded with a plea to allow him to carefully undertake this "delicate" work rather than rely upon a single individual whose "personal initiatives and mood indicates if a particular book is harmful." Boudet reminded Decoux that the task of purging all 'criticism' was impossible unless the administration wanted to destroy all libraries: "There is very little [reading matter] that does not have a little malicious criticism; thus the only measure capable of satisfying the worried spirit [of these criticisms] would be the destruction by fire all the libraries, such as in the case of the burning of the Alexandria [library]." This case suggests the hesitation to directly apply Vichy and wartime authoritarian censorship

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Eric Jennings examines the impact of Vichy politics of the "National Revolution" and conservative, authoritarian concepts of "Patrie, Famille, et Travail" upon Vietnamese nationalist sentiment: Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Decoux also advanced a policy of traditionalism in Indochina, rallying behind local unifying forces of hierarchical power such as the mandarins and an imagined traditional lost past prior to French colonialism. Phạm Quỳnh played an important role as Bảo Đại's prime minister to instill this sense of local nationalisms and the mandarin responsibility to cultivate the past. Phạm Quỳnh addressed a class of graduating mandarins in December 1941: "Experience has shown...that it is by turning to traditional institutions, and by invigorating and consolidating them, that we can best ensure the progress... of this people. You know these fundamental institutions well: they are the patriarchal family, the oligarchic community, and the monarchic state. They rest on the same traditions of order and discipline, of hierarchy and authority which are the bases of Annamite society." P. 169.

upon library reading. Policy and practice diverged in regard to control of information and reading.

Besides politics, economic factors might have influenced the removal of certain books from the collection. In 1943, 113 books from the Central Library were put up for auction.⁵¹⁰ The list of books did in fact include some of the ‘controversial’ volumes discussed in the previous year such as Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Voltaire’s *Candide*. However, the editions placed on auction were luxury watercolor editions which sold for a higher value. Other books on the list for auction included illustrated, color, or art bounded editions of popular works such as dictionaries and encyclopedias, *Le roman de Tristan et Iseut* [the 12th century romance of Tristan and Iselut], *La guirlande d’aphrodite* [the colorfully illustrated Aphrodite’s Garland], and *Biblia Sacra* [a cloth bound edition of the Latin Holy Bible]. By auctioning off some of its most valuable books, the Central Library could offset some of the wartime strain on the library budget for personnel, maintenance, and collections.

Wartime Library Reading: Popularity of Lending and Everyday Dynamics

In the context of wartime authoritarian control of information and libraries, how did library reading practices change? A few reports record yearly reader preferences in the Central Library in Hanoi from 1941 to 1945. A yearly report compared the reader statistics between 1943 and 1944, observing the decrease in library use and readers over the course of one year.⁵¹¹ In particular, the Central Library Reading Room in 1944 received 30% less readers than in 1943. The number of consultations of books and periodicals also decreased significantly over the course of one year (over 30% and 47%). However, the number of borrowers who requested special exception to loan books home from the Reading Room increased from 291 borrowers to 491. World War II strained the local economy of food, transportation, and raw materials, resulting in shortages and price increases for everyday living necessities. Furthermore, a devastating famine hit northern Vietnam from October 1944 to 1945, resulting in widespread starvation and economic disarray. An administrator measured the change in cost of living from 1925 to 1944 for a working-class Vietnamese individual to rise 430% in Saigon and 1,040% in Hanoi.⁵¹² The challenges of securing food and work during wartime and the closure of several schools correlated to an overall decrease in Reading Room (reading on site) activity. Furthermore, wartime strains also resulted in paper shortages, increasing the value of books and journals. In the case of the Cambodge Central Library, fines increased tenfold for lost books and double for damaged books.⁵¹³

By May 31, 1944, there were a total of 12,851 Vietnamese readers registered for a Reading Room card and 1,510 for a Lending Section card at the Central Library. Compared to

⁵¹⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1451 “Venté aux Enchères des Livres par la Bibliothèque de l’Indochine 1943,” November 19, 1943.

⁵¹¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669 “Organisation de la direction des archives études bibliothèques de l’indochine, 1945-1946.” Document: Undated document, approximately 1944-1945 “Deuxième Partie: Bibliothèques, Bibliothèques Pierre Pasquier.”

⁵¹² *Revue d’histoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* as cited in Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (University of California Press, 2011). P. 347.

⁵¹³ National Archives of Cambodia, Document: “Postal note number 1181-D from Resident Superior of Cambodia to the Curator of the Central Archives and Library, Phnom Penh on December 27, 1943” as cited in Helen Jarvis, “The National Library of Cambodia: Surviving for Seventy Years,” *Libraries & Culture* 30, no. 4 (October 1, 1995): 391–408. P. 397.

the overall decrease in reader visits and consultations in the Reading Room, the Lending Section increased in popularity in 1944. The Lending Section increased its number of new lending cards by 38% from 1943 to 1944 and distributed 133,895 volumes (approximately 35 checkouts per reader per year). Note that 35 checkouts per reader in Vietnam is significantly high, especially compared to American library users in 1943 who only averaged 16 book checkouts per year.⁵¹⁴ The increase in use of the Lending Section suggests the continued use of the library and the demand for reading matter even in times of war. Furthermore, the increase in book lending also points to the reliance on libraries to access reading matter rather than individual purchases of newspapers and books in the context of rising wartime costs of living.

Reading Room – Central Library Hanoi in 1943 and 1944

	1943	1944	Percentage Difference
Total number of reader visits in one year (Number of readers recorded entering the library)	89,693	61,140	-31.8%
Monthly average of reader visits	334 (Maximum of 599)	223 (Maximum of 519)	-33.2%
Total Book Consultations	91,875	64,153	-30.2%
Total Periodical Consultations	7,181	3,745	-47.8%
Books borrowed home	5,146 volumes (~18 books per borrower)	5,534 volumes (~11 books per borrower)	+7.5%
Number of borrowers who loaned books home	291	491	+68.7%

Lending Section - Central Library Hanoi in 1943 and 1944⁵¹⁵

	1943	1944	Percentage Difference
Total number of readers registered with Lending Card	4,059 (2,432 Europeans, 1,627 Indochinese)	3,826 (2,316 Europeans, 1,510 Indochinese)	-5.7%
Total number new cards registered (not including renewals)	552	763	+38.2%

⁵¹⁴ Kaiser draws these statistics from public libraries in cities with population sizes over 200,00 in the United States of America. Walter H. Kaiser, "Statistical Trends of Large Public Libraries, 1900-1946," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 18, no. 4 (1948): 275–81. P. 278

⁵¹⁵ The same Central Library statistics report that its collection increased by 1,633 volumes, of which 852 were gifts. In total the books on the Lending Section shelves increased to 16,983 books. 700 books had to be destroyed due to overuse and their poor state.

Total volumes distributed	115,656* ⁵¹⁶ (according to last records in 1941)	133,895 (approximately 35 per reader)	+13.6%
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Chart 4-7. A comparison of Reading Room and Lending Section of the Central Library Hanoi between 1943 and 1944.⁵¹⁷ From 1943 to 1944 reading practices transitioned from reading on-site to lending materials to consult at home.

What did Vietnamese and French readers check out from the Lending Section of the Hanoi Central Library? Readers highly preferred the work of Alexander Dumas in the Lending Section Novels Collection. According to statistics of monthly checkouts from the Lending Section recorded June 1942 to May 1943, checkouts of works by Dumas comprised 45% of total checkouts by Vietnamese and 21% by French.⁵¹⁸ Although French readers checked out nearly three times more total books per month than Vietnamese (938 French checkouts compared to 366 Vietnamese checkouts), Vietnamese checked out Dumas almost as much as French (Vietnamese 165; French 199). The astonishing proportion of Vietnamese consumption of Dumas is considered even more sizeable when comparing the other authors which Vietnamese borrowed. Out of an average of 366 checkouts per month by Vietnamese, 165 checkouts were of Dumas, followed at a dramatic comparison with 38 checkouts of Bordereaux, 37 of Delly, and 35 of Balzac.

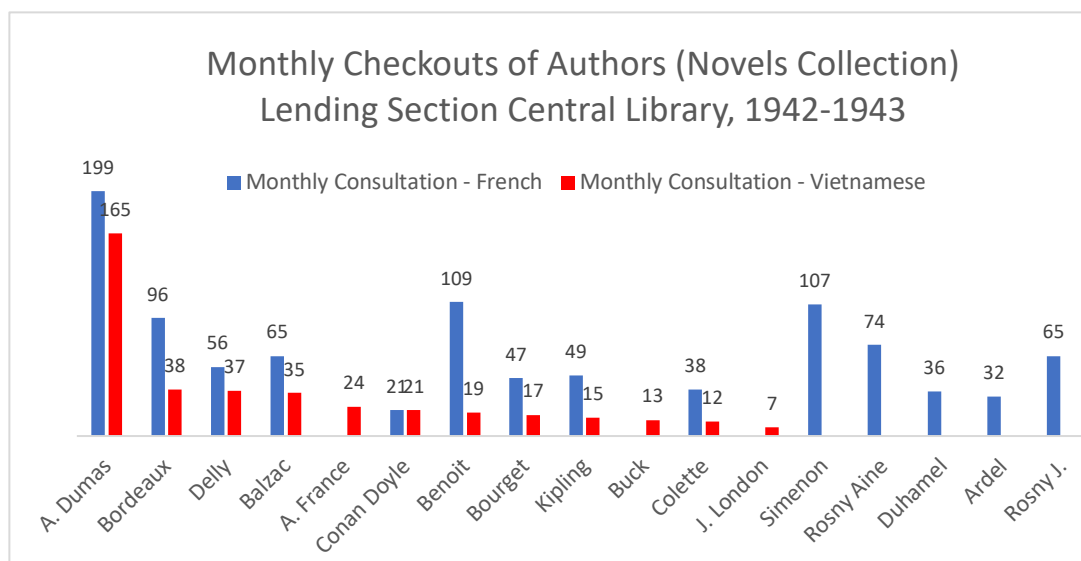


Figure 4-8. Comparison of French and Vietnamese monthly average of checkouts from the Novels Collection in the Lending Section of the Hanoi Central Library, 1942-1943.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1627 “Statistiques Annuelles de 1920 à 1941 du Nombre des Lecteurs, des Livres Prêtés et Consultés à la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1920-1941,” Document: “Fréquentation de la bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi – Salle de lecture et section de prêt réunire.”

⁵¹⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669 "Organisation de la direction des archives études bibliothèques de l'indochine, 1945-1946." Document: "Deuxième Partie: Bibliothèques, Bibliothèques Pierre Pasquier" c. 1944-1945.

⁵¹⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2215 “Rapport sur les Activités de la Bibliothèque de ‘Pierre Pasquier’ Section de Prêt pendant les Années 1939-1943.”

⁵¹⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2215 “Rapport sur les Activités de la Bibliothèque de ‘Pierre Pasquier’ Section de Prêt pendant les Années 1939-1943.”

By 1944, the most popular authors in the Lending Section of the Central Library had shifted. The top five authors preferred by French readers included Pearl S. Buck, Vandermeersh, Henri Ardel, Alexandre Dumas, and Simenon.⁵²⁰ In comparison, the top five authors preferred by Vietnamese readers included Gide, Dumas, Buck, Duhamel, and Kipling. The authors most read in the Lending Section reflect the popular and award winning world literature at the time such as Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, Henri Ardel's women's literature, and Georges Simenon's detective novels.⁵²¹ Popular authors in the Lending Section include André Gide, the pro-Dreyfus, anti-fascist thinker who wrote prolifically and broadly.⁵²² Even in this context of authoritarian Vichy administration, Indochinese readers were able to access the works of André Gide who covered sensitive topics such as sexuality, morality, and Communism. The popularity and the on-the-ground circulation of politically controversial books in the Lending Section suggests the limitations of a complete authoritarian regime of state control of reading and information.

On May 22, 1945, the director of the Saigon Library Saint-Marty reported to the Cochinchinese government offices of a verbal altercation between French reader Mademoiselle Germinet and Vietnamese female secretary-archivist Cao Van Khanh.⁵²³ Germinet demanded to borrow more books from the Saigon Library Lending Section than permitted. The Vietnamese secretary-archivist on duty, Cao Van Khanh denied her this request, reminding her of the Lending Section rules. In response, she violently cursed Cao Van Khanh, to which Khanh notified the police. The director of the library Saint-Marty defended Cao Van Khanh's dutiful professionalism and immediately revoked Germinet's borrowing privileges even before the official legal decision had been made. Saint-Marty called on the government to take the necessary rigorous punishment in order to serve as an example in future cases of violations of library rules. This incident reveals the changing state of racial and gender dynamics between Vietnamese and French in the framework of political and social decolonization. By May 1945, official French colonial rule had been overthrown by the Japanese March 1945 coup de force. However, in everyday practice colonial law and administration still continued at the local level. Saint-Marty, the director of the Saigon Library promptly reported the incident, defending his Vietnamese employee and justifying the necessity of regulations and a policy of consequences for violations. Other subtle incidents reveal the transformation of the colonial library in the context of war and decolonization. On August 1, 1945, a new director of the Saigon Library named "Hong" wrote to the the Director of the Offices of the Government of Saigon requesting

⁵²⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669 "Organisation de la direction des archives études bibliothèques de l'indochine, 1945-1946." Document: Undated document, approximately 1944-1945 "Section de Prêt: Ordre de Preference"

⁵²¹ American missionary to China Pearl S. Buck wrote prolifically on rural China including the bestselling work *The Good Earth* (1931). *The Good Earth* (1931) depicted everyday family life, gender relations, and the subtle cultural and political tensions between revolution, imperialism, and nationalism in rural China. Originally written in English, *The Good Earth* won the Pulitzer Prize (1932) and Nobel prize (1938) and its translations became one of the bestseller works of 1930s and 1940s world literature.

⁵²² Gide's work spanned literature and autobiography including his examination of morality in *L'immoraliste* [The Immoralist](1902), the discussion of homosexuality in *Les faux-monnayeurs* [The Counterfeiters] (1925), and his personal dabbling and ultimate criticisms of Communism in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* [Return from the U.S.S.R.] (1936). This list of books provides insight into the range of popular publications that might have possibly circulated within the Central Library Lending Section or at least, within the local Indochinese reading market.

⁵²³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 48856 "Dossier relative à l'incident survenu à la Bibliothèque de Pret entre Mlle Germinet et M. Cao Van Khanh, secrétaire archiviste année 1945.

additional night watchmen to guard the library from thieves.⁵²⁴ Currently the roof of the library was under construction and the previous night watchmen of the library were now in prison.

Conclusion

This chapter revealed how the colonial state attempted to control its public image and quell potentially subversive ideas by controlling what people read and how they read. The state attempted to control print and the circulation of information through sponsored publishing, libraries, and censorship. Over the course of 40 years, the project of print control in Indochina manifested itself in both private and public initiatives and through different stages of information dissemination—from state subsidized translation, writing, publishing, and censorship, to dissemination in libraries, schools, and book wagons. In the late 1920s, Pierre Pasquier’s governorship researched other publishing and library models such as the Dutch East Indies Balai Pustaka project, the public library and book wagon initiatives in America and Asia, and F.H. Schneider, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, and Émile Vayrac’s early 1910s publishing initiative, the Bibliothèque de Vulgarisation. From these models, the colonial state attempted to create a central bureau and protocol to distribute reading and create popular libraries throughout Indochina. Pasquier and the colonial administration emphasized publishing and libraries as a crucial tool of information control, mass education, and propaganda against incendiary ideologies and political threats.

Although a complete state centralized publishing bureau and network of libraries throughout Indochina never fully materialized, the politics of reading and print control developed its foundation at the institutional interstices of publishing, libraries, and translation during the French colonial period. During World War II, the Vichy French colonial state attempted to enact a more authoritarian and direct mode of information control in publishing, libraries, and propaganda. However, tactics to purge the library met with opposition from Paul Boudet, and library reading of politically sensitive materials still continued to circulate in the Lending Section of the Hanoi Central Library. Furthermore, through the systems of distributing books to the countryside through bibliobus tours, provincial populations gained access to valuable reading matter and improved their literacy through French and Vietnamese popular literature, history books, and morality and science primers. This chapter examined the meanings and mechanics of propaganda in the realms of cultural imperialism, control of information, and circulation of reading matter. Propaganda strategies were not simply top-down state instruments, but were contested, redefined, ignored, and reimagined in publishing and libraries. The next chapter will examine the role of libraries, print control, and documentary heritage in the context of the decolonization of Indochina, the First Indochina War, and the formation of post-colonial Vietnamese states.

⁵²⁴ TTLT2, GC, Folder 49841, “Correspondances de la direction des bureaux, archives et bibliothèque relatives à l’autorisation de recrutement d’un gardien de nuit journalier pour les archives et bibliothèque année 1945.”

Decolonization of Libraries: Documentary Heritage and Building New States, 1945-1958

This chapter examines the decolonization of Indochina's libraries collections from 1945 to 1958 in the context of social and political events of the First Indochina War, urbanization, increased literacy in quốc ngữ (Romanized Vietnamese), and the nationalization of public institutions. I demonstrate how the struggle for political sovereignty over Indochina and Vietnam manifested in the struggle for the management, mission, and collections of the French colonial Directorate of Archives and Library. I argue that the library became a centerpiece of post-colonial nation-building for the French Fourth Republic, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the Republic of Vietnam.

The first four chapters of this dissertation covered the development of libraries throughout the French colonial period. This chapter focuses on the role, forms, and functions of libraries in the post-colonial Vietnamese and French states before, during, and after the First Indochina War (1946-1954). With the official toppling of French colonial rule at the end of World War II, Indochina libraries underwent a gradual and piecemeal process of decolonization. Many of the infrastructural and conceptual underpinnings of the libraries carried on from the colonial period. For example, postcolonial libraries maintained many of the information systems (catalogs and classifications, spatial layout, and personnel) from the colonial period. Furthermore, many of the same principles such as state control of information, suppression of 'dangerous' reading matter, and cultivation of the ideal reader and reading behavior shaped post-colonial library functions. However, the role of libraries in the post-colonial states took on a distinct form because of a new urgency to define legitimate Vietnamese states in the context of civil, ideological, and international-based warfare during the First and Second Indochina War (1946-1975). During these years in both the northern and southern states, building the national library went hand with building the nation-state, governmental institutions, national culture, and popular legitimacy.

This chapter is divided into four parts following the historical events and institutional transformations of the former colonial central libraries in Hanoi and Saigon from 1945 to 1958. By following the histories of these two institutions, I demonstrate how 'decolonization' of the colonial library was a drawn out, non-linear historical process which involved French and Vietnamese administrators and international library organizations working within a changing environment of urbanization, political regime changes, and military conflict. This focused history of the institutions challenges conventional timeframes of 1945 and 1954 as historical ruptures—the everyday functions, personnel, and mission of the libraries often transgressed the political regime changes. By studying institutions, I show how the war and political regime changes actually materialized on the ground in a slow-moving, transitional, tentative state. The decolonization of the library reveals the uneven, fragmented manifestations and changing sovereignties of the post-colonial state, described by Christopher Goscha as the 'archipelago state.'⁵²⁵

⁵²⁵ Goscha describes the domains of competing power during the First Indochina War: "...neither the French and their allies, nor the Democratic republic of Vietnam and theirs, ever possessed sufficient force or weapons to control

Part 1 examines the transformation and translation of the colonial system of libraries from the Japanese *coup de force* of French authorities in March 1945 to the start of the First Indochina War in December 1946. This part considers how the new DRV state envisioned its governmental bureaucracy and institutions in the aftermath of famine (December 1945-May 1945), economic uncertainty, and struggle for state authority in the post-World War II power vacuum in Hanoi. I show how Hồ Chí Minh's new government translated and transformed the operations, terminology, and functions of the library into Vietnamese language and concepts. This section sheds light on the influence of colonial institutions, technologies of governmental bureaucracy, reporting, and documentation within the building of new states.

Part 2 considers how the Hanoi and Saigon Central Libraries continued to operate during the hostilities of the First Indochina War. During the First Indochina War, the French Fourth Republic attempted to regain its empire in Indochina and created a coalition government with Vietnamese administrators based out of Saigon. Reorganizing former French Indochina under the Haut Commissariat de France pour l'Indochine [High Commission of France for Indochina] government, the French retained administrative control of the Hanoi Central Library. In this part, I examine how military battles, war economy, and the struggle for governmental authority affected the everyday practices of library reading in Saigon and Hanoi. I also analyze how contending French, communist, anti-communist, and nationalist state authorities debated the role of libraries and public access to reading matter in a post-colonial context.

Part 3 focuses on the immediate aftermath of the First Indochina War 1954-1955, analyzing the division of the French colonial directorate of archives and libraries. With French defeat and the signing of the Geneva Accords, the libraries and archives were officially handed over to Vietnamese governmental authorities in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the Associated States of Vietnam (which became the Republic of Vietnam in 1955) (South Vietnam), Cambodia, and Laos. This part reveals how decolonization of the services began symbolically in 1946 with the handover of the Saigon Cochinchina Library to the Vietnamese government and in 1953 with the creation of a mixed French-Vietnamese board of directors for the Hanoi Library. With the formal end of the war, the 1954 and 1955 decrees initiated by French and South Vietnamese governments divided the directorate of archives and libraries and transferred a large collection from Hanoi to Saigon. The decrees to divide and transfer the collections emerged from the agreements made at the Geneva Convention for a tentative separation of North and South Vietnam. The tentative and distrustful nature of negotiations at Geneva extended into post-colonial politics of fear and uncertainty. Saigon was designated as the legitimate heir and 'protector' of Vietnamese and colonial cultural heritage, reflecting the international anti-communist coalition at Geneva negotiations and French, American, and South Vietnamese distrust of the future of Communist DRV. The removal of cultural heritage continues to be a point of political contention during the 1960s, as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam investigated the removal of national historical documents and advocated repatriation.⁵²⁶

all of Vietnam all the time. Instead they all administered competing, archipelago-like states, whose sovereignties and control over people and territories could expand and shrink as armies moved in and out and the balance of power shifted accordingly." Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016). P. 172.

⁵²⁶ In 1966, the Ministry of Culture of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam conducted a study of all the materials on Vietnam which were currently held in libraries in France, China, Japan, and the Vatican. This study raised the question of patrimony and the challenges of the DRV to reassemble a national history based only on the existing cultural artifacts in the DRV. TTLT3, BVH, Folder 1612 "Kế Hoạch Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia về Việc Sưu Tầm, Thu Thập Sách Báo, Tài Liệu Của Việt Nam ở Nước Ngoài Năm 1966," February 5, 1966.

Part 4 examines how the new Republic of Vietnam defined the social and political mission of a national library in the early years of nation building (1955-1958). I show how the development of the Saigon library pursued two intersecting visions of the library as both ‘national’ and ‘public.’ This part also reveals how the national library of Saigon conceived of itself as a service of national heritage to build a core collection of Vietnamese literature, historical and contemporary periodicals from its inherited Hanoi collections and colonial Cochinchina Library. Furthermore, the national library envisioned itself as a modern, public service of popular education for the Saigon urbanites and university students to connect with global news and literature. The social and educational role of the post-colonial Saigon library in the 1950s has striking parallels with the Hanoi Central Library Reading Room of the 1930s. These similarities point to the formative role of libraries as a social, public space for self-learning among urban students and readers.

Part 1

Translating the Meaning and Mission of the Colonial Library: Decolonization and the Early DRV State, March 1945 - December 1946

Transitional Decolonization of the French Administration: March 1945 Japanese Coup

The decolonization of the libraries and archives officially began with the Japanese *coup* in March 1945 which removed the French colonial administration.⁵²⁷ With support from the Japanese, emperor Bảo Đại declared Vietnam’s independence and Trần Trọng Kim was named the prime minister. The Japanese administrator S. Kudo served as the first non-French director of the archives and libraries from March to August 1945. Kudo proceeded to replace all French high-level administrators with Vietnamese personnel. Prior to decolonization in 1945, the Directorate of Archives and Library consisted of the Central Library, Archives, and Legal Deposit in Hanoi and library and archives branches in Saigon, Hue, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane. On June 1, 1945, a new decree promoted several Vietnamese librarian-archivists to administrative positions at the Directorate in Hanoi: Ngô Đình Nhu (the curator of the archives and libraries of Annam) became Deputy Director of Archives and Libraries, Trần Văn Kha (senior archivist-librarian) was now head of the Library section of the Hanoi Central Library, and Lê Hữu Cúc (senior secretary) took on the role as head of the Archives Section.⁵²⁸ Kudo requested that the former directors and head curators Paul Boudet, Rémi Bourgeois, and Simone de Saint-Exupéry maintain their role as “advisors” to the Japanese Director Kudo.⁵²⁹ Kudo noted

⁵²⁷ Japanese *coup de force* on March 9, 1945 ousted such French colonial administrators as Jean Cousseau. Jean Cousseau, who served as the head Information Office for Propaganda and the Press in Tonkin [Service local de l’information de la propagande de la presse du Tonkin] in April 1943 and head of the Bureau of Vietnamese Affairs (Service des affaires annamites) in the Resident Superior of Tonkin in December 1944, was ousted and interned by the Japanese. When Cousseau was released, he continued to work with the French Fourth Republic on the mission to re-instate colonial rule in Indochina. On October 1945, Cousseau was the chief of the Office of Political Affairs for the Commissioner for Northern Indochina and worked closely with the High Commissioner Georges Thierry d’Argnelieu and Léon Pignon.

⁵²⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669 “Organisation de la direction des archives études bibliothèques de l’indochine, 1945-1946.” Document: Decree on July 14, 1945.

⁵²⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669, Document: Letter from S. Kudo Director of Archives and Libraries of Indochina to the GGI (Personnel Department) in Hanoi on May 28, 1945. Nguyen Van Suoc would replace Lê Hữu Cúc after Suoc returned from leave in six months.

Ngô Đình Nhu was “qualified with the necessary credentials (of archivist-paleographer) and also knowledge of the great traditional culture” in order to help Kudo to reorganize the entire libraries and archives service. These transformations signaled a decolonization of all operations, including the management of the libraries and archives. On July Nhu left to Huế to work at the Institute of Culture and Phạm Đình Giếm took over as interim deputy-director of the Central Library in Hanoi.

At the time of this transition in March 1945, reports recorded the following list of European personnel working in the directorate of Archives and Libraries: Paul Boudet (age 57, male, French, advisor, 48 boulevard Rollandes, Hanoi), Rémi Bourgeois (age 48, male, French, curator of the archives, 66 boulevard Carnet, Saigon), Simone de Saint-Exupéry (age 47, female, French, deputy archivist-librarian, 31 Rue Borgnis Desbordes, Hanoi), Simon Ban Nguyen (age 52, male, French, building manager, 31 Rue Borgnis Desbordes, Hanoi), and La Faugere (age 24, female, French, archivist-librarian, 190 Avenue Grand Buddha, Hanoi).⁵³⁰ The complete administrative replacement of French administrators progressed slowly. Between March and August 1945, Kudo repeatedly requested the implementation of his appointments of Vietnamese administrators.⁵³¹

In Cambodia, the Japanese *coup de force* of March 9, 1945 resulted in the handover of archives and library management to Cambodian staff.⁵³² The Central Library and Archives of Cambodia closed from March 10th to the 16th and reopened on the 17th with a French curator. By the 27th of March the operations of the Cambodian archives and library was passed over to Mak Ok, the most senior Cambodian staff member. Two Vietnamese archivist-librarians were also replaced by lower-level Cambodian staff. However, after the signing of the accords between the Cambodian government and the Commission of the French Republic in Cambodia in January 1946, the administration slowly returned to that of the French colonial period prior to the Japanese coup in 1945. For example, Jacques Quesnel was reinstated as head curator and continued to direct the Cambodia Library until he retired on November 30, 1947. Mak Ok returned to his previous job as head secretary of the Cambodia Library.

August Revolution and ‘Translating’ Colonial Infrastructure during the Early DRV State

Before many of the Japanese administrative changes in Hanoi were implemented, the dropping of the atomic bomb, Japanese capitulation and the end of World War II ushered in a power vacuum throughout Indochina. On August 19, 1945 the Việt Minh seized power in Hanoi and continued to gain power throughout Annam and Cochinchina for the rest of the month of August. The Việt Minh had its origins since the 1930s, when communist and nationalist groups such as the Indochinese Communist Party organized throughout Vietnam, gathering support locally as well as collaborating with global communist movements in the Soviet Union and

⁵³⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669, Document: Situation of European Personnel at the Directorate of Archives and Libraries, May 2, 1945 Signed S. Kudo and Paul Boudet.

⁵³¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669, Letter from S. Kudo Director of Archives and Libraries of Indochina to the GGI (Personnel Department) in Hanoi on May 28, 1945. Nguyen Van Suoc would replace Lê Hữu Cúc after Suoc returned from leave in six months. Document: Decree on July 14, 1945.

⁵³² TTLT1, GGI, Folder 1839 “Rapports sur le fonctionnement du Service des archives et des bibliothèques au Cambodge, 1945-1936, Document: Report by the curator, Phnom Penh, February 25, 1946” as cited in Jarvis p. 398. Some reports note that during the period of World War II, the March 1945 *coup de force*, and the immediate aftermath, many French and Vietnamese administrators and residents departed Phnom Penh and took with them books from the Reading Room and Lending Section of the Cambodia Library.

China. By 1941, the Indochinese Communist Party expanded its strategy from proletarian internationalism to national liberation and developed a new, broadly defined nationalist front, the Vietnamese Independence League known as the Việt Minh. Throughout the Japanese-Vichy rule in Indochina, the Việt Minh developed bases of support throughout remote areas of Northern Vietnam. Led by the charismatic and internationally connected Hồ Chí Minh and the military leader Võ Nguyên Giáp, the Việt Minh recruited a wide range of people such as peasants, women, ethnic minorities, and village leaders towards the cause of independence from French colonialism. The Việt Minh gained many supporters from the population of desperate and angry peasants impacted by the French-Japanese economic policy and a devastating famine in Tonkin and Annam from October 1944 to May 1945. The August Revolution of 1945 culminated with the official handover of power from emperor Bảo Đại and prime minister Trần Trọng Kim to the provisional government led by president Hồ Chí Minh. On September 2, 1945 Hồ declared independence from France and formed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with its base in Hanoi. In September, British, Indian, Chinese, and American troops occupied Indochina to maintain diplomatic negotiations and the handover from Japanese authority.

From August 1945 to December 1946, the early DRV state attempted to build fundamental state operations by relying upon existing colonial institutions. Although the Việt Minh was the largest political party with the communists holding the administrative lead, the new state was weak. To maintain peace between political factions and the transitional state, Chinese republican troops occupied Hanoi until June 1946.⁵³³ In the initial years the DRV administrators prioritized state building rather than proselytizing political ideologies. For example, the early DRV granted citizenship to all Vietnamese nationals as well as minorities and implemented a new system of identification, census, taxation, and recruitment for soldiers. Christopher Goscha describes the administrative apparatus of the early DRV as a ‘colonial graft.’⁵³⁴ Many of the public infrastructures, schools, services, presses, and offices remained the same in structure and Vietnamese government administrators from the colonial period also remained in their positions. On the surface, many of the departments retained their personnel and functioned similarly as in the colonial period. However, government institutions re-evaluated, defined, and translated its functions into the Vietnamese language under a national rhetoric.⁵³⁵

Through the process of literal translation, government institutions such as the library also redefined its services, overall mission, and political role in the new post-colonial Vietnamese context. On September 8, 1945, Võ Nguyên Giáp Chairman of the Provisional Government [Chủ tịch chính phủ lâm thời] issued decree number 13 which absorbed the French colonial Directorate of Archives and Libraries and Department of Public Instruction [L’instruction publique], all museums, public libraries (excluding libraries of public departments), institutes, and the ÉFEO into the Quốc gia Giáo dục [Ministry of National Education]. The new state positioned the library as well as other cultural heritage institutes within the framework and administration of national education. As part of the decolonization of buildings, official French

⁵³³ Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016). P. 160. With the withdrawal of Chinese troops and security apparatus in June 1946, the DRV security and military forces attacked its opponents such as the Vietnamese Nationalist Party, the Vietnamese Revolutionary Alliance, the Greater Vietnam in Hanoi, the Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai. Christopher Goscha characterized these early cases of violence as the beginning of the Vietnamese civil wars which continued through until 1975.

⁵³⁴ Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016). P. 174.

⁵³⁵ The former Indochina government bulletin, *Journal officiel de l’Indochine* was renamed the *Công Báo Dân Quốc Báo*. The bulletin announced the new government’s early decrees which renamed and restored essential government institutions of schools, banks, postal service, transportation, police, and newspapers.

names were also renamed under a nationalistic convention. For example, On October 20, 1945, the Pierre Pasquier Library in Hanoi was henceforth named the National Library [Quốc gia Thư viện], the Louis Finot Museum in Hanoi renamed National Museum Institute [Quốc gia Bảo tàng viện], and the Blanchard de la Brosse Museum in Saigon renamed Gia đình Museum Institute [Gia đình bảo tàng viện]. However, many of the documents still continued to refer to the Hanoi National Library as the “Central Library” or the “Pierre Pasquier Library.” Many of the Vietnamese personnel who worked in the colonial directorate of archives and libraries continued their positions or were promoted into temporary managerial positions. In Decree Number 21 signed on September 8, 1945, Ngô Đình Nhu was designated as the director of the Nha Lưu trữ công văn và Thư Viện toàn quốc [Department of Archive Records and Nationwide Library].⁵³⁶ In December 1945, Paul Boudet and Simone de Saint-Exupéry were designated as advisors to the Hanoi library and were based out of the Saigon library at 34 Lagrandière.⁵³⁷

As part of early state building, many comparison surveys were conducted to understand the effectiveness of certain state functions and institutions. These initiatives literally translated colonial institutions and its administrative taxonomy as well as evaluated its roles and responsibilities. On September 18, 1945, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued Circular Number 18 to the Ministry of National Education to standardize all administrative language and paperwork into Vietnamese.⁵³⁸ The ministry requested that all governmental offices submit a list of specialized administrative vocabulary in Vietnamese and French so that the government could move towards linguistic standardization in Vietnamese. Ngô Đình Nhu from the Archives and Libraries submitted a list of specialized libraries and archives words in French with Vietnamese translations and simple explanations of certain administrative functions. For example the “Bureau de la Bibliographie [Bibliography Office]” became the “Phòng thư mục,” the “Régie du Dépôt Légal de l'Indochine [Office of Legal Deposit in Indochina]” was translated to “Department of legal deposit of national cultural products” with the Vietnamese explanation “all printed works, music, film, photographs, records... must be submitted according to the January 31, 1946 decree and the edict from February 12, 1946.”⁵³⁹ The Salle de lecture [Reading Room] became the Phòng đọc sách “room where readers read books” and the Section de Pret [Lending Section] became the Phòng mượn sách “room where readers come to borrow books to read at home.”⁵⁴⁰ The process of linguistic and political translation resulted in the constant changes, duplicate names, and partitions of governmental bodies. For example, the French colonial Directorate of Archives and Libraries was henceforth referred interchangeably as “nha [bureau or office]” or “sở [department or office]” of Archive Records and Nationwide Library [Nha lưu trữ công văn và Thư viện toàn quốc or Sở lưu trữ công văn và thư viện toàn quốc].

⁵³⁶ Võ Nguyên Giáp also signed Decree Number 21 on September 8, 1945. “Ngô Đình Nhu - Nhà lưu trữ Việt Nam thời kỳ 1938-1946,” *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu và Phát triển*, no. 6-7 (2013): 104-5. However, it seems that Nhu left to work in central Vietnam, leaving most of the work to Phạm Đình Giếm. Nhu returned to Hanoi on May 20, 1946 and continued to sign official libraries and archives decrees until November 1946.

⁵³⁷ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102 “Hồ Sơ về Tổ Chức và Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Nam Phần Năm 1951-1957,” Document: “Lịch sử của Thư viện quốc gia Việt-Nam” c. 1954-1957.

⁵³⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1581 “États Statistiques des Noms Courants (Française-Vietnamiens) de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine, 1945,” Circular Number 18 from Hoàng Minh Giám, Bộ trưởng Bộ Nội Vụ Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hoà to Ông Bộ Trưởng Bộ Quốc Gia Giáo Dục. Hanoi, September 18, 1945.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

DRV Evaluation of the National Library in Hanoi: Decreased Use and Proposed Developments of Mobile and Neighborhood Libraries

Linguistic translation accompanied the re-evaluation of the function and mission of government institutions. The early DRV government produced an abundant number of charts and statistics, such as those evaluating the roles, responsibilities, and changes in state institutions such as the libraries and archives. These studies also evaluated long-term inequality or inefficiency in the libraries under the French colonial regime and the impact of governmental transition. In 1946, two important surveys were conducted to examine the archives and libraries in Vietnam. In the first survey titled “Statement from the March 9th Coup d’état to the end of 1945” signed February 9, 1946 the Service of Archive Records and Nationwide Library [Nhà lưu trữ công văn và thư viện toàn quốc] compared the National Library (Quốc gia Thư viện) in 1944 and 1945.⁵⁴¹ Comparative statistics were recorded on the number of readers, books consulted, books donated, books purchased, legal deposit in both the Reading Room and the lending section of the national library in 1944 and 1945. A third column was designated for the difference from 1944 to 1945. The records show a large decrease of readers and books used between 1944 and 1945.

	1944	1945	Difference
READING ROOM			
Number of readers	43,958	20,263	-23,695
Number of books read	46,239	20,900	-25,339
Number of books added to the collections	2,389	2,632	243
Books purchased	1,973	1,915	-58
Legal Deposit	450	893	443
LENDING SECTION			
Number of borrowers	48,075	19,741	-28,334
Number of books loaned	96,278	39,582	-56,694
Number of books added to the collections	1,702	1,458	-244

Chart 5-1. Comparative statistics between 1944 and 1945 collected by the Service of Archive Records and Nationwide Library in 1946. Note that the number of readers, books read, and books purchased in both the Reading and Lending Section drop significantly from over the course of one year in 1945. However, for the Reading Room, there is a small increase in number of books added to the collection and legal deposit in 1945.

The Director of the Service of Archive Records and Nationwide Library concluded that there were four specific reasons for the decrease in numbers between 1944 and 1945: 1) Many schools had closed or transferred out of Hanoi, 2) the library was no longer open during the evenings, 3) the number of foreign readers have decreased to nearly zero (while in 1944 they accounted for the majority), and 4) finally many of the books are needed for use by government

⁵⁴¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1537 “Réorganisation et fonctionnement de la Direction des archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1945-1946,” Document: “Tờ trình từ ngày đảo chính m ồng 9 tháng 3 đến hết năm 1945” Report by Service of Archive Records and Nationwide Library [Sở lưu trữ công văn và thư viện toàn quốc] signed February 9, 1946.

agencies for research. Besides these reasons, the historical context of the war economy and governmental transition might have contributed to the overall decrease in library use. The Japanese war economy depleted Indochina food and supply lines and pulled the local economy into near collapse. Together with poor rice harvests and a famine in 1944-1945, Tonkin experienced widespread starvation and social discontent. With the drastic political, economic, and military transformations in 1945, libraries also underwent challenges in operations and readership. The archives reflect the economic shortages in paper, as demonstrated in the reuse of the backside of old reports and the use of a lower quality paper and ink. Furthermore, the political upheaval also raised certain threats to the Hanoi library collection. On September 15, 1945, the acting director of the Pasquier Library noted that the buildings of the Central Library and Archives on 48 Nguyễn Trai Street (previously 48 Rollandes) should be designated for the librarian-archivists to reside in order to “protect the materials night and day and to prevent (the materials) from theft and fire.”⁵⁴² However, even with the many difficulties, the Central Library in Hanoi only halted for a few days and continued to operate between 1944 and 1946.

The report “Statement from the March 9th Coup d’état to the end of 1945” also included another section titled “Proposed Work.” Depending upon the improvement of the state budget, the improvements proposed include the following: new equipment for the National Library book storerooms; the expansion of operating hours of the Reading Room and Lending Section from 8AM to 5PM to 8AM to 8PM (as well as the improvement of lighting in the rooms); a “xe sách” [mobile library] project to bring books to a larger number of readers in the provincial areas so they can benefit from the “light of literature;” the building of additional bookshelves; the development of neighborhood libraries (Thư viện khu phố), which “provide popular and valuable books to those outside the geographic reach of the national library and the city of Hanoi.”

Once or twice each week, a committee would designate a place and organize an event for the lending and returning of books. People could leisurely come to this area, consulting these “books which find their readers” [sách đi tìm người] and in turn, would produce a community of readers and functioning library that would henceforth be called a “People’s Library [Bình dân thư viện].” The proposal for a mobile library seems to be modeled on Paul Boudet’s colonial project of the bibliobus and distributing ‘good reading’ to the people. However, the proposals for neighborhood libraries and people’s libraries distinctly stand out from previous top down centralized library initiatives during the colonial period. The community libraries focus on frequently providing popular reading to the countryside provinces and developing a community practice of reading.⁵⁴³

The second survey was titled “Statement from August 1945 to September 1946” and was signed September 12, 1946 by Interim Director Trần Văn Kha of the Service of Archive Records and Nationwide Library.⁵⁴⁴ The report compared the years 1944-1945 and 1945-1946. By 1946,

⁵⁴² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1669 “Organisation de la direction des archives études bibliothèques de l’indochine, 1945-1946.” Document: Letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 15, 1945.

⁵⁴³ The library policy of building collections of “books which find their readers” shaped much post-colonial Communist cultural projects in the 1950s and 1960s. This policy is the opposite of “readers find books” [người sẽ đi tìm sách] where library development relied upon reader’s individual initiative to search for books. TTLT3, BVH, Folder 7, “Báo Cáo Tổng Kết Hội Nghị Thí điểm Nhà Văn Hoá Nông Thôn Toàn Miền Bắc Của Bộ Văn Hoá Năm 1956,” October 1956.

⁵⁴⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1537 “Réorganisation et fonctionnement de la Direction des archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine, 1945-1946,” Document: “Tờ trình từ tháng 8 năm 1945 đến tháng 9 năm 1946” Report by Service of

the Hanoi library Reading Room and Lending Section had extended their hours from the afternoon to 7PM, and each day the number of readers had increased. According to official state policy, no more books “are necessary” for purchase for the library for the 1945-1946 year. However, that same year, a large number of legal deposits (1,193) and book gifts (1,232) still were added to the library collections. Furthermore, there were 436 new reader card applications. In the Reading Room, the library provided consultation of periodicals 4,821 times and 34,592 books. The report declared the importance of the library for economic development and state function: “The Reading Room is not only a place for readers to research but also an opportunity to consult necessary documents to build the industrial sector. The Reading Room offers 1,832 important books for government offices, unions, and professionals to consult.”

Library Book Acquisition (Chart of Comparison of Volumes between the Years 1944-1945 and 1945-1946)		
	1944-1945	1945-1946
Books purchased	3,256	0
Books received as gifts	1,712	1,232
Legal Deposit	505	1193
Total	5,473	2,425

Chart 5-2. Note that the total number of books acquired by the library decreased 44% from the years 1944-1945 to 1945-1946. Nevertheless, the 1945-1946 year acquired more than double the number of legal deposits than the previous year.

In 1945-1946, the borrowing room lent 1,308 books (in 1945 the borrowing room lent 1,975) to 220 foreigners (mainly French) and 472 Vietnamese readers. After the Japanese *coup* in March 9, 1945, the library recorded that 843 Europeans and 279 Vietnamese library readers ceased to return to the library and never returned 3,077 checked out books from the Lending Section. The report recorded other challenges in everyday library preservation, such as the alarming insect infestation which was rapidly spreading throughout the library, destroying many bookshelves and books.

These two reports are significant because it reveals the ways in which H ồ Chí Minh’s early DRV state inherited and evaluated colonial institutions such as the libraries. The report not only compared the impact of independence upon library use, but also proposed new projects for the library moving forward. In the section “Proposed Work,” the new director Trần Văn Kha envisioned the expansion of geographic reach of the library through the continuation of the colonial project of bibliobus [xe sách] and the development of local “People’s Popular Library [Bình dân thư viện]. However, there is no archival documents which show any governmental initiative to carry out this proposal until after the end of the First Indochina War. Furthermore, these reports reveal important everyday constraints of library function in a time of government transition. Limited budgets for book purchases and rising threats from insects, theft, and fire on the valuable collections point to the challenges of maintaining library function with limited personnel and government funding.

Archive Records and Nationwide Library [Sở lưu trữ công văn và thư viện toàn quốc] signed September 12, 1946 by Interim Director Trần Văn Kha.

Reading Tastes, Genre Preferences, and Operational Constraints in the Central Library Hanoi, 1945-1946

In spite of the many challenges in preservation and development, the Central Library still was able to collect robust statistics on reader behavior. From August 1945 to August 1946, the Central Library recorded the monthly number of consultations of books in the Reading Room by genre.⁵⁴⁵ Compared to the 1941 number of 96,997 consultations, the 1945 to 1946 year only recorded a total of 33,914 book consultations in the Reading Room. The dramatic decrease of Reading Room consultation numbers in 1945 to almost a little over a third of the numbers in 1941 is reasonable given other demands on everyday life such as economic inflation and famine, political instability and economic uncertainty due to World War II and the governmental transition. Compared to previous years during French colonial period, the proportion of genres consulted in the Reading Room in 1945-1946 differs significantly. In the French colonial period, literature was often the most popular type of work consulted—for example 30% in 1925 and 47% in 1941. In comparison, 1946 shows a more even distribution of popular genres such as literature (17%), Indochina (15%), Current Affairs (15%), and Periodicals (14%).

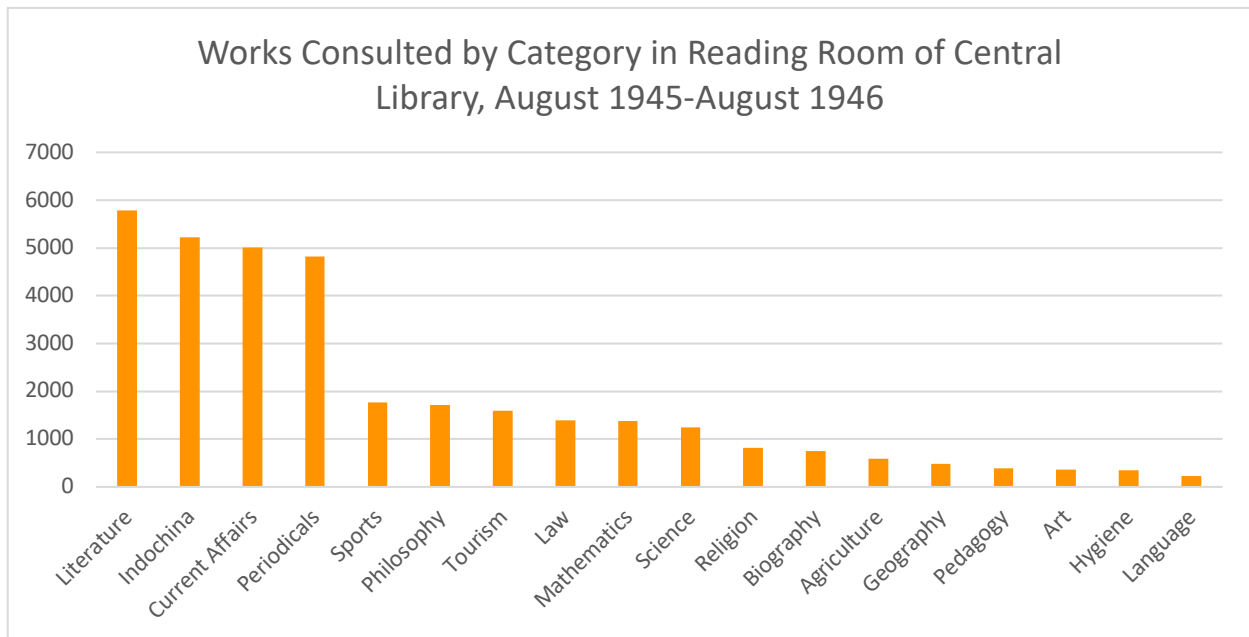


Diagram 5-4. Besides literature, the popular categories of Indochina, Current Affairs, and Periodicals focus on local politics and events. This shift away from literature towards local needs suggests the use of the Central Library for reference and administrative needs rather than primarily for leisure and study as in the colonial period.⁵⁴⁶

This new distribution could be due to the fact that many French had departed from the city and students were possibly not using the Reading Room as much during this transitional

⁵⁴⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2211, “Rapports sur les activités de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine pendant les années 1938-1939 et 1944-1946,” Document: “Quốc gia thư viện- phòng đọc sách - bản kê khai từ tháng và từ loại.”

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

period. Furthermore, urban intellectuals might prefer to access their reading matter from other sources such as Vietnamese periodicals and smaller association reading rooms.

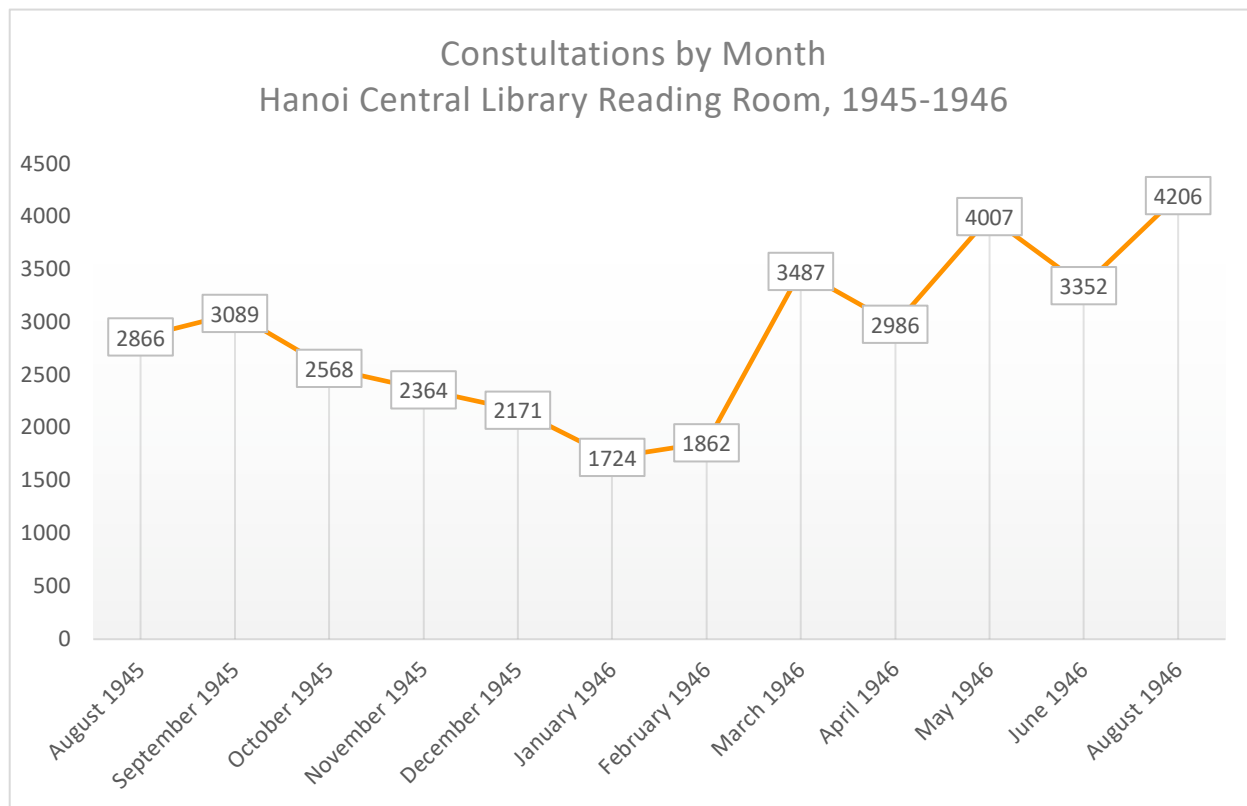


Diagram 5-5. The above chart records the change in total consultations of the Reading Room between August 1945 and August 1946. There is a gradual decline in Reading Room use between October 1945 and February 1946, which could be due to a combination of reasons—from political instability, economic constraints, closure of schools, to even the availability of light in the Reading Room during winter months.⁵⁴⁷

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Central Library confronted operational challenges due to a constant lack of supplies, personnel, funding, and equipment to maintain the library, opening hours, and services. On December 7, 1945 the Ministry of National Education University Division requested the Central Library to extend its operating hours to 7PM so that administrators, workers, and university students could come to the library after their work or classes. However, Ngô Đình Nhu stated that in order to extend the operating hours, the Department of Archive Records and Nationwide Libraries needed at least 7 more temporary personnel (2 secretaries and 5 orderlies).⁵⁴⁸ At the time, the Department of Archive Records and Nationwide Library employed 33 full-time workers. Nhu added that other positions such as

⁵⁴⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2211, “Rapports sur les activités de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine pendant les années 1938-1939 et 1944-1946,” Document: “Quốc gia thư viện- phòng đọc sách - bản kê khai từ tháng và từ loại.”

⁵⁴⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1559 “A.s. Ajournement de l’ouverture de la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi jusqu’à 19 Heures pour Manque d’employé et de Lamps 1946,” Document: Letter number 1835 on December 15, 1945 from Ngô Đình Nhu to the Ministry of National Education.

nightguard, gardeners, and bookbinders had a high turnover rate, and requested that the department be able to replace these employees without prior approval from the Ministry of National Education.

Besides issues with reliable personnel, the library also lacked enough light for the Reading Room and storage rooms, especially during the darker winter months. In letter 1843 on December 19, 1945 Nhu requested 50 light bulbs for all the lamps missing light bulbs and a monthly supply of 12 light bulbs for replacements. Nhu requested that future payments be paid for by government check because the library could no longer access its previous budget.⁵⁴⁹ Nhu noted the dire lack of light bulbs: since August, the library was only able to purchase 3 light bulbs in cash. The challenge for securing light bulbs did not just impact the library. In January 17, 1946, the municipal administration reported that they themselves could not procure light bulbs for their office. Instead they suggested that the library purchase directly from the light bulb factories. This case reveals the everyday challenges of personnel and supplies that prevented the operations of the libraries and other administrative offices in the new state in 1945-1946.

Reference Matter on How to Build a New State: The Department of Archive Records and Nationwide Library's Role in Governmental Transition and Documentation Training

The National Library [Quốc gia thư viện] also played an important role by actively providing reference materials for Vietnamese administrators to build up the new post-colonial state. Sometime in 1945 to 1946, the DRV state requested the library to assemble an official catalog of library books on the topic of politics.⁵⁵⁰ The list featured political works ranging from nation building, patriotism, political philosophy to histories of revolution and colonialism. Some works of interest include the following:

- *Inventaires I: La Crise sociale et les idéologies nationales* by Raymond Aron, Célestin Bouglé, Étienne Dennery, Georges Friedmann, Élie Halévy, Robert Marjolin, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1936) – a social scientific study led by the Center of Documentation at the Paris L'École normale supérieure on the problem of the middle class in French society during the Third Republic
- *Political Handbook of the World, 1940* by Walter H. Mallory, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Council on Foreign Relations, 1940) – the standard reference volume on world events, governments, political parties, and press policies in every country around the world
- *L'Homme et l'État Totalitaire*, by Richard Nikolaus von Coudenhove-Kalergi, (Paris: Plon, 1939) – Coudenhove-Kalergi was an Austrian-Japanese political philosopher and advocate of pan-European integration and respect to human liberties. He was opposed to antisemitism, Nazism, and the political models of Bolshevism, totalitarianism, and dictatorship.
- *L'Indo-Chine française: étude politique, économique et administrative sur la Cochinchine, le Cambodge, l'Annam et le Tonkin* by Jean-Louis de Lanessan, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1889) – a political economic, and administrative study of French Indochina

⁵⁴⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1559, Document: Letter from Ngô Đình Nhu to Ministry of Internal Affairs on December 19, 1945, Letter Number 1843.

⁵⁵⁰ TTLT1 DABI, Folder 1649 “Liste des Ouvrages Politiques à la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine,” Document: “Bảng kê khai sách ở QUỐC GIA THƯ VIỆN v ề chính- trị” c. 1945-1946.

- *L'Indochine, erreurs et dangers: Un programme* by Fernand Bernard, (Paris: Charpentier, 1901) - a study on the colonial operations (on the ground) of the administration in Indochina with particular attention to taxation policies

This book list reveals how Vietnamese governmental departments were interested in researching state-building history and political models in order to develop the new post-colonial state and administrative operations. Vietnamese administrators read widely the collections on colonial history and political models available in the former colonial Central Library.

Post-colonial government offices and the National Library in Hanoi sought to re-catalog and standardize the existing library collections. However, government administrators had borrowed copious amounts of reading matter without adhering to library regulations. On October 9, 1945 the director of the Ministry of National Education wrote to the Department of Higher Education requesting administrators to return checked-out library books and also requested the implementation of a stricter and standardized accounting system for book loans.⁵⁵¹ The director argued that many books were lost during the French period and requested a re-cataloging of all library books while also calling for the end of special borrowing privileges to government offices. On October 12, 1945, interim director Phạm Đình Giếm from the National Library responded that in this time of “building the nation,” governmental offices needed to rely on the library materials which make it impossible to adhere to a comprehensive re-cataloging of the collections. However, Giếm reassured that each individual lender took care of their borrowed library books. Attached to this statement was a list of books borrowed by government offices from the National Library, signed by the Phạm Đình Giếm. The list included such departments as internal affairs, propaganda, education, and foreign affairs.

The National Library and Ministry of National Education continued to debate about the borrowing privileges and reading behavior of government administrators. On November 28, 1945 the director of the National Library in Hanoi, Ngô Đình Nhu wrote to the Ministry of National Education reporting that several government administrators were exploiting their library privileges by borrowing too many books and for too long.⁵⁵² Nhu called for an end to unfair usage of the library materials by government administrators and argued that “exploiting library privileges negatively impact the task of preserving library materials which are valuable to all the citizens of the country.” Nhu also attached a list of all the books borrowed by various departments and the date the books were checked out. For example, the Vietnam Women’s Union [Phụ nữ cứu quốc] borrowed 15 Vietnamese language books on November 6, 1945 such as *Women and Literature* [*Phụ nữ và văn học*], *The Trung Sisters* [*Hai Bà Trưng*], *Eastern Women* [*Đàn bà Đông Phương*] and *Laboring and Suffering Sisters* [*Chị em lao khổ*]. The association Cultural Transformation for National Salvation [Văn Hoá Cứu Quốc] borrowed an astonishing 250 books between September and October 1945 such as the periodicals *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* and *The Times* [Báo Thời Thế], political books such as *Drumcall for Independence* [*Hội trống tự do*], *Socialism against Fascism* [*Xã hội chủ nghĩa chống phát-xít*], and *Proletarian*

⁵⁵¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1527 “États Numériques et Nominatives des Livres Prêtés de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques à Hanoi du Septembre au Decembre 1945.” Documents: Letter from the Director of the Ministry of National Education to the Director of the Department of Higher Education on October 9, 1945. Letter from Phạm Đình Giếm from Nha lưu trữ công văn và thư viện toàn quốc to the Ministry of National Education on October 12, 1945 and attached “Bảng kê các sách cho mượn” [List of borrowed books].

⁵⁵² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1527, Documents: Letter from Ngô Đình Nhu from Nha lưu trữ công văn và thư viện toàn quốc to the Ministry of National Education on November 28, 1945 and attached list of borrowed books by department or individual name.

Organizing [Tổ chức vô sản]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs borrowed 100 books in 1945 including 35 issues of *The New York Times* from 1941, and several books on contemporary history, Japan, international law, and China. This list of books reveals how associations and departments used the National Libraries extensively to research on social and political transformation in the first few months after the declaration of Vietnam's independence. Consulting global news and comparative studies as well as historical sources, readers accessed diverse reading matter and defied the library limitations on duration and quantity of books borrowed.

In response to Nhu's request, the director of the Ministry of National Education sent out a statement to all the ministries mandating that government administrators pay closely to the following:

1. Careful adherence to the library regulations regarding borrowing library books. For books only necessary for reference, send someone to consult the books on-site. Only borrow necessary books to read at home.
2. Return books in accordance to their due date before borrowing new books.
3. Carefully maintain the books to prevent damage and loss.⁵⁵³

The director concluded with the following statement "these rules above must be adhered in order to preserve and protect the library materials because these documents are very rare..." These exchanges show the significance of the National Library reading matter to government offices for building a post-colonial state and society. The discourse regarding library procedures centered on standardization, accounting, and reader responsibility to maintain fair and collective use of libraries.

Government administrators considered the library reading matter as both valuable and essential for state building. In 1946, the new government emphasized administrators to consult library and archives materials in order to understand and standardize department functions and communications. On May 21, 1946 the Office of the Administrative Committee of the North [Ủy ban hành chính bắc bộ, văn phòng] proposed to all the directors of government departments to participate in a new centralized "administrative training class [lớp huấn luyện hành chính]" in order to "instruct and guide all new administrators in local administrator (province and district) the organizational methods of each governmental office as well as the customary legal protocol."⁵⁵⁴ Currently there were 50 possible participants in the class. This statement to all governmental departments emphasized the necessity of first-hand consultation of their department archives and printed matter in order to standardize communications between various departments. In subsequent letters on May 29, 1946, the Office of the Administrative Committee of the North requested 70 reader and borrowing cards for administrators to visit the central

⁵⁵³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1527, Document: Letter from Minister of National Education to the ministries of foreign affairs, internal affairs, information and propaganda, National defense, national economy, youth, justice, health, public works and transportation, labor, and finance, undated.

⁵⁵⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1553 "Établissement des cartes de lecture et cartes de prêt des livres à la Bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi des membres du cours de formation administrative (ouvert par la Commission administrative du Nord Vietnam), 1946." Letter to several government departments from Ủy ban hành chính bắc bộ, văn phòng số 2527 VP/T, "[Administrator Training School] Trường Huấn luyện hành chính" Hà nội ngày 21 tháng 5 năm 1946 signed Nguyễn Xuân. The departments addressed included the Central Treasury, the National Library, Northern Land Cadastral Survey, Primary Schools, Popular Schools...

archives and libraries in order to conduct research on their department's administrative procedures and documentation practices.⁵⁵⁵

DRV State Control of Print Matter: Legal Deposit and Press Regime

During the French colonial period, the legal deposit functioned as a technology of statecraft to monitor publications produced in the colony as well as to build a library collection of colonial print heritage. Previously, the 1922 colonial law for the legal deposit required that printers deposit two to three copies of print publications to the Central Library in Hanoi, the National Library in Paris, and also to the regional library. In the 1940s the legal deposit law required additional copies to be submitted from the printer and the publisher.⁵⁵⁶ During World War II, the legal deposit was still implemented, requiring two copies submitted to the BNF, three to the minister of the French overseas territories, three to Saigon, and two to the Hanoi library.

Two of the earliest decrees signed under H ò Chí Minh's government detailed the stipulations of the legal deposit and the press regime. On January 31, 1946, H ò Chí Minh signed Decree 18-SL ordering the legal deposit of all cultural objects in Vietnam on the premise that "the preservation of cultural objects is of cultural necessity for the nation."⁵⁵⁷ The law of legal deposit required that all cultural matter—printed works (books, newspapers, photographs, postcards), music pieces, movies, and records—be submitted regardless if they are or not able to be sold, distributed, lent. Printers must submit two copies and publishers must submit eight copies of their publications to the legal deposit office in Hanoi immediately after their production and before they go on the market for sale or distribution. Decree 18-SL considered associations, individuals, companies, bookstores, and private or public departments who created their own publications as 'publishers' and subject to legal deposit law. An entire section of the decree focused on penalties if publishers and printers failed to submit copies to the legal deposit. Backed by the judicial system, the Legal Deposit Office could bill publishers and printers for missing copies of legal deposits. Repeated and direct refusal to submit copies to the legal deposit resulted in fines between 100 to 2,000 Vietnamese ð ù ng. The government can also confiscate unauthorized copies of print matter which have not been submitted to the legal deposit. Print matter must be submitted to the legal deposit in addition to other existing requirements to submit to the offices of censorship, propaganda, or court requests. Enforced through the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, and the Ministry of Education, this new legal deposit decree replaced all existing colonial requests for legal deposit and demanded adherence throughout all of Vietnam. The DRV protocol for legal deposit strove to monitor publications and also to build the library collections by mandating publishers and printers to submit a copy of new publications to the library.

⁵⁵⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1553 "Établissement des cartes de lecture et cartes de prêt des livres à la Bibliothèque centrale de Hanoi des membres du cours de formation administrative (ouvert par la Commission administrative du Nord Vietnam), 1946." By June 3, 1946, Trần Văn Kha allotted the library cards and sent another 7, bringing the total up to 77 cards.

⁵⁵⁶ By 1944, the legal deposit law required editors to submit 8 additional copies to the legal deposit. In 1946, the law changed back to 2 for printers and 6 for publishers.

⁵⁵⁷ Sắc Lệnh số 18-SL, Chính Phủ Lâm Thời, Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hoà, Hanoi, January 31, 1946. [Decree 18-SL, Provisional Government, Democratic Republic of Vietnam].

On March 29, 1946 H ồ Chí Minh, the ministers of Justice and Internal Affairs of the provisional government of the DRV signed decree number 41 on the press regime.⁵⁵⁸ The decree replaced all previous decrees and outlined permissions and protocol for publishing, submission to censorship, and the penalties for violation of the procedures. Prior to publication, newspaper offices must submit two copies of the newspaper to the office of censorship, the local public court of where the newspaper will be distributed, and the press department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The decree also outlined the structure of the Censorship Council. The council was located in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and comprised of five members nominated by the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, National Assembly, and a representative of the press. Although Decree 18-SL on the legal deposit and 41 on the press regime were not fully applied within the short time frame of DRV authority in Hanoi, the decrees reveal the new state's priorities to collect and control print matter.

Part 2

Legacies of Colonial Institutions: The Fragmented Decolonization of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries during the First Indochina War, 1946-1954

Under the leadership of General Charles de Gaulle, France attempted to retake back all of Indochina and rule Indochina as a colonial federation.⁵⁵⁹ However, the retake of Indochina was not simply a contestation between unified fronts of French and Vietnamese. The French Fourth Republic (1946-1958) struggled to recover from World War II to develop its domestic economy, centralize its divisive ministries, and also retain control over its overseas colonies. Throughout Vietnam, contending groups carved out bases of authority with different visions of a post-colonial state. Northern communists and nationalists, southern republican nationalists, Việt Minh scattered throughout the country, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen, fought for political power and popular support.

On August 17, 1945, the French Fourth Republic replaced the Governor General system in colonial Indochina with the Haut Commissariat de France pour l'Indochine [High Commission of France for Indochina] and named Vice Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu as high commissioner of Indochina. On September 23, 1945, France launched a *coup de force* pushing out the DRV forces out of Saigon and retook power south of the 16th parallel in Vietnam. Saigon served as the headquarters to rebuild an Indochina federation with semi-independent states under French control. The High Commission was further divided into general territorial organizations—the Commission for Cochinchina and South Annam, the Commission of the Republic for North Indochina (which included Tonkin, highlands, and Annam down to the 16th parallel), the Commission for Laos, and the Commission for Cambodia.⁵⁶⁰ This new

⁵⁵⁸ Sắc Lệnh số 41-SL, Chính Phủ Lâm Thời, Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hoà, Hanoi, March 29, 1946. [Decree 41-SL, Provisional Government, Democratic Republic of Vietnam].

⁵⁵⁹ For historical information on the First Indochina War, I draw from Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

⁵⁶⁰ Jean Cédile was named Commissioner of the Republic for Cochinchina and South Annam on August 24, 1945. Jean Sainteny was the head of the military mission in China and was appointed Commissioner of the Republic for Tonkin and North Annam on October 1945. (During Sainteny's term, the Commission of the Republic for North Indochina was referred to as the Commission of the Republic for Tonkin and North-Annam.) On December 2, 1947, General Yves Digo was appointed as the Commissioner of the Republic in Tonkin.

configuration placed the federation of French Indochina within the French Union. Jean Cédile was named Commissioner of Cochinchina and Jean Sainteny (Albert Sarraut's son-in-law) as Commissioner of Annam and Tonkin. Furthermore, French efforts to re-colonize Indochina relied upon a cohort of long-term French colonial civil servants as well as former Vietnamese administrators who opposed the communist DRV. This group included Léon Pignon, Jean Cousseau, Albert Torel, Charles Bonfils, and Marcel Bonfils who carried out a conservative, local monarchy based administration within a French Indochina federation. Commander-in-chief General Philippe Leclerc led the military takeover of Indochina beginning in October 1945. In Cambodia, the French troops overthrew Son Ngoc Thanh's nationalist government, restored King Norodom Sihanouk, and declared Cambodia an 'état libre' [free state] of the Indochina federation. In Laos, the French pushed out the Lao Issara [Free Lao] government and placed Sisavang Vong as the monarch of Laos. Cochinchina was managed under a provisional government [Gouvernement provisoire du sud-Vietnam, Chính phủ lâm thời] under Vietnamese president Nguyễn Văn Thỉnh, followed by Lê Văn Hoạch, and Nguyễn Văn Xuân.⁵⁶¹ The Provisional Government of the Republic Cochinchina was a key step in forming Charles de Gaulle's French federation (incorporating all of former French colonial Indochina) which countered the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) project to unify all Vietnamese territories including Cochinchina under its government administration based in Hanoi.

On December 19, 1946, full-scale war between France and Hồ Chí Minh's DRV began, henceforth known as the First Indochina War. The first battles began as urban conflicts in Hanoi (Battle of Hanoi), which resulted in the pushing out the DRV government from Hanoi and into the north western countryside of Tonkin. The French retook Hanoi by February 1947 and installed the Commission of the Republic for North Indochina. To gain support to fight Vietnamese Communist nationalism, the French created a coalition of anti-DRV supporters from the southern nationalists, the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and the Binh Xuyen. Two states—Hồ Chí Minh's DRV government and Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu's High Commission based out of Saigon competed for power and legitimacy. On March 8, 1949 the former emperor Bảo Đại and French President Vincent Auriol signed the Elysée accords that formally recognized Vietnam's limited independence from France and created the Associated State of Vietnam. Bảo Đại was designated as a monarch head of state and gained the temporary support of 'Third Force' non-Communist nationalists throughout the three Vietnamese regions. Negotiations to form the Associated State of Laos (July) and Cambodia (November) followed in the same year, signaling the end to attempts for an Indochina Federation under the French. However, the Associated States were not granted authority over the most important aspects of independent states—military, diplomacy, and finance, and remained under the power of the High Commission of Indochina under the High Commissioner Léon Pignon.⁵⁶² It soon became clear that the Associated States still functioned as colonial tools to maintain French power and Bảo Đại and the nationalists distanced themselves from the project.

Between 1946 and 1950, several attacks took place in Saigon, attacking navy arsenals and civilian areas. Christopher Goscha argues that the First Indochina War was not a "simple tale of urban terrorism, rural counterinsurgency...but it was a sustained and increasingly savage

⁵⁶¹ On June 1, 1946, Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu declared the Provisional Government of the Republic of Cochinchina with Nguyễn Văn Thỉnh as President. Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*. P. 165

⁵⁶² Bảo Đại and the High Commissioner Léon Pignon signed another set of accords on December 30, 1949 which transferred major educational institutions to the Southern government such as the department of public instruction, schools, and personnel.

battle about controlling people, occupying territory, gathering information, and building states—in the cities to an extent, but especially in the countryside.”⁵⁶³ Goscha describes the two warring states as embryonic, piecemeal ‘archipelago states’ with uneven bases of administrative control, insufficient military forces, and shifting loyalties among the inhabitants. Brett Reilly characterizes the state projects as a work of ‘bricolage’ with inherited colonial legacies, fragmentary modern state institutions, and overlapping sovereignties.⁵⁶⁴ Comprised of troops from French Africa, Vietnam, and locally recruited southern militias, the French military (Expeditionary Corps) forces could not hold control over the entirety of Vietnam. French and southern Vietnamese held power bases primarily in Saigon, southern cities, and Hanoi. Similarly, the DRV authority reached unevenly throughout Vietnam, with power bases concentrated in the rural regions of the northern highlands, central Vietnam, and the Mekong Delta. With widespread violence and coercive tactics to recruit loyalty to the French colonial federation or Viet Minh nationalist cause, many Vietnamese villagers fled to the cities seeking refuge. Saigon-Cholon grew from 500,000 in 1939 to 1.7 million in 1954, transforming Saigon-Cholon into an expansive urban landscape with limited infrastructure to receive such a large population of migrants.⁵⁶⁵

Colonial Directorate of Archives and Libraries as a Bygone Era: Colonial Nostalgia and Symbolic Sites of Modernity

From 1946 to 1954, the colonial Directorate of Archives and Libraries underwent significant organizational and symbolic changes following the post-colonial transfer of state authorities from the DRV to the provisional governments under the High Commission of France for Indochina. The collections of the Saigon and Hanoi libraries originated from donations from the colonial administration libraries. From the 1920s to 1940s, the colonial libraries evolved into valuable, vast, and diverse collections of local, historical, and contemporary print media. In a report written from Paris on December 11, 1947, Paul Boudet summarized the colonial era accomplishments of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina since its founding in 1917.⁵⁶⁶ Boudet pointed out the creation of a central archives in Hanoi which contained over 400,000 dossiers and whose storage facility “guaranteed the security and conservation of the documents for at least 30 years against deterioration due to environment (humidity, cholera, rain, typhoons) as well as insects and termites.” Boudet added that the archives were furnished with wooden furniture and could respond to requests for administrative documents unlike any other overseas territory. Paul Boudet also applauded the development of the Hanoi Central Library, which he described as an “indispensable organ for the intellectual life of the country,” with over 150,000 volumes and welcoming 300 to 600 readers a day, two-thirds of whom were Indochinese. Furthermore, from 1930 to 1945, the colonial era directorate trained over 200

⁵⁶³ Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*. P. 171. Goscha also argues that the militarization of Northern society during the First Indochina War contributed to the development of the DRV state and its administrative apparatus focused on security, military, and social mobilization. Christopher Goscha, “A ‘Total War’ of Decolonization? Social Mobilization and State-Building in Communist Vietnam (1949–54),” *War and Society* 31, no. 2 (August 2012): 136–62.

⁵⁶⁴ Brett Reilly, “The Sovereign States of Vietnam, 1945–1955,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (November 1, 2016): 103–39.

⁵⁶⁵ Goscha. P. 173.

⁵⁶⁶ ANOM, PB, Folder 48 “Imprimés sur les Archives et Bibliothèques de l’Indochine,” Document: “La Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l’Indochine,” Signed by Paul Boudet, Paris, December 11, 1947.

Indochinese administrators to work as secretaries, archivists, and librarians to serve in various government bureaus.

Although the buildings, collections, and even the personnel of the libraries and archives remained relatively intact through 1946 to 1954, the symbolic meanings and function of the library would drastically change. French authority had been removed since 1945, but former colonial administrators sought to rekindle the grandeur of colonial institutions and the French civilizing mission. In a report on the libraries of Indochina written between 1945 and 1946, the unnamed author reminisced upon the colonial libraries and calls attention to the destruction of ‘modern’ institutions under the new Vietnamese government.⁵⁶⁷ The report was most likely written by a French former colonial administrator of the archives and libraries. Explaining the history, mission statement, and current status of the libraries and archives in Vietnam, the author of the report expressed a deep nostalgia for the golden years of intellectual centers in the early years of the colonial period. The author’s narrative framed the history of archives and libraries development in Hanoi, Saigon, Hue, Phnom Penh, as part of larger colonial initiatives in culture and education. The Central Library (later renamed the Pierre Pasquier Library, after the Governor General from 1928 to 1934) stood at the center of these great ‘modern’ institutions built under colonialism. According to the author, the name “Pierre Pasquier Library” existed until the day when the “Việt Minh, destructive and ungrateful, had the audacity to erase the façade of the Library and the name of the great friend of the Vietnamese under a layer of plaster.” The symbolic erasure of the name of Governor General Pasquier marked the reluctant and seemingly sudden conclusion of a ‘golden era’ of colonial collaboration, development, and intellectual prosperity marked by the Pierre Pasquier Library. As explained in the nostalgic report, the library was built on the site of the old camp where Vietnamese literati took their triennial examinations and later functioned as the palace of Kinh Lược (Viceroy) of Tonkin. Described as a “predestined place” that could “reunite the elite of the studious youth of the country”, the library symbolized a location of scholastic heritage. The report recalled with reverence and nostalgia the space of the library—a site imbued with a deep history of intellectual communities from the literati mandarins to the urban French and Vietnamese intellectuals during the French colonial period.

Yet, the report also argued that colonialism moved Indochina away from ‘tradition’ towards ‘modernity.’ The author remarked that the colonial Central Library transformed the site as one “frozen in the cold and empty speculation of a traditional culture of the old days” into a modern space of learning the disciplines of the West. The author distinguished between the tropical landscape of the “bygone times” and the new “vast, clear” Reading Room where “young people flock eager to get acquainted with the sciences of the West.” Finally, the report described the vibrant community of intellectuals made equal by the democratizing space of the library: seated side by side were “professors, high functionaries, general officers, next to simple students” and “French and Indochinese mixed like brothers.” From the hours of eight in the morning to ten in the evening, the library opened its doors to the hundreds of Vietnamese and French readers to consult the neatly organized hundreds of thousands of works. Describing the Central Library as a ‘beautiful intellectual collaboration’ between France and Indochina, the author vehemently accused the new Việt Minh regime in the north for their destruction of this

⁵⁶⁷ ANOM, PB, Folder 53, “Dossier Concernant la Construction des Bâtiments pour les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine” (c. 1946). Document: “Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine.”

relationship.⁵⁶⁸ According to this report, the Hanoi Central Library represented the introduction of colonial modernity, Western progressive thought, and democratic learning to an eager community of Vietnamese intellectuals rooted in tradition and the past. This report conveys a desperate sense of hierarchical nostalgia of the French colonial period in a time of political uncertainty for the French Fourth Republic's control in Indochina. During French attempts to re-colonize and redefine authority Indochina (1946-1954), French authorities used colonial institutions such as the Central Library as testaments to the historic 'contributions' of French influence and to justify the continued French-Vietnamese administration.

Reorganization of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries: The Service of Archives and Libraries of the High Commission of Indochina and the Legacy of Colonial Administrators

With the outbreak of war at the Battle of Hanoi on December 19, 1946, there was an increased urgency to protect the valuable collections of the archives and libraries. The French Republic administration shifted the headquarters of the directorate from Hanoi to Saigon (the new capital of the High Commission) and officially transferred the Cochinchina Library out of Hanoi's management. The French administration moved some of the Hanoi archives to Saigon in April 1947, but also retained the library and archives administrative outposts in Hanoi, Hue, and Dalat.⁵⁶⁹ The Central Library in Hanoi temporarily managed by the DRV (1945-1946) switched back its name to the Pierre Pasquier Library under the direction of the Commission of the Republic for North Indochina. On July 25, 1947, the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina from the French colonial period was officially renamed the Service of Archives and Library of the High Commission [Nha lưu trữ công văn và thư viện Cao Ủy] with Saigon as the headquarters rather than Hanoi. The renaming and reorganization of the French colonial Directorate of Archives and Libraries reveal piecemeal attempts by the French High Commission to retain its colonial institutions and also to concentrate Saigon as its administrative base for reconquest of Indochina.

Many of the same colonial era cohort of higher-level personnel trained at *École Nationale des Chartes* continued to work in the libraries and archives in Indochina. Reinstated as "federal" director of the Service of Archives and Library of the High Commission of Indochina and director of the Pierre Pasquier Library in Hanoi, Paul Boudet continued his previous work to centralize documentation and libraries procedures throughout Indochina. In his December 11, 1947 report, Paul Boudet commented on the consequences of the transition of libraries

⁵⁶⁸ The author emphasizes that the new regime did not comprehend the depth and significance of this intellectual collaboration and also damaged the priceless collections. The author adds that this negligence of the libraries is a "detriment to the Vietnamese culture they claim and clamor each day to work to advance."

⁵⁶⁹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11 "Báo Cáo Hoạt động và Thành Tích Của Tổng Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1954-1958," Document: "Tờ tuồng trình về tổng thư viện quốc gia" Dated July 18, 1957 by temporary director Nguyễn Hùng Cường. In several archives documents, December 19, 1946 is referred to as "ngày khói lửa" or "Day of Fire and Smoke." ANOM, PB, Folder 30 "Dossier concernant le transfert des archives federales et leur installation à Saigon." Initially in September 1946, the administration had considered the transfer of the entire colonial archives to Dalat. However, it seems that after French takeover of Hanoi in the beginning of 1947, plans to move the archives slowed down and the administration decided to leave the archives and library in Hanoi. Simone de Saint-Exupéry brought up the plans to move the colonial archives (such as the Governor General and personal archives collections) from Hanoi to Dalat in October 1948. However, there were too many delays in building the Dalat archives to store the transferred collections. TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1834 "A.s. projet d'installation de la direction des archives et des bibliothèques à Dalat."

management from French to Vietnamese, and back to French.⁵⁷⁰ Boudet noted with overall surprise that most of the library and archives services continued as usual during the period of DRV authority in Hanoi. However, he regretfully remarked that sometime during 1945-1946, the DRV government removed two small collections of documents from the period 1859-1885, and the collection had not yet been recovered. In April 1947, French authorities reclaimed control of the Hanoi library. Boudet remarked again with amazement how Indochinese librarians and secretaries welcomed the French administrators and resumed the library services from the colonial period. Boudet commended this dedication to the library service, recognizing the antagonism that many of the Vietnamese personnel might confront by fraternizing with French administrators.

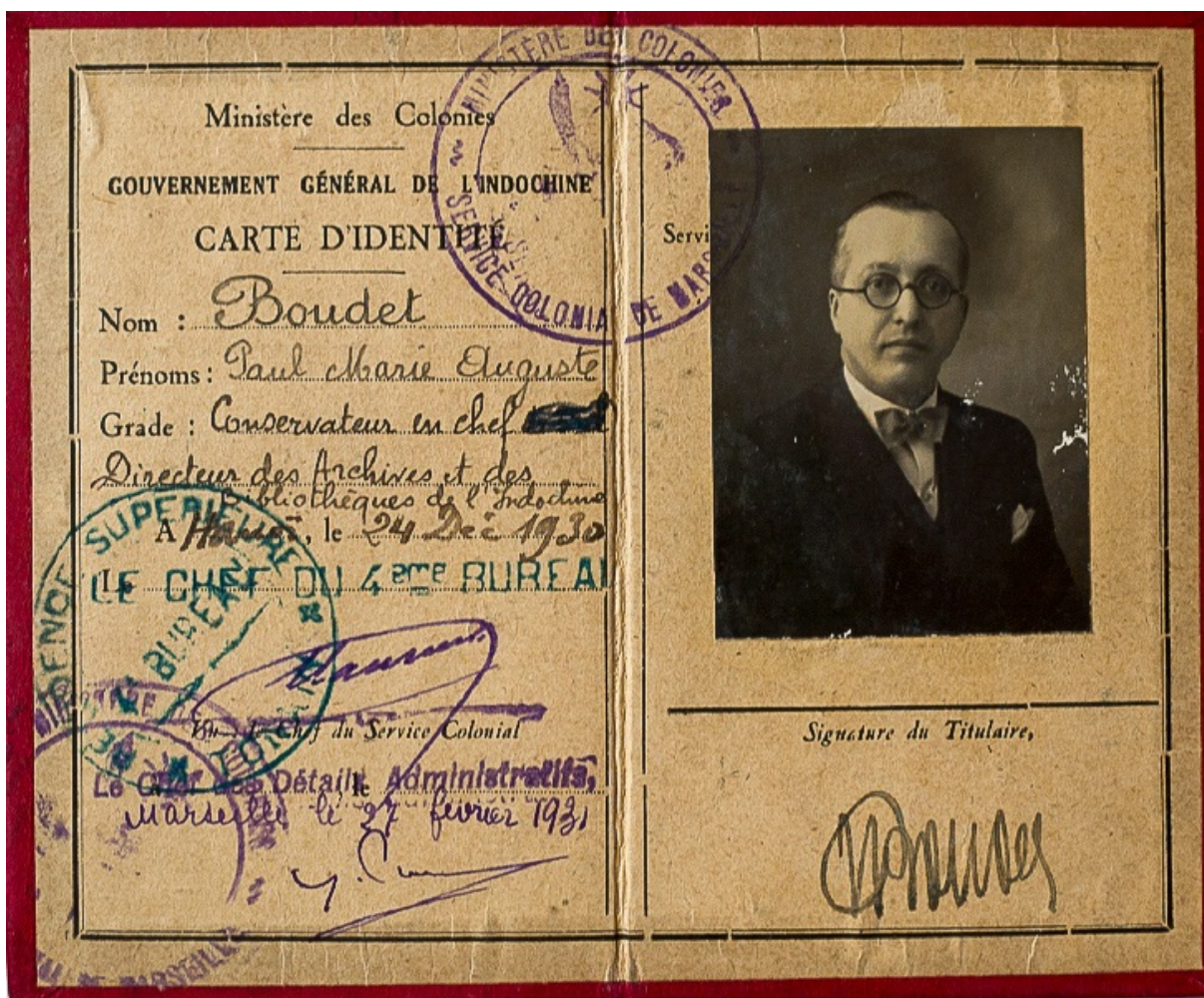


Image 5-6. Paul Boudet's Indochina Identity Card, 1930.⁵⁷¹

In 1948, Paul Boudet suddenly became sick in July and was repatriated back to France August 4, 1948. He passed away shortly afterwards on November 11, 1948.⁵⁷² Ed. Castagnol

⁵⁷⁰ ANOM, PB, Folder 48, "La Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine," Signed by Paul Boudet, Paris, December 11, 1947.

⁵⁷¹ ANOM, PB, Folder 96 "Dossier personnel Paul Boudet, lettres adressés à Paul Boudet par sa famille."

⁵⁷² André Masson, "Paul Boudet," *Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes* 107, no. 2 (1948): 335-37.

(deputy-director of the Archives and Libraries for Tonkin and North Annam) succeeded Paul Boudet as director of the entire Service. In the official personnel dossier of Paul Boudet, the biographical information summarized Boudet's work during World War II and the immediate aftermath: "During and despite the Japanese occupation, Boudet endeavored to maintain intellectual relations with the outside world, to ensure, on several occasions, secret links between North and South Indochina during the same period. Thanks to his leadership with Indochinese staff, he was able, in spite of the difficult circumstances, to save almost the entire precious collections of the Archives and the Libraries of Indochina in Hanoi."⁵⁷³ Ferréol de Ferry, another graduate of *École Nationale des Chartes* who previously worked at the colonial archives section in Hanoi, became the director of the Pierre Pasquier Library in Hanoi in 1948 and served in this role until 1953. De Ferry created a new Library of the High Commission at 32 Taberd Street in Saigon and built a collection of general subjects on Indochina.⁵⁷⁴

Vietnamese personnel confronted more challenges and interrogation to prove their loyalty to the French High Commission regime in Hanoi. For example, former colonial librarian-archivist Trần Văn Kha worked for decades in the Central Library Reading Room and Lending Section, Legal Deposit, Periodicals section, and Bookbinding department. From 1937-1940 Kha led several training courses for archivists, librarians, and secretaries. Kha worked continuously from 1925 throughout the regime changes from French to Japanese to the DRV communists. During the period of DRV control in Hanoi from 1945-1946, Kha had served as the Interim Director of the Service of Archive Records and Nationwide Library. On January 2, 1947, former director Trần Văn Kha requested that the Commissioner of the Republic for North Indochina re-instate him as archivist-librarian of the Pierre Pasquier Library.⁵⁷⁵ Kha explained to the French Commissioner that he continued to work at the library during the DRV government not for political reasons, but for his livelihood and also to protect the library collections. Kha justified that he was forced to work under the DRV government in order to "have enough to live and support my large family comprised of a wife and seven young children; to avoid being arrested or sent to labor camps by the Việt Minh Party; and to safeguard the cultural wealth (books and archives documents) as much as possible, since I am the most senior and most experienced official in the Archives and Libraries department." Kha followed up with a proclamation that he did not belong to any political association since the Japanese *coup* on March 9, 1945.

Even with his lifetime of contributions to the Directorate and appeals, Kha still had to petition for his re-instatement in the Pierre Pasquier Library in Hanoi for another three years. By October 1950, the personnel office of the high commission in Saigon wrote a statement which praised Kha's extensive libraries experience and confirmed his 'safe' political background. The high commission office in Saigon advocated for his re-appointment to the Archives and Libraries department in Hanoi. The statement also reassessed Kha's long history with the directorate of archives and libraries in Indochina. Kha had joined the administration on January 1925 and by 1950 had dedicated 26 years to the service. The statement commended Kha's work: "In these various tasks, given its complexity and diversity whose workload has steadily increased with the development of the Service, Monsieur Kha has always shown a general culture of superior work, of intelligence, and of cheerful initiative. In addition to his technical knowledge developed through his quarter of a century of work in the service, Kha has proved in the field of general

⁵⁷³ ANOM, PB, Folder 86 "Dossier relatif à Paul Boudet."

⁵⁷⁴ ANOM, PB, Folder 48, Document: Mouvement de la Révolution Nationale, n. 232, April 18, 1956.

⁵⁷⁵ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 24 "Hồ Sơ Cá Nhân ông Trần Văn Kha Từng Sự Tại Tổng Thư Viện," Document: Letter from Trần Văn Kha Hanoi to Commissioner of the Republic for North Indochina on January 25, 1947.

administration as a first-rate collaborator and indispensable to the smooth operations of the Service.” The report noted that Kha had kept himself away from recent political movements and dedicated himself to “safeguard the rich collections of the libraries, the recovery of the archives of the Government General, the Resident Superior of Tonkin, and the former Department of Finance.”⁵⁷⁶

The Pierre Pasquier Library during the First Indochina War: Maintenance of Colonial Legal Deposit and International Standards of Library Services

During the First Indochina War, the Service of Archives and Libraries of the High Commission of Indochina attempted to maintain its administrative organization and operations inherited from the French colonial period. On an everyday functional level, the Indochina libraries still sought to maintain its functions to serve the local public, increase its collections, and update library catalogs. On August 27, 1946 Paul Boudet, the Federal Director of the Service of Archives and Libraries, wrote to the High Commissioner of France of Indochina regarding the status of the legal deposit given the recent turn of events between 1945 and 1946.⁵⁷⁷ With the reestablishment of legal authority of the French republic over the Indochinese federation (federal ordinance signed on May 28, 1946), Boudet outlined a protocol to reassert a regime of legal deposit in Indochina. Boudet explained that the task of legal deposit and centralization efforts must be provisionally based out of the federal capital Saigon and the library at 34 Lagrandière rather than the Pierre Pasquier Library. However, in the midst of war shortages in library personnel and constantly changing legal protocol for legal deposit, most publishers and printers did not adhere to legal deposit requirements throughout the First Indochina War.⁵⁷⁸ For example, from 1946 to 1949, legal deposits of publications in the north were often not submitted. By January 1950 de Ferry resumed the submission of legal deposits from the north—two copies were submitted to the national library in France, three to the ministry of the France d’outre-mer [Ministry of Overseas France, formerly the Ministry of the Colonies], one to Saigon, and two to the Hanoi Central Library.⁵⁷⁹

On January 12, 1954, Castagnol, the director of the Service of Archives and Libraries, submitted to the director of the Hanoi General Library a series of documents, statistics, and reports on the legal deposit. Castagnol believed the legal deposit was an important method to maintain reciprocal relationship between the regional governments and libraries in Hanoi, Saigon, and central Vietnam in the midst of war and handover of governmental institutions to Vietnamese authorities. Castagnol requested that other regions “send works published in those regions not only to enrich the collections of the Central Library (in Hanoi), but also to give to the reading public in North Vietnam, and a collection reflecting the evolution of thought and the art

⁵⁷⁶ Up until he passed away on December 28, 1955, Trần Văn Kha continued to work in the service of archives and libraries as the head of the library after the conclusion of the First Indochina War. Kha also oversaw the transfer of the Hanoi collections to Saigon from 1954 to 1955.

⁵⁷⁷ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 32, “Tập Tài Liệu Của Nha Văn Khố - Thư Viện Đông Dương V/v Nạp Vào Bản Thư Viện Quốc Gia Pháp Năm 1946-1947,” Document: Letter from Paul Boudet, Federal Director of Archives and Libraries of Indochina, Saigon to the High commissioner of France for Indochina, August 27, 1946.

⁵⁷⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-02 “Application sur la Régie du Dépôt Légal de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de L’indochine à Hanoi 1951-1954,” Document: Documents related to the Regime of Legal Deposit compiled by Ed. Castagnol submitted to the Director of the General Library in Hanoi, c. 1954.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

of writing in Vietnam after World War II.”⁵⁸⁰ Castagnol included statistics comparing the number of periodicals sent to the Hanoi Central Library in 1938 and 1953 and the number of periodicals sent to the bindery to draw attention to Hanoi’s deficit of metropolitan, local, and foreign periodicals. Castagnol even called for the restoration of the previous system of legal deposit where Hanoi would operate as the central repository. However, the end of the First Indochina War and the re-division of the services interrupted attempts to recentralize the legal deposit efforts.

Table Comparing Number of Periodicals Received in 1938 and 1953 (Hanoi Central Library)

	1938	1953
Metropolitan Periodicals	159	95
Local Periodicals	65	20
Foreign Periodicals	39	7

Table Comparing Number of Periodicals submitted to the Bindery in 1938 and 1953 (Hanoi Central Library)

Year	Number of volumes
1938	2,960 volumes
1953	620 volumes

Chart 5-4. Castagnol’s two tables submitted to the Director of the Library in Hanoi convey the immense decrease in periodicals submitted to Hanoi. The bindery chart includes the note “This table does not include the volumes bound by the bindery from the library service.”⁵⁸¹

International bodies such as UNESCO also influenced administrative everyday practices, the structure, and classifications of the library. On January 24, 1951 De Ferry from Hanoi reported on the state of the legal deposit and the success of the Central Library of Hanoi on 31 Rue Borgnis-Desbordes to “maintain regular reports like other scientific institutions of France and UNESCO.”⁵⁸² UNESCO and French libraries continued to serve as benchmarks for library standards and functions in Indochina. On February 1952, the statistical department of UNESCO sent multiple requests to the library in Hanoi and Saigon for statistics on libraries in Vietnam.⁵⁸³ The questionnaire sought to obtain basic information about publicly funded and publicly accessed libraries. The questionnaire also included an extensive system of classifying types of libraries based on organization, scope, and function. The divisions included the following:

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. Castagnol submitted this from 32 Rue Taberd, Saigon from the Haut Commissariat de France en Indochine, Mission Culturelle Française archives et bibliothèques office on January 12, 1954. Castagnol became the head of the Indochina Service of Archives and Libraries in after Paul Boudet passed away in 1949 and continued to mediate the transition of the Service to the Saigon government after the Geneva Accords.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² TLLT1, DABI, Folder 1845 “A.s Envoi des Bulletins Officiels de l’Indochine, des Bulletins Administratifs du Tonkin, Des Exemplaires de Documents et Publications de Divers Services Du Tonkin a La Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi 1947-1954,” March 28, 1947.”

⁵⁸³ TLLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102 “H òSor v`èTổ Chức và Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Nam Ph ãn Năm 1951-1957,” Document: UNESCO Questionnaire on the statistics relative to the Libraries and Impact” February 25, 1952, Paris.

- National (Central body of the country, receives legal deposits of publications)
- Higher Education (University libraries open to qualified readers)
- Public Libraries (Funded by local authorities and available to the general public)
- Special Research Libraries (Scientific, institutional libraries attached to other institutions)
- Scholarly libraries (Attached to schools and intended for teachers and students), includes different types of scholarly schools for technical, professional, secondary school, and primary education⁵⁸⁴

International standards of libraries sought to categorize the post-colonial libraries based on functions, funding, and services. The Hanoi and Saigon Library received extensive guides on library standards from UNESCO and also accessed American, British, and French models of library sciences through international networks of book exchanges.

Wartime Networks of Book Exchanges and the Circulation of Dangerous Print Media

Besides requirements for legal deposits, some voluntary book gifts and exchanges continued between Saigon, Hanoi, and internationally even with the outbreak of war at the end of 1946. The Pierre Pasquier Library in Hanoi continued to receive new shipments of books from the Cochinchina Library in Saigon. On September 27, 1947 Ed. Castagnol, the deputy director of the Archives and Libraries for Tonkin and North Annam, confirmed that the following books were received and added to the general collections of the Pierre Pasquier Library: André Gide's *Journal 1939-1942*, Aldous Huxley's *En marge: Essais et notes* and *Le plus sot animal*, Pierre Benoit's *L'oiseau des ruines*, Joseph Kessel's *L'armée dé ombres*, and Adrien Dansette's *Histoire de la libération de Paris*.⁵⁸⁵ New periodical acquisitions included recent 1947 copies of *Le Monde illustré* and *France illustration*. From February 3, 1938 to September 2, 1948, the library recorded that books were sent between Saigon and Hanoi libraries nearly every week.⁵⁸⁶

However, by the 1950s, war exhaustion was more apparent and impacted the administration and services of the Pierre Pasquier Library. Between January and March 1952, Ferréol de Ferry, the delegate for the Archives and Libraries for North Vietnam requested the office of the high commission in Saigon for foreign currency to purchase foodstuffs, equipment, newspapers, and foreign reviews in order to continue to operate various government departments.⁵⁸⁷ De Ferry requested foreign currency to purchase the following works: subscriptions to "Europa," "Orbis," and "Minerva," American magazines such as "The Far Eastern Quarterly," "Publishers Weekly", and "The United States Quarterly Books Review." According to this exchange, UNESCO provided book vouchers through the Ministry of National Education for libraries to purchase foreign books. Additionally, the university presses had offered

⁵⁸⁴ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: UNESCO Questionnaire on the statistics relative to the Libraries and Impact" February 25, 1952, Paris.

⁵⁸⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1799 "Réception des Ouvrages Nouveaux à La Bibliothèque Pasquier 1947," September 27, 1947."

⁵⁸⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1841 "Bordereaux des pièces adressées au Délégué des Archives et des Bibliothèques de l'Indochine à Hanoi 1948."

⁵⁸⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1214, "A.s. Demande des Divisés étrangères à la Commande des Livres étrangers de la Délégation des Archives et des Bibliothèques pour le Nord-Vietnam," Letters from the Haut Commissariat de France en l'Indochine, affaires économiques, Saigon, January 30, 1952; F. de Ferry, Delegation des archives et des bibliothèques, Hanoi, February 19, 1952, February 21, 1952, and March 12, 1952 "Objet: Besoin en Devisés Étrangères [Objective: In need of Foreign Currencies]."

aid by simplifying the process for the North Vietnam archives and libraries to subscribe to international periodicals such as *Pacific Affairs*, *Ricenca Scientifica*, *Artibus Asiae*, the German Bibliography, and the Canadian Journal of Biology.

Between 1949 and 1953, UNESCO, the United States Library of Congress, and the United States Book Exchange, Inc provided a network of international book exchanges, bibliographies, and donated books with the Pierre Pasquier Library.⁵⁸⁸ These international book exchanges reveal how the Hanoi Pierre Pasquier Library remained embedded in an expansive circulation of diverse political and scientific books. For example, on April 20, 1949 the United States Book Exchange requested the Pierre Pasquier Library to establish a library exchange with the Alabama Polytechnique Institute for regular submissions of the *Bibliographie de l'Indochine*. The Polytechnique Institute would be able to provide publications on science, engineering, and library news. The USBE also mediated the transfer of books from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace collection which comprised the following works: "The Hague Court Reports," "L'institut de droit international," "Root: The Military and Colonial policy of the United States," "Richie: The "Navicert" System during the War." UNESCO also worked with the British National Book Exchange to provide the Pierre Pasquier Library with the following English language works from the social sciences collection:

- Roosevelt, Franklin: *Looking Forward*. London, 1933
- Roosevelt, Franklin: *On our Way*. London, 1934
- Sho-Chien Tsiang: *The Variations of Real Wages and Profit Margins in Relation to the Trade Cycle*. London 1947
- Theimer, Walter: *The Penguin Political Dictionary*. London, 1940
- Wells, H.G.: *Phoenix: a summary of the inescapable conditions of world reorganization*. London 1942
- Wells, H.G. *The Rights of Man, or what are we fighting for?* London. 1940

The Hanoi Pierre Pasquier Library continued to send lists of its new library acquisitions to the American Information Service in Hanoi. In a letter to Simone de Saint-Exupéry on September 19, 1951, John Metcalfe, the assistant director of the American Information Service in Hanoi, requested that the Central Library inform the American Information Service of books and periodicals published in North Vietnam.⁵⁸⁹ The Library also received shipments of books gifted from the American Information Service in Hanoi and Saigon throughout the First Indochina War. On December 5, 1952 the American Information Service located at 110 Jules Ferry Street (Hàng Trống), Hanoi sent a shipment of 27 books including *Crops in Peace and War* by the U.S. Government printing office, *The US and World Relations* by Lilian T. Mowrer, and "Tự do hay là chết" by Oksana Kasenkina. A shipment from November 25, 1953 included 38 books such as *Building for Small Public Libraries* by Ernest I. Miller, *The First Book of Cats* by Cladys Taber, *A New Slavery* by Roger N. Baldwin, *Les États-unis revolution permanent* by the editors of Fortune in collaboration with W. Davenport Russel, and four brochures and five maps of Southeast Asia. Donated books from the American Information Service in Hanoi and Saigon in 1954 included the following political works: *American Government in Action* by Marshall

⁵⁸⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1771 "Enquête des services bibliographiques conduite par l'Unesco et la bibliothèque de congrès des états-unis 1949-1953."

⁵⁸⁹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1771, Document: Letter from John Metcalfe from the American Information Service (Foreign service of the United States of America) to Simone de Saint-Exupéry on September 19, 1951.

Edward Dimock, *The U.S.A. and Its People and Its Home, Capitalism and America, Man's Right to Knowledge, The Chinese Year Book 1944-1945, Brainwashing in Red China* by Edward Hunter, *Peace Can Be Won* by Bernard Baruch, and *Everyman's United Nations*. Other books included bibliographic updates or books on library development such as the bibliography *Books in Print, 1952, Reading in Modern Education, The Children's Book on How to Use Books & Libraries*, and *The American School and University*.⁵⁹⁰

Many of the books donated from the American Information Service were overstocked English language reading matter. However, the list of books also reflects the political and social interests during this period: history and political science, US world relations, and Asia geography and politics. On August 13, 1953, the director of the newly renamed "General Library" (formerly Pierre Pasquier Library) wrote to the American Information Service reporting a politically subversive book in their last shipment of donated books to the library.⁵⁹¹ The General Library director expressed deep concern that two passages in *The Voice of Asia* by James A. Michelar "very much favor communism and its leader Hồ Chí Minh...and the author is very far away from the position adopted by the United States vis-à-vis the Indochinese problem. I do not think it is useful to spread literature which claims it is documentary but in reality is inspired by superficial and fanciful and haphazard declarations." The General Library Director's concern over the circulation of contentious reading matter suggests administrator's fears of communist influence in the midst of war and a weak governmental authority in Hanoi.

Former Cochinchina Library: Colonial Legacies and the Foundations of the Library of South Vietnam

Throughout World War II and the immediate aftermath, the Cochinchina Library (also called the Saigon Library) at 34 Lagrandière operated as an educational resource for Saigon readers and also dispatched book wagons throughout the southern provinces. However, a few wartime challenges such as shortages of labor, fuel, and security halted the book wagons and interrupted library services.⁵⁹² For example, in 1944 the Cochinchina Library Lending Section which consisted primarily of novels and popular works (literature, history, travel, science) was moved temporarily to the city hall.⁵⁹³ On Wednesday March 15, 1944, a group of prison laborers from the Maison Centrale were tasked with moving the valuable Lending Section collections for safekeeping. The Cochinchina Library was forced to temporarily close during the *coup de force* and transfer of authority in 1945.

In September through December of 1945, several administrative offices including the High Commission of France for the Southern Zone, the General Direction of Information, and

⁵⁹⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1754 "Dons des livres par le Service Americain d'information d'hanoi à la Bibliothèque Centrale de Hanoi," Documents: Shipments of books from the American Information Service in Hanoi to the Central Library in Hanoi, March 15, April 3, May 1, 1954. The Saigon branch of the American Information Service also sent a shipment on April 13, 1954.

⁵⁹¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 1754 Document: Letter 544 from the Director of the General Library of Hanoi to the Director of the American Information Service on August 13, 1953.

⁵⁹² TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 1 "Báo Cáo Hoạt động Hàng Tháng Của Nha Văn Khố và Thư Viện Nam Việt Năm 1946-1948," Document: Rapport sur le services des archives et des bibliothèques de la cochinchine" from the Department of Archives and Libraries to the President of the Provisionary Government of the Republic of Cochinchina. June 15, 1946.

⁵⁹³ TTLT2, GC, Folder 52630 "Demande d'escorte pour surveiller une corvée de 8 prisonniers en vue de déménagement de la Bibliothèque année 1944."

trade associations requested for the reopening of Saigon Library. An administrator begged for the reopening of the library in order to provide scientific and documentary information for military officials, commercial professionals, and administrators.⁵⁹⁴ The Reading Room at 34 Lagrandière was reopened on April 15, 1946 with limited operating hours from 9:30AM-11:30AM and 3-6PM. By August, the hours expanded to 9 hours a day without a midday break.⁵⁹⁵ The Cochinchina Library comprised of the Reading Room on 34 Lagrandière [Gia Long Street], a Lending section and Children's corner [Thư viện cho Mượn và phòng Đọc thiếu nhi], and a collection of circulating libraries (book wagons). Access to the Lending Section during this time was similar to the colonial era regulations: To apply for a Lending Card, an official in the civil service had to act as the guarantor on behalf of the applicant in case of loss or damaged works.⁵⁹⁶ Borrowers in the civil service were exempt from this requirement. Borrowers were permitted to borrow two books at one time for two weeks. Students were also permitted to read in the Lending Section with the presentation of their student identity card. However, an additional rule was added in 1946 which required that the applicant donate two books of average value at the time of registration. This mandatory donation helped to build the Lending Library collections.

The Cochinchina library quickly regained its old reading clientele and attracted more and more readers. According to the April 1946 report by Rémi Bourgeois, the Reading Room had approximately 820 readers and 913 works consulted each month (which averaged to a daily average of 63 readers and 70 works consulted).⁵⁹⁷ The Lending section was still much more utilized, accounting for 2,284 readers and 4,568 works lent a month (91 readers and 182 works borrowed per day). In 1946, Rémi Bourgeois reported that Saint-Marty, (the retired curator of the Cochinchina Library) would return to France and try to acquire published works whose subscriptions had been suspended since 1940 due to World War II. Other European personnel in the Cochinchina library included the contracted librarian of the Reading Room Madame Lebron, the head of the Lending Section Monsieur Francis and his assistant Monsieur Saunier. Bourgeois had requested the Commissioner of the Republic of Cochinchina for an assistant librarian. As of April 30, 1946, Indochinese personnel included 4 secretaries, 1 typist, 4 guards, and 2 handymen. Cao Van Khanh who was previously in charge of the Lending Section had been transferred to work at the registry office of the Director of Administrative Affairs.

On June 28, 1946, the new organization of French high commission transferred the colonial institution of the Cochinchina Library to the provisional government of South Vietnam. The library was placed within the Service of Education and renamed the library “Thư viện Quốc Gia Nam Việt [National Library of South Vietnam]”.⁵⁹⁸ Even with the renaming in 1946, Vietnamese readers often referred to the National Library of South Vietnam interchangeably with the old colonial name Cochinchina Library [Thư viện Nam Kỳ], as well as colloquial names the Saigon Library [Thư viện Saigon], and the Library of the South [Thư viện Nam Phần]. The Library of the South carried out four primary services — acquisitions, legal deposit, Reading Room, and lending section. The former French colonial librarian curator Rémi Bourgeois

⁵⁹⁴ TTLT2, GC, Folder 48733 “Dossier relatif au transfert des JOIC et BAC et depose a la Bibliothèque Française année 1945”; Document: Letter to Saint-Marty on October 18, 1945.

⁵⁹⁵ ANOM, PB, Folder 53, “Dossier Concernant la Construction des Bâtiments Pour les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine” (c. 1946).

⁵⁹⁶ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam” c. 1954-1957.

⁵⁹⁷ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 1, Document: “Commissariat de la république en Cochinchine – archives et bibliothèques – rapport mensuel, mois d’avril 1946” Signed Rémi Bourgeois, May 7, 1946.

⁵⁹⁸ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 2 “Hồ Sơ V/v Trả Lời Phỏng Vấn Đài Phát Thanh Báo Sài Gòn, Báo Ngô Luận về Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Nam Việt Năm 1949-1956.”

continued to be the director of the Library of the South until his death in 1948. The June 1946 report submitted to the President of the Provisionary Government of the Republic of Cochinchina demanded the government to resume efforts to construct “a larger modern library with a Reading Room, lending section, storage for books and archives, sufficient to assure the long term future of the Cochinchina Library.” The report requested for the following improvements: reorganization of the library storage, construction of four new shelving units, updating the library catalogs and archives inventory, creating a bibliography of works from Cochinchina, and restoration of the circulating libraries with new personnel, drivers, and secretaries.

An anonymous 1946 report on the Saigon library expressed the tremendous popularity and importance of the library and archives for documentation and education.⁵⁹⁹ The report called for the new Saigon government to dedicate attention to develop the library as it was now the new capital of the service of archives and libraries. “The cramped archives and the library no longer have more than a meter of shelving available. It is hoped that the young Republic will have a heart, to provide to Cochinchina and to the capital [resources] worthy of the library and archives services. The administration needs to have the archives in order, to provide documentation at all times, and also to make progress for the various levels of education; a library carefully kept abreast [of reading matter] and with convenient catalogs is essential...” Even with its constrained state, “antiquated system,” a “dark and off-putting” environment, the library provided extensive services in the Reading Room, legal deposit, and bindery. Additionally, the Lending Section (temporarily installed in the city hall) boasted extensive use, lending 60,000 books a year to 30,000 readers. The report concluded with the proclamation that the library was a “very French work” that must be cared for and continually improved “under the auspices and with the effective assistance of the young Republic, certainly a friend of letters and arts.”⁶⁰⁰

By June 1946, the collections at the former Library of Cochinchina Reading Room at 34 Lagrandière consisted of 56,000 of mainly French works, 470 newspapers, 44 seats, and a covered seating space for outdoor reading. Described as “not luxurious but pleasant, clean, well-lit and ventilated” another report argued that the library was not significantly altered by World War II, the First Indochina War, and the change of political power in Saigon.⁶⁰¹ However, a closer analysis shows how the library readers and contents of the library transformed during the post-colonial period. Furthermore, the Saigon Library evolved to become a national symbol and a central resource for culture and the growing population of urban students.

Diversifying the Language of Library Materials: Chinese Readers and the Work of Director Đoàn Quan Tấn

In an undated French and Chinese language newspaper article, the author characterized the Cochinchina Library at 34 Lagrandière as a “French language” library and criticized the lack of library resources for Chinese language readers.⁶⁰² The author (who was of Chinese-Vietnamese origin), declared, “Chinese readers to the library are few. We could say they do not

⁵⁹⁹ ANOM, PB, Folder 53, “Dossier Concernant la Construction des Bâtiments pour les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine” (c. 1946). Document: “Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine.”

⁶⁰⁰ ANOM, PB, Folder 53, Document: “Les Bibliothèques de l’Indochine.”

⁶⁰¹ TTLT2, TVQGNV, 102, Document: “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam” c. 1954-1957.

⁶⁰² TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 1, Document: “Une bibliothèque de langue Française par Cao Son” Original newspaper article appears to be written in Chinese and then later translated to French. C. 1946-1947.

even reach the proportion of one in a thousand readers. The number of Chinese readers are few—not because we are forbidden to visit there—but because apart from a very small number of lettered men, very few of our compatriots know of the library’s existence.” He continued to argue that in Saigon-Cholon, books are considered extremely valuable for education, and thus it was necessary to provide the community a library immediately. He exclaimed, “200,000 of our compatriots who reside here do not have access to any public library in the Chinese language!” He continued to criticize other limitations of the library such as a functional cataloging system based on topics and described the Cochinchina library as “lacking perfection.” This article reveals the immense demand from Chinese-language readers in Cholon for Chinese-language reading matter. The call for a public library was not currently satisfied by the singular Cochinchina Library. However, this request for a new public library was not met until after 1954.⁶⁰³

In a May 1949 interview with Radio Saigon, the Minister of National Education for the Government of South Vietnam evaluated the National Library of South Vietnam, its collection, history, and projects.⁶⁰⁴ This interview sheds light on the popular use of the libraries even during times of the political uncertainty and regime changes between 1945 and 1949. The interview noted that the Reading Room was “heavily frequented by the Saigoneses public such as high school students and university students.” With an average daily reader number of 80, approximately half of that number was Europeans. The interview noted that the number of readers slightly dropped to 60-70 readers during September 1945.

By 1949, the library included 57,000 volumes on law, humanities, science, arts, philosophy, religion, history, and geography. The works most read were classics, history, sciences, and law. The majority of the works were in French, and translation were encouraged by the library. In particular, the library encouraged the translation of popular science and technology works from French to Vietnamese. Recognizing the politics of translation, the library also encouraged translation of Vietnamese works into French so “that the effort of mutual understanding was not one-sided.” The library reported that it was currently focusing on building a collection of 10,000 Vietnamese quốc ngữ works to be placed in the Lending Section. The interview concluded with subtle criticisms of common ‘misbehaviors’ in the library. The library commented on the failure of readers to carefully handle the valuable books, by breaking the binding, annotating and ripping out pages. As a result, the library had to move all the tables to the central Reading Room for surveillance. The report called for the library to provide a “complete education” for readers on cultural norms and proper use of a public library.

After the death of Rémi Bourgeois, the position of director of the Library of the South (Thư viện Nam phần Việt nam) was handed over to the first Vietnamese director, Đoàn Quan Tấn on February 1948.⁶⁰⁵ In 1940 Tấn was the chairman of the Study Encouragement Society (Hội khuyến học), a mutual self-help society focused on education, improvement of the Vietnamese language, and the research and study of literature, fine arts, and national history. Đoàn Quan Tấn also worked at the Service Contentieux of the Indochina bank prior to 1945. As Director of the Library of the South, Đoàn Quan Tấn’s early responsibilities included conducting

⁶⁰³ With the end of the First Indochina War and transfer of collections, the General Library was located at the Pétrus Ky school and thus functioned as a temporary public library which served the large population of readers in the Cholon area.

⁶⁰⁴ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 2, Document: May 1949 Radio-Saigon questionnaire to Minister of National Education of South Vietnam.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid. Limited biographical information is available on Đoàn Quan Tấn prior to 1940.

a comprehensive evaluation of the library in order to improve facilities, to supply adequate furniture, to purchase more print media, and to create a Vietnamese language collection. In the first few years as director, Đoàn Quan Tấn worked to improve the reader experience by installing new neon lights, and updating the library tables, chairs, and shelves. On top of his work as director, Tấn also engaged actively with Saigon scholarly life and worked with other research institutes. From 1950 to 1952 Tấn was the chairman of the France-Vietnam People's Academy Association, chairman of the Indochina Archaeology Association, and from 1953 was the assistant chairman of the French literary alliance association.⁶⁰⁶

Between 1949-1954, Tấn prioritized the building of the Library of the South's collections through finding missing issues of Vietnamese language serials in the library collection and creation of a comprehensive collection of Vietnamese, English, and Chinese works. The library justified the importance of building the Vietnamese collections due to the fact that Vietnamese had been designated as the official language of archives and governmental operations in the post-colonial period. The report "The history and operations of the National Library of the South" also emphasized the importance of developing the Chinese collection because Vietnamese quốc ngữ language and newspaper writing relied upon words of Chinese origin, especially those relating to ideology, politics, and internationalism. In other words, the report concluded that developing the Chinese language collection could also help the advancement of literacy in quốc ngữ. The Chinese collection developed largely from the collaborative efforts of the director Viên Thâu Thạch and chairman Phủ Lâm Anh from the Chamber of Commerce of Cholon Overseas Chinese in 1951. A committee of scholars, journalists, and bookstore owners of ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese personally selected and purchased many books for the Chinese collection, even venturing to Hong Kong for purchases. From this collaborative effort, over 3,563 Chinese language books of various genres and formats were obtained for the Chinese collection called "Phần hoa văn (Chinese Language Section)" of the Library of the South in Saigon.⁶⁰⁷ The collection included valuable works on Buddhist philosophy and education, chronicles, and historical encyclopedia such as the following: *Tứ Bộ Bị yếu* (94 volumes gifted from Phủ Lâm Anh), *Bộ Đại Tạng Kinh* (317 volumes gifted from Dương Quang Lượng), *Bộ Thập Thông Chí* (20 volumes gifted from Quan Bôn), *Bộ Tứ Khố toàn Thư trân bản* (the extensive 1960 volume set published by Thương Vụ Ấn Thư Quán). As for the English collection, international offices such as American and British information services, UNESCO, the German, British, Dutch, and Indian consulates donated English and European language books and serials such as *The Economist*, *Spectator*, *London Calling*, *Review of Progress of Science*, *The National Geographic*, *Album of American History*, *Compton's Picture Encyclopedia*, and French and English dictionaries.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 2, Report dated March 18, 1955. The France-Vietnam People's Academy Association offered continual education for seniors. The Indochina Archaeology association focused on archaeology and indigenous history especially of Vietnam. The mission of the French literary alliance association was to spread French language and literature.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. Many sets of collected volumes were donated from private libraries.

⁶⁰⁸ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102 "Hồ Sơ về Tổ Chức và Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Nam Phần Năm 1951-1957."

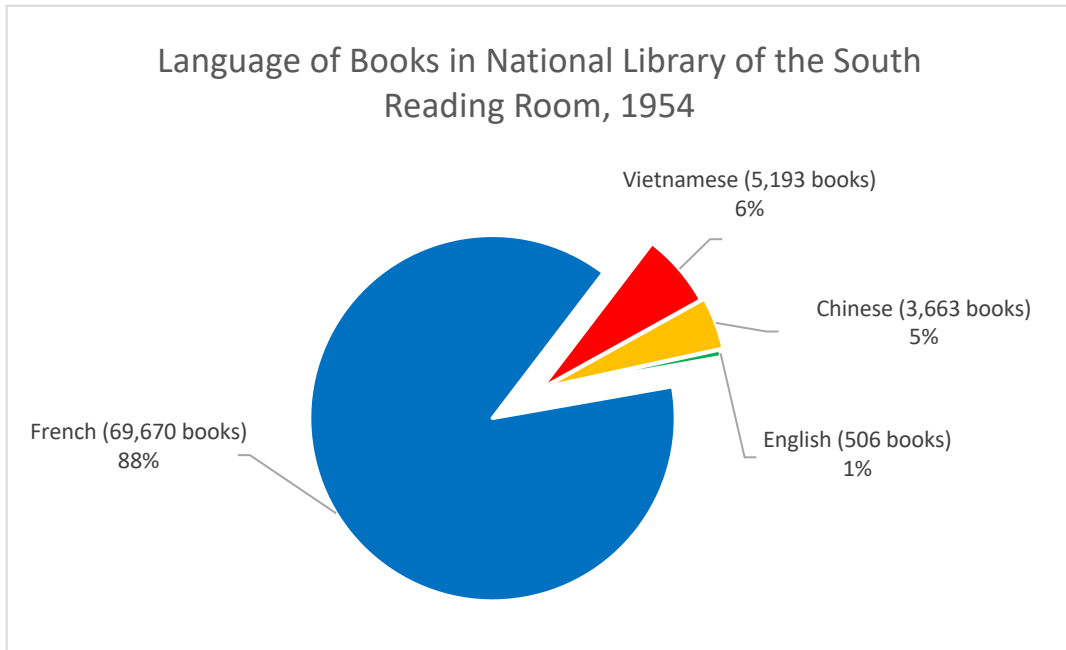


Diagram 5-5. Language breakdown of books in the National Library of the South Reading Room in 1954 out of a total of 79,081 books.⁶⁰⁹

By 1954 the collection had increased by 15,000 works, bringing the total to 79,081 books (of which 5,193 were in Vietnamese.) The primary language of the books collection was in French (69,670 books), reflecting the inheritance of the large French language colonial era collections. However, a closer analysis of the periodicals in the Reading Room reveal a shift towards contemporary publishing trends in Vietnamese rather than French. In 1953, the Reading Room held 36 French language periodicals, 43 Vietnamese, and 14 Chinese. By 1955, the number of French periodicals had decreased to 23 while Vietnamese had more than doubled to 89, and Chinese numbers had stayed about the same at 13. From 1953 to 1955, the total number of books and periodicals in the library—especially Vietnamese, English, and Chinese—was gradually increasing and diversifying the language of the Saigon library collections.

⁶⁰⁹ TILT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Documents: “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam” c. 1956, p. 9. “Hoạt động của thư viện quốc gia từ khi giao lại cho chính phủ việt nam đến ngày nay” signed Phan Vô Kỳ June 26, 1954, the acting director of the library and archives of South Vietnam [Quy`ân Giám đốc thư viện và văn khố nam việt.] For the statistics of Reading Room for 1953 I draw from a report from Phan Vô Kỳ January 23, 1953 sent to attaché of French information in South Vietnam and “Tổ chức thư viện quốc gia- phần thứ nhất” signed Lê Ngọc Trụ c. 1954(?) in the same archival dossier.

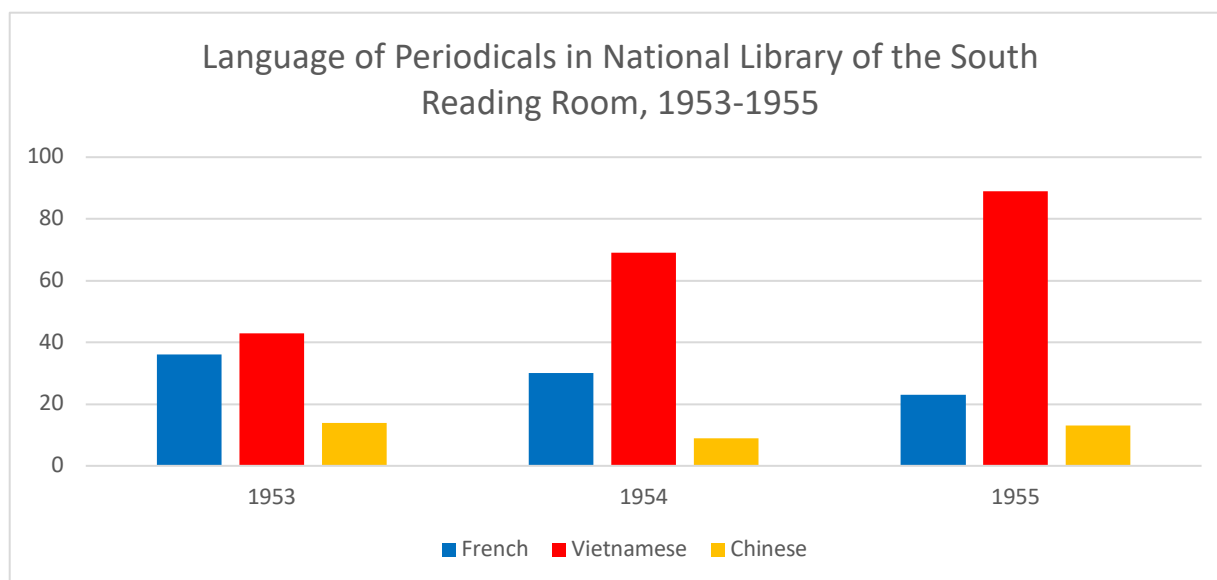


Diagram 5-6. Comparative language breakdown of periodicals (monthlies and dailies) in the National Library of the South Reading Room from 1953 to 1955.⁶¹⁰

The new southern government in Saigon struggled to consistently implement mandatory submission of new books to the legal deposit, especially of books published in north and central Vietnam.⁶¹¹ For example, according to the five-month report from January to May 1954, the legal deposit received 190 books and musical records, 127 serials (of which 41 of these were newspapers newly beginning to publish in 1954).⁶¹² Thus, the Library of the South relied upon gifts and purchases rather than legal deposit to increase its collection. According to the same five-month report in 1954, the acquisitions room received 1,038 books and 188 serials from purchases and gifts.⁶¹³ The Library of the South slowly increased its collections and diversified its languages through purchases, gifts, and mandatory legal deposit.

Statistics of Saigon Reading Room and Lending Section: Collection Sizes and Reader Trends, 1953-1955

Prior to 1944, the Saigon Reading Room operated from Monday to Saturday from 9AM to 12PM and 3PM to 10PM. From 1945 to 1953 during the beginning of the First Indochina War, the library closed during the evenings and changed its hours of operation from 9AM to 6PM Monday to Saturday and Sunday mornings. However, university student readers requested shifting the hours to later in the evening to accommodate readers who were busy during the day with studies or work. Since the Reading Room usually received few readers during lunchtime hours, the Reading Room changed its hours starting on March 1954 back to 9AM to 12PM and 3PM to 9PM Monday to Saturday.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: "Tổ chức thư viện quốc gia- phần thứ nhất" signed Lê Ngọc Trụ c. 1954.

⁶¹² TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102: Document: Report from Phan Vô Kỳ January 23, 1953 sent to attaché of French information in South Vietnam.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: "La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam" c. 1954-1957.

	1953	1954	1955
Total Readers by year	20,915	26,174	31,997
Daily Average of Readers Visiting the Library	80	92	110
Total Number of Books in Collection	77,289	79,081	80,396

Chart 5-7. Statistics of Readers visiting the library (yearly, daily average) from 1953 to 1955. Note the gradual increase in daily averages.⁶¹⁵

From 1953-1955, the number of readers also increased steadily, with Vietnamese students forming the majority of readers. In 1953, the monthly average was 1,630 readers of which 1,540 (94.5%) were Vietnamese and 90 (5.5%) were European. In 1954, the monthly average had increased to 2,056 readers, of which 1,996 (97%) were Vietnamese and 80 (3%) were foreigners.⁶¹⁶ During this time period there were only a total of 44 seats available in the Reading Room, constraining the maximum capacity for reader consultation at any one time. Since many of the Reading Room collections only had one copy of rare, difficult to acquire texts from the colonial period, the Reading Room only permitted a limited number of researchers and administrators to borrow books home from the Reading Room collection on a special case by case basis. From January to May 1954 only 169 readers with special permissions were permitted to borrow a total of 317 books.

Ever since the French colonial period, the Lending Section of the Saigon Library was more popular than the Reading Room and welcomed thousands of visitors and book loans. The Saigon Library Lending Section had been relocated several due to building size constraints. First the Saigon Library Lending Section was moved to Saigon's city hall in March 1944. In 1951, the Lending Section was again relocated to the Indochinese Circle Association building on 14 Lê Văn Duyệt (formerly 14 Thủ Tướng Thinh).⁶¹⁷ In 1953, the monthly average of the Lending Section welcomed 1,200 readers of which 1,000 were Vietnamese (83%) and 200 were European.⁶¹⁸ The number of readers increased over time, averaging 80 visitors to the Lending Section per day. From January to May 1954, there were a total of 10,500 borrowers. The monthly average breaks down to approximately 2,100 monthly readers of which 1500 (72%) were Vietnamese and the remaining 600 were foreigners. During that same time period, 1,500 (14%) of the readers were students who often checked out textbooks. The popularity of the Lending Section is even more pronounced when considering the number of readers (2,100 per month) to the relatively small size of the Lending Library collection (approximately 10,000).

Part 3

Division and Patrimony: Transitional Sovereignties, Demarcations of Cultural Heritage, and the End of the First Indochina War, 1950-1955

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ This calculation is based on a report of total readers from January to end of May 1954 as 10,378 total.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: Report from Phan Vô Ky January 23, 1953 sent to attaché of French information in South Vietnam.

Fragmented Decolonization: Transitional Organization into a “Mixed French-Vietnamese” Service

Decolonization of the archives and libraries continued in a fragmented manner throughout the First Indochina War between the High Commission of France in Indochina and the State of Vietnam authorities based out of Saigon. Administrators proposed multiple conventions to reorganize the archives and libraries but failed to implement the conventions and later revised the plans in light of changing governmental regimes and geopolitical realities during the war. From June 1950 through February 1953, administrators signed a series of conventions on the colonial collections from the former Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina. On June 15, 1950, Bảo Đại (Head of State of Viet Nam) and Léon Pignon (High Commissioner of France in Indochina, representing the Government of the French Republic) signed conventions to divide the archives of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries conserved in the Hanoi and Saigon central depots from the colonial period.⁶¹⁹ The former colonial archives, library of Cochinchina, and legal deposit of materials on South Vietnam had already been transferred to the Government of Vietnam since February 14, 1948. This convention extended the previous transfer and partitioned the remaining archives in Hanoi and Saigon. A committee with representatives from France, the Associated states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia would carry out the division of the archives. For collections from the colonial General Services which cannot be divided, a shared collection would be jointly managed by the associated states. Article 7 of the convention outlined the handover of the archives of the imperial government of the Kinh Lược (conserved in the Central Archives) and the local administration of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina to the Government of Vietnam. Article 8 transferred the following collections to French authorities: the archives of the French administration prior to the establishment of the Indochinese Union, the archives of the cabinet and offices of the Governor General, the archives of the Resident Superiors and the Cochinchina Governors (specifically the archives of the cabinet, institutions, and French establishments), the French tribunal, the French Civil State and Personnel, the administrative cabinets in the provinces, the residents and resident-mayors, and “in general, all archives that carry a political, diplomatic, military, or private characteristic.” Along with the partition of the documents of the collections, the convention detailed the transfer of personnel, documentation systems, and furniture to the respective associated states. A separate convention also signed by Bao Dai and Léon Pignon on June 15, 1950 detailed the division of the libraries and the legal deposit between France, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.⁶²⁰ The June 15, 1950 conventions between France and Vietnam ratified the division of the former colonial directorate materials between Cambodia, France, Laos, and Vietnam.⁶²¹

On June 15, 1950 Nguyễn Văn Tâm, President of the Council of Ministers of the Government of Vietnam (representing the government of Vietnam) and Letourneau Minister of

⁶¹⁹ ANOM, HCI, Folder 58-200 “ÉFEO enseignement des hautes études extrêmes orientales, transfer des musées; transfer des pouvoirs de conservation des monuments; bibliothèques et archives...” Document: “Convention relative aux services d’archives relevant en ce qui concerne le Viet-Nam de la Direction des Archives & Bibliothèques” signed June 15, 1950 by Léon Pignon, Bao Dai, and Tran Van Huu.

⁶²⁰ ANOM, HCI, Folder 58-200, “Convention relative aux Bibliothèques” and “Convention relative au transfert des services de dépôt légal” signed June 15, 1950 by Léon Pignon, Bao Dai, and Tran Van Huu. Along with statuts on the transfer of archives and libraries, the High Commission of Indochina negotiated the transfer of the authority over museums, schools, and monuments in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam and the reorganization of the ÉFEO.

⁶²¹ *Organization and Administration of the Directorate of National Archives and Libraries*, (Saigon: Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Education, Directorate of National Archives and Libraries, 1964).

the Associated States (representing the French Republic) also signed the Franco-Vietnamese convention that outlined the future of the library and archives.⁶²² The convention outlined the creation of a new “Bibliothèque Culturelle (Thư viện Văn Hoá)” to replace the Central Library or Pierre Pasquier Library. The Cultural Library “will use all the existing furniture and buildings of the former Direction of Archives and Libraries in Hanoi subject to the provisions of the General Convention, and compensation will be granted to the states of Cambodia and Laos.” However, plans for this new ambitious reorganization of the colonial Directorate of Archives and Libraries remained in a tentative state throughout the First Indochina War.

Between 1952 and 1953, administrators revisited the plans to reorganize the Service of the Library and Archives and to move the Pierre Pasquier Library. In an internal report on March 26, 1952, administrators summarized the current state of the Pierre Pasquier Library in 1952. “In spite of the current events, the reductions in budget for personnel and equipment, the considerable decline in French inhabitants in Hanoi (who used to constitute a great proportion of the readers), the success of the library has not ceased to increase among the public, currently the majority of whom is Vietnamese.”⁶²³ In December 1952, 3,328 readers visited the library during the month and consulted 5,686 books.⁶²⁴ The author, most likely a Vietnamese librarian at the Pierre Pasquier Library commented that very few French military visit the library. He added that the library stood like an “incomparable center of French culture in a Vietnamese milieu” where Vietnamese readers consult books and periodicals in French, using a French catalog and library science system. The author points to the information imperialism persisting in the collections and cataloging system, even noting that American information services had recognized the French dominance of the library and thus was “flooding us with their publications.”⁶²⁵ He argued that the division of the libraries also reflected a post-colonial struggle for authority through governmental appointments as heads of services. Citing the examples in the libraries of Cochinchina in June 1950 and Phnom Penh in December 1950, the author mentioned that the appointments of librarians immediately precede their promotion to the minister’s office of national education and of information.⁶²⁶ Besides claims to authority in the new post-colonial states, the author argued that Vietnam must also represent itself as a beautiful national library with modern buildings on the international stage such as at UNESCO meetings and for foreign visitors. Recognizing the Hanoi library’s colonial past in the Indochinese Union, the author raised the question “Is it fair and possible that this “federal” institution (Hanoi Library) be attributed only to Vietnam?” He suggested the possibility of a financial compensation to Laos and Cambodia. He concluded with the question “Does France have any interest and means to maintain some control over this library?” and discussed France’s budgetary commitment to support the library in order to

⁶²² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-05 “Organisation et Fonctionnement de La Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi 1953,” Document: Convention, c. 1949-1953.

⁶²³ ANOM, HCI, Folder 60-205 “Bibliothèque de Hanoi, rapport, projet de statut, négociation avec le Vietnam, 1953,” Document: “Note sur la bibliothèque centrale de l’Indochine (Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier) à Hanoi.”

⁶²⁴ The administrator reported 3,626 readers in the Lending Section in December 1952, compared to 3,740 readers and 7,252 books checked out in November 1952. Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ In this case the author references the appointment of Đoàn Quan Tấn as the head of the library of Saigon. Đoàn Quan Tấn previously worked in the Indochina Bank and was later promoted in the Ministry of National Education. In the case of Cambodia, 15 days after the transfer of Cambodia in 1950, Pach Chhoeun became the head of the library of Phnom Penh, and later advanced in the Ministry of Information. Pach Chhoeun took over from Madame Renée Duquesnay. During his first year Pach Chhoeun requested the renaming of the Centrale Bibliothèque to the Nationale Bibliothèque, proposed to expand the library collections, and increase the number of professional archivist-librarian staff.

maintain French control of the library. The questions raised the important issue of patrimony and legitimate heritage of the colonial library and archives between France and the post-colonial Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian states.

In 1952, administrators proposed the official separation of the Service of the Library and Archives of the High Commission [Nha Thư viện và Văn khố Cao ủy phụ] into two parts: the Pierre Pasquier Library at 31 Rue Borgnis-Desbordes in Hanoi and the Library of the High Commission at 32 Taberd Street in Saigon.⁶²⁷ The Pasquier Library, would be placed within the University Institute in Hanoi and renamed the General Library of Hanoi, jointly managed by the French director Simone de Saint-Exupéry and the Vietnamese director Trần Văn Kha.⁶²⁸ The Library of the High Commission at 32 Rue Taberd in Saigon, had served as the headquarters of the Service of the Archives and Libraries of the High Commission of Indochina since its creation by Ferréol de Ferry in 1948. The 1952 division of the Service of Archives and Libraries attached the Library of the High Commission to the French Cultural Mission Library [Thư viện của Phái bộ văn hoá Pháp]. Nguyễn Văn Tâm, (Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam from 1952 to 1953) expressed his vision of the post-colonial library in a letter to the Minister of State (Division of Relations with the Associated States) on August 4, 1952. Tâm reasserted the vision of the Central Library of Indochina by the associated states. First, he reiterated that the governments of Laos and Cambodia had decided to not participate in the future plans for the Central Library of Indochina. On behalf the State of Vietnam, Nguyễn Văn Tâm argued that the Central Library in Hanoi should be “an autonomous institution with a mixed council of directors, which thus conserves the Central Library with its characteristics as a cultural establishment intended for the entirety of the population. The library of the University Institute of Hanoi whose collection is almost exclusively composed of books for students, would be kept in its special structure under the management of the rectorate.”⁶²⁹ Nguyễn Văn Tâm’s vision for the Central Library requested Vietnamese management of the Central Library and also its separation from the library of the University Institute of Hanoi.

Administrators continued to debate the future of the “Mixed French-Vietnamese Library [Bibliothèque mixte Franco-Vietnamienne]” and its new organization with the University of Hanoi. Longtime colonial librarian-archivist Simone de Saint-Exupéry took over temporarily as director of the Pierre Pasquier Library between 1953 and 1954. On January 28, 1953, Simone de Saint-Exupéry submitted the 12-page draft statutes of the newly transferred library which she tentatively named, the “Cultural Library [Bibliothèque Culturelle]” also called the Thư Viện Văn Hoá.⁶³⁰ Simone de Saint-Exupéry described the Cultural Library as a “mixed French-Vietnamese body, endowed with a civic characteristic and budget attached to the University of Hanoi.” The library would be open to the public, and students of higher education would simply be admitted with presentation of their student identification card. The library would produce bibliographies, manage the legal deposit of North Vietnam, and facilitate book exchanges with the Legal

⁶²⁷ ANOM, PB, Folder 48 “Imprimés sur les Archives et Bibliothèques de l’Indochine,” Article: “La Bibliothèque Générale nationale du viet-nam est la seconde bibliothèque de l’extrême-orient,” *Mouvement de la Révolution Nationale*, Number 232, April 18, 1956.

⁶²⁸ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: “Lịch sử của Thư viện quốc gia Việt-Nam” c. 1954-1957.

⁶²⁹ ANOM, HCI, Folder 60-205 “Bibliothèque de Hanoi, rapport, projet de statut, négociation avec le Vietnam, 1953,” Document: Letter from Nguyễn Văn Tâm, Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam to the Minister of State (Division of Relations with the Associated States) on August 4, 1952.

⁶³⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-05 “Organisation et Fonctionnement de La Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi 1953,” Document: “Projet de Statuts de la bibliothèque Culturelle (Thư Viện Văn Hoá)” Signed by Simone de Saint-Exupéry on January 28, 1953.

Deposit in Vietnam and France. Saint-Exupéry noted that all of the library personnel must be Vietnamese or French. She proposed that each year the library and the University of Hanoi organize a cycle of technical training courses for archivist-librarians. However, some administrators were uncertain about attaching the former Pierre Pasquier Library to the University of Hanoi. On February and March 1953, Jean Lassus the Rector of the University of Hanoi raised several hesitations regarding the financial strain on the University of Hanoi and the lack of transition protocol for library personnel.⁶³¹

Throughout 1953, Vietnamese and French administrators debated the draft statutes on the Cultural Library written by Simone de Saint-Exupéry and the future of archives and the Central Library in Hanoi.⁶³² Most of the remarks comment on the ambiguous nature of the organization of the libraries and archives personnel and their relationship with other government departments. Nguyen Van Dang, the cabinet director at the Ministry of National Education wrote, “in which it concerns the Personnel, the draft convention contains provisions which would unjustly favor some individuals...and create inequalities of treatment between the public servants in the library and those of different departments of the government of Vietnam...I therefore propose that the Minister seek the opinion of the Civil Service on the part of the draft convention relating to staff.”⁶³³ Other documents considered the relationship future relationship of the library with France and the meaning of a “mixed French-Vietnamese authority.”⁶³⁴ On July 9, 1953, the French-Vietnamese accords were signed and the Cultural Library, (renamed the General Library) was designated as “mixed French-Vietnamese service” and transferred to the University Institute of Hanoi. At the time, the General Library collection contained 130,000 works in French, 17,000 in Vietnamese, 2,000 in English, and 400 in German.⁶³⁵ Beyond the formal statutes for the “General Library,” the everyday functions of the library still remained similar to prior years. Many administrators, including Simone de Saint-Exupéry continued to refer to the Central Library interchangeably as the Cultural Library, the General Library, and the Pierre Pasquier Library. On July 31, 1953 Simone de Saint-Exupéry published the official bylaws for the Bibliothèque Generale de Hanoi (Tổng Thư Viện Hà Nội) in both French and Vietnamese.⁶³⁶ The official bylaws stated that the General Library permitted “a) Asians or Europeans 18 years and

⁶³¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-06 “Rattachement de l'ancienne bibliothèque "Pierre Pasquier" à l'université de Hanoi 1953,” Document: Letter from Rector of University of Hanoi Jean Lassus to Inspector Chovard of the F.O.M. (France d'outre-mer) March 27, 1953. TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-05, Document: Confidential letter from Rector of University of Hanoi, Jean Lassus to the Inspector General of Libraries, Masson at the Maison des Étudiants de l'Indochine, Paris, February 18, 1953.

⁶³² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-05, Documents: “Remarks on the Project of the Convention Related to the Cultural Library” signed by Nguyen Van Dang, the Director of Cabinet, Ministry of National Education on February 19, 1953; “Remarks on the Project of the Convention Related to the Cultural Library” signed by Le Quang Ho, Secretary of State of the Interior Office on March 14, 1953; “Remarks on the Project of the Convention Related to the Cultural Library” signed by Minister of the Interior of the Government of Vietnam (Civil Service) on May 6, 1953.

⁶³³ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-05, Document: “Remarks on the Project of the Convention Related to the Cultural Library” signed by Nguyen Van Dang, the Director of Cabinet, Ministry of National Education on February 19, 1953.

⁶³⁴ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-05, Document: “Remarks on the Project of the Convention Related to the Cultural Library” signed by Le Quang Ho, Secretary of State of the Interior Office on March 14, 1953.

⁶³⁵ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-08 “Rapport sur l'activité de la Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi, 1954.” Documents: “Projet de proces-verbal du conseil d'administration de la bibliothèque de hanoi réunion 20 janvier 1954.”

⁶³⁶ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-05 “Organisation et Fonctionnement de La Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi 1953,” Document: “Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi – Tổng Thư Viện Hà Nội – Règlement Intérieur - Nội Quy” July 31, 1953.

older, who have sufficient instruction b) students from Hanoi University and from French and Vietnamese high schools.” Furthermore, readers must respect the following rules: “Readers must observe absolute silence. They are forbidden to smoke...the reader must deposit their reader card to the supervisor office when they enter the library...Before leaving the reader must return the books and periodicals taken from the shelves and also return to the orderly the works consulted. Afterwards, their reader card is returned.” These Reading Room regulations were based off colonial rules of proper reader behavior. The regulations also cited consequences for violations of these rules or reader damages to books—readers will be subjected to fines or prison according to penal code articles 254, 255, and 257.

On January 20, 1954, the Board of Directors of the General Library of Hanoi met to discuss the future of the library. The meeting began with the following anecdote: “President of the Board of Directors remarked in surprise when he realized the importance of the General Library, even exceeding in importance compared to many libraries in the capitals in France.”⁶³⁷ Saint-Exupéry commended the work of the rector of the University of Hanoi, Jean Lassus, who negotiated and fundraised a budget for the university and the attached library for 1954. The report on the meeting observed that the library has developed at a slow pace and has not yet recovered the same number of readers as it had before 1945. In 1953 the General Library recorded 6,540 registered readers and 165 daily readers compared to 5,483 total registered and 144 daily readers in 1952. The report noted that this low number was due to the mobilization of many of its student readers for the army. The Lending Section recorded 43,230 readers in 1953 (19,730 Europeans, 25,500 Asians), averaging 163 reader visits and 324 works checked out daily.

The meeting designated the future directions, organization, and personnel of the services of the central archives, library, and legal deposit of Hanoi under the new governments. Saint-Exupéry nominated Trần Văn Kha (currently senior librarian) as the director of the Hanoi library. Saint-Exupéry read a recommendation from de Ferry (when he was director of the service) supporting Trần Văn Kha. The meeting concluded with a visit to the Children’s Library Section which was opened in 1952 in a corner of the Lending Section. The Children’s library had two benches and four armchairs, providing seating for 19. On average the Children’s Library received 44 visitors daily who borrowed books home or read on-site. The report noted that the “beautiful illustrated works are made available to the little readers who treat the books with great care.”⁶³⁸ In 1953 the Children’s Library subscribed to five illustrated newspapers and comics in French: *Coeurs vaillants*, *Coq hardi*, *La semaine de Suzette*, *Spirou*, and *Tintin*.⁶³⁹ The meeting noted that the Children’s Library “had been received favorably by the young public. The director also asked members of the Vietnamese delegation to create another Vietnamese language newspaper for children. The current newspaper was *Tuổi Thơ* and was provided by the services of the Army and was only intended for families of combatants.”⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-08 “Rapport sur l’activité de la Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi, 1954.” Documents: “Projet de proces-verbal du conseil d’administration de la bibliothèque de hanoi réunion 20 janvier 1954” and “Rapport sur l’activité de la Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi pendant l’année 1953” (based off the meeting on January 20, 1954).

⁶³⁸ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-08, “Rapport sur l’activité de la Bibliothèque Générale de Hanoi pendant l’année 1953” (based off the meeting on January 20, 1954).

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-08, “Projet de proces-verbal du conseil d’administration de la bibliothèque de hanoi réunion 20 janvier 1954.”

During the discussions regarding transfer of the General Library, the central archives also requested to be reorganized and attached to the General Library. Since the decree on November 21, 1917 which created the Directorate of Archives and Libraries, the Central Archives Depot in Hanoi conserved the papers of the General Government, administrative services, the Superior Residences, and documents from a select number of institutions and services. The Central archives occupied the ground floor of a governmental building located in the same compound as the Pierre Pasquier Library at 31 Borgnis-Desbordes. With a few pauses in service between 1945 and 1947, the archives maintained its services through World War II and the First Indochina War. The report justified the attachment of the Central Archives and the General Library because it would be “difficult to maintain a common collection between four states and it is impossible to separate the collection. Furthermore, the collections of manuscripts and print matter should not be divided since they developed jointly. Additionally, the training courses for archivists-librarians had been under the technical management of the Director of the General Library and the archival training must take place in the Archives building.”⁶⁴¹ The remainder of the report examined the breakdown of the dossiers conserved in the Central Archives according to collection. According to the December 1953 statistics, the Central Archives maintained over 200,000 dossiers on the Government General, General Services, as well as the North Vietnam Archives (local and provincial archives).⁶⁴²

The End of the First Indochina War: Formal Division and Transfer of the General Library and Central Archives to Saigon

In January 1950, the Soviet Union and China recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and began to provide military arms, state-building advisors, and financial support to its communist ally. Chinese Communist Party advisors assisted the DRV state in both state-building and warfare, providing a Maoist style model for statecraft, social mobilization strategies (rectification and emulation campaigns, land reform, peasant recruitment), as well as guerilla warfare and conventional army tactics. Christopher Goscha has described the conflict as a total war of social mobilization, relying upon the military draft and complete civilian mobilization as porters and fighter laborers for the war effort. At the same time, the United States also began to provide aid to France and the Associated States of Indochina as part of the transnational war against the spread of Communism. The First Indochina War was not a simple war of decolonization, but were several intertwined civil, international, and ideological wars.

On May 7, 1954, General Võ Nguyên Giáp led a siege against the French Army at Dien Bien Phu, leading to one of the most symbolic battles in colonial history and one of the most staggering military losses in French history. Negotiations to officially end the war began in Geneva led by France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, the People’s Republic of China, and with representatives from the Associated States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. By July 21, 1954 the DRV and France signed an armistice at the Geneva Conference and a declaration which separated the country at the 17th parallel with the promise of elections to reunify the country of Vietnam in two years. With a base in Saigon, Ngô Đình Diệm was chosen as prime minister of the State of Vietnam (which later

⁶⁴¹ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-02 “Application sur la Régie du Dépôt Légal de la Direction des Archives et des Bibliothèques de L’indochine à Hanoi 1951-1954,” Undated report c. 1954.

⁶⁴² TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2041-02, Document: “Répartition des dossiers conservés aux archives centrales entre les divers fonds (Decembre 1953).”

became the Republic of Vietnam, or Việt Nam Cộng Hoà on October 26, 1955) with support from the United States. Returned to their headquarters in Hanoi, Hồ Chí Minh's government led the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, extending communist social and government organization throughout North Vietnam.

The Geneva Accords' sanctioned division of the country also marked the formal division of the Hanoi General Library and Central Archives. Between 1954 and 1955, a portion of the Hanoi Library along with a number of personnel were transferred to South Vietnam. A 1956 newspaper article noted that at the time of the movement to Saigon, the Hanoi library was "considered the largest and most valuable library in Vietnam and judged by other countries as the second greatest in the all of the Far-East."⁶⁴³ In spite of the transfer of the Hanoi collections, the remaining collections and personnel in Hanoi, the capital of the DRV, continued to operate the library for the Hanoi reading public. On October 10, 1954, the General Library was renamed the Central Library of Hanoi [Thư viện Trung ương Hà Nội]. In the newspaper *Nhân Dân* [The People] on October 21, 1954, the Central Library announced that it had reopened with operating hours for reading from 7:30 to 11AM in the morning and 2 to 5PM in the afternoon.

On May 11, 1955, the former General Library (Pierre Pasquier) of Hanoi was divided and transferred to Saigon along with the entire University Institute of Hanoi. Between May 11 and May 26, 1955, Republic of Vietnam troops transported boxes of documents and newspapers to Saigon. This transfer moved a quarter of the Hanoi collection and 16 personnel of the Pierre Pasquier Library in Hanoi to Saigon to the temporary Denis Frères storage facility in Khánh Hội. The official director of the General Library of Hanoi, Trần Văn Kha was also transferred to Saigon. The collection of transferred materials included over 17,000 valuable books, half of the serials from the colonial period, the archives of the Kinh Lược viceroy located in North Vietnam (38 boxes), and 35,000 legal deposit items collected in Hanoi.⁶⁴⁴ These valuable transferred materials totaled over 700 boxes. Most of the transferred collections were claimed to be from the Indochina legal deposit and duplicate copies collected up to June 1954.

This collection of materials from Hanoi merged with the existing National Library of the South (formerly the Cochinchina Library during the colonial period) and the combined libraries were renamed the National Library of Vietnam [Thư viện quốc gia Việt-nam]. This newly merged National Library of Vietnam joined the network of other Saigon libraries such as French-managed library of the Marie Curie school on 123 Bonard (Lê Lợi) Street, the library of the Alliance Française at 26 Lagrandière (Gia Long) Street, the library of the Society for Sino-Indic Studies at the Blanchard de la Brosse Museum.⁶⁴⁵ There was also a small, library with limited staff for Popular Culture Club [Câu lạc bộ Văn hoá Bình dân] created by the Association of Popular culture [Hội Văn hoá Bình dân] at 7 Vigerie, Saigon. Another city university library existed in Saigon reserved for students. According to a 1955 report from archivist-librarian Nguyễn Hùng Cường of the new General National Library in Saigon, the transfer signaled the

⁶⁴³ ANOM, PB, Folder 48, Article: "La Bibliothèque Générale nationale du viet-nam est la seconde bibliothèque de l'extrême-orient," *Mouvement de la Révolution Nationale*, n. 232, April 18, 1956.

⁶⁴⁴ Information on the transfer of collections is compiled from the following sources: TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11 "Báo Cáo Hoạt động và Thành Tích Của Tổng Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1954-1958" and TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 12 "Hồ Sơ v ề Tổ Chức và Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1957-1958," Dated June 28, 1957.

⁶⁴⁵ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: "Lịch sử của Thư viện quốc gia Việt-Nam" c. 1954-1957..

“transformation of the General National Library (in Saigon) into a completely Vietnamese (library)” and suggested its official separation from its French colonial past.⁶⁴⁶

Part 4

Creating a New National Library in Saigon: Colonial Legacies, Collections, and New Reading Publics, 1954-1958

The National Library of South Vietnam within International Library Standards: Methodical Organization, Cultural Value, and Colonial Legacies of Bibliothéconomie [Library Sciences]

On June 26, 1954, Phan Vô Ky, the director of the Service of Library and Archives of South Vietnam, summarized the recent activities of the library from the time of French handover to Vietnamese authorities in 1946 to 1954.⁶⁴⁷ Ky noted that the National Library of South Vietnam continued to carry out its essential services even with a severe deficit in personnel and budget. Three library personnel had been conscripted for the war cause, but the library still served its large population of readers such as university students. Ky reported the dismal state of library affairs, and argued that the library must advance into a fully functional institution worthy of the nation’s capital, Saigon:

With the complete independence of our motherland and the designation of Saigon as the national capital, the national library is far too small to provide services for the Saigon population of over 2 million. The library is too crowded, unable to store books and documents shipped to the library. With only 46 chairs in the Reading Room, some readers come to the library but end up leaving due to lack of seating. The estimated yearly budget of the library is not enough to purchase books or several copies of certain books in order to let readers check out the books to read at home. The hope is that the National Library will be able to expand, provide the same level of conveniences and services as other large libraries of civilized and economical countries. The National Library must become a space worthy to collect the spiritual products of a people with four thousand years of civilization.⁶⁴⁸

Ky’s declaration addressed the colonial past and the national future of the Saigon library. Vietnamese library administrators such as Phan Vô Ky envisioned with ambitious optimism the vision of the Saigon library: a national institution tasked with the preservation of cultural heritage of Vietnam and a public service to the growing number of inhabitants of Saigon. Although Ky used a vague benchmark of “civilized and economical countries” to evaluate the capabilities of the Saigon Library, it is significant that he places the Saigon library as both an everyday institution serving the public and a symbol of nationhood.

In the nine-page statement titled “Tổ chức thư viện quốc gia (Organization of the National Library)”, Lê Ngọc Trụ outlined the importance of library collections and methodic

⁶⁴⁶ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11 “Báo Cáo Hoạt động và Thành Tích Của Tổng Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1954-1958” Document: Report titled signed by K.T. giám đốc tổng thư viện quốc gia, quán thư văn kho, hạng nhất Nguyễn Hùng Cường, January 12, 1955.

⁶⁴⁷ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: “Hoạt động của thư viện quốc gia từ khi giao lại cho chính phủ việt nam đến ngày nay” signed Phan Vô Ky June 27, 1954.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

organization.⁶⁴⁹ The self-taught linguist Lê Ngọc Trự (1909-1979) worked in the National Library in Saigon from 1948 to 1961 as deputy secretary and then as director of the collections department from 1961 to 1964.⁶⁵⁰ In 1954, he became the director of the Institute of Archaeology and later worked as a linguistics professor at the University of Arts and University of Teaching in Saigon. Lê Ngọc Trự declared that the library cannot just function as a “storage space of books” but must be systematically organized for ease of reader access and research.⁶⁵¹ “Books and newspapers are the foundation of the library,” Trự proclaimed. “We cannot call our library a proper library institute with such a large number of books in the library organized without a rational order; [we cannot call our library a proper institute] with the increasing number of print media published each day, blindly purchased for the library without selective intention.” Trự believed that the first stage of library organization required re-assessing the collections [“Thâu thập sách báo”] while the later stages included organization [“Sắp đặt”] and preservation of materials [“Gìn giữ sách báo”].

Lê Ngọc Trự described in fine grained detail the national library collections, focusing especially on accumulating books “of value.” Lê Ngọc Trự measured the value of books based on if the work was encyclopedic or general, its rarity, and its publication date. Since the budget for book acquisitions and library storage space was limited, Trự explained that the library director must be deliberate in book acquisitions. Trự requested that the director first prioritize fundamental and elementary books [Căn bản]. Some examples of encyclopedic essential books include Larousse encyclopedias, dictionaries, specifically *Dictionnaire de la Conservation et de la lecture*, and the series “Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne” edited by Michaud. Other important works in the collection include geographic histories such as Vidal Lablache’s *Geographie Universelle*, Michilet’s *Histoire de France*, and Saglio’s *Dictionnaire des Antiquités grecques et romaines*.

After essential fundamental works are collected for the library, the director must follow the global contemporary news on popular and award-winning books to determine his next acquisitions. Trự specified that the measurement of ‘international cultural acclaim’ could be based on the following designations: book prizes (Nobel, Goncourt, Femina, Ville de Paris); books which were translated into French; new research books about society, economics, religion, art, architecture, medicine, science; and books about Vietnam, the French Union, and Southeast Asia and its geography, history, cultural customs. Trự specified that the library director must also read the National Bibliography of France each month and follow the major cultural and literary review magazines in France such as *Revue des deux Mondes*, *Revue de Paris*, *Mercure de France*, *Esprit*, *Europe*, *Études*, and *Nouvelles littéraires* in order to guide the book and serials purchases for the Vietnamese national library. Trự’s statement reveals the meticulous logic of library collections policy and assessment of ‘cultural value’. He outlined a hierarchy of books based on notions of value, deeply rooted in France library sciences [bibliothéconomie] and literary benchmarks such as French translations, bibliographies, book awards. The reliance on French literary reviews, the French national bibliography, and also direct purchasing from

⁶⁴⁹ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: “Tổ chức thư viện quốc gia- phần thứ nhất” signed Lê Ngọc Trự c. 1954?

⁶⁵⁰ Lê Ngọc Trự (who also went by the pseudonym Ngọc Toàn) was born in Cholon in 1909. He dropped out of school early and went to work at Lê Văn Ngũ’s (his father-in-law) gold shop in Cholon from 1932 to 1945. Trự self-studied Vietnamese linguistics, and published in the newspapers *Đông Dương* (1939-1941), *Độc* (1939), *Nghệ thuật* (1941), *Bút Mới* (1941). He was a member of the Southern Association for Study [Hội Khuyến học Nam Kỳ].

⁶⁵¹ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: “Tổ chức thư viện quốc gia- phần thứ nhất” signed Lê Ngọc Trự c. 1954?

French booksellers was a legacy of the pervasive French colonial print economy and libraries in Indochina. As a consequence of this colonial carryover in library book purchases, French colonial ideas of cultural value permeated Trự's standards for library acquisitions and organization of the national library in Saigon.

Although the collections and acquisitions still retained its French colonial characteristics, the demographics of its users was slowly changing by 1955. In a follow up interview with the newspaper *Ngôn Luận* (Nhật báo thông tin nghị luận Cholon) on March 18, 1955, director of the library Đoàn Quan Tấn reported the current status of the National Library. Since 1949, many of the early responsibilities to improve the library were still being implemented.⁶⁵² By 1955 the library had a collection of over 60,000 works—5,000 Vietnamese, 3,600 Chinese, 400 English, and 51,000 French. The library hours had updated to include a midday closure at 12PM-3PM and the average daily number of readers reached 110. By 1955, the majority of these readers were Vietnamese university students while only 1 out of every 10 were French or foreigners.

National Library Building Projects: Colonial Notions of Cultural Preservation and the Ambitious National Cultural Center

Since 1949 the State of Vietnam (South Vietnam) proposed the development of an ambitious new “National Library” building at boulevard Norodom (today Lê Duẩn Street) to address the overcrowded Cochinchina Library and Archives.⁶⁵³ The “National Library” would serve as both a cultural center and a grand integration of the colonial and post-colonial library collections. The original vision for the Boulevard Norodom project included the creation of a cultural center with an archives repository, a two-part library with a central room for study and reference and a Lending Section especially intended for youth, and a historical museum of Indochina.⁶⁵⁴ The museum would be the most important part of the cultural center, devoted to the work of France in the Far East. In a May 1949 interview with Radio Saigon, the Minister of National Education for the Government of South Vietnam concluded with the hope that “the realization of this project on Boulevard Norodom will soon be completed and thus equip Saigon—the capital of South Vietnam and a university city—with a museum-library worthy of it.” The ambitious visions of the Norodom National Library project reveal how the provisional government in South Vietnam envisioned its new capital in 1949 as a cultural and intellectual center. The Norodom project originated in the colonial era and was deeply influenced by colonial notions of cultural heritage firmly grounded in preservation.

⁶⁵² TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 2 “Hồ Sơ V/v Trả Lời Phỏng Vấn Đài Phát Thanh Báo Sài Gòn, Báo Ngô Luận về Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Nam Việt Năm 1949-1956,” Document: Report, Dated March 18, 1955.

⁶⁵³ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 2, Document: May 1949 Radio-Saigon questionnaire to Minister of National Education of South Vietnam.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid. Boulevard Norodom was renamed *Thống Nhất* Street in 1955 and Lê Duẩn after 1975.

and storage. Another draft version of the first floor also includes designated sections for gallery exhibitions and stages.⁶⁵⁵



Image 5-8. A closeup view of the imagined portico entry to the museum-library.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁵ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940.” A subfolder of draft designs of the Norodom museum-library titled “Avant-projet de construction d'un musée bibliothèque et d'un hotel pour le conseil colonial boulevard Norodom, 9 octobre 1940. [Draft project of the construction of the museum-library and the townhall for the colonial council on Boulevard Norodom, October 9, 1940.]”

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid. The design combines exoticized motifs of the orient (Khmer temple inspired bas-relief, dragon symbols, Chinese characters) together with Western-designed porticos, narrow columns, and stairways characteristic of modern architecture. Note the envisioned clientele of the library as both Western and Asian in dress and appearance.

Throughout 1946 to 1954, the Saigon library underwent a piecemeal process of decolonization which intersected with the creation of a post-colonial “National Library.” For example, the transfer of the management of the Saigon library to Vietnamese administrators in 1948 reflected the gradual reorganization of the library into a national, Vietnamese institution. Furthermore, with the formal declaration of Vietnamese as the national language of education and the administration, the library sought to decolonize its holdings by increasing public access through adding books in Vietnamese, Chinese, and English languages. However, these attempts to nationalize the Library of South Vietnam were undermined by French initiatives to maintain authority in Indochina.

With the official end of French claims to authority in Indochina in 1954, the new post-colonial Republican state could fully envision and implement a Vietnamese, independent concept of the National Library of Vietnam in Saigon. The Norodom project rooted in French colonial cultural preservation evolved into a Vietnamese project of decolonization and nation building. In 1955, President Ngô Đình Diệm proposed the building of a new national library on the site of the Saigon Maison Centrale prison [tù Khám Lớn]. By 1955, the Norodom project developed into an even more ambitious proposal for a “Cultural Center [Trung Tâm Văn Hoá]” which would include the new National Administration Institute, the humanities and law school, a National Library with a Reading Room with 150 seats and storage large enough for at least 300,000 volumes.⁶⁵⁷ On April 3, 1956, President Ngô Đình Diệm inaugurated the building of the National Library and Cultural Center project with a bricklaying ceremony. The bricklaying ceremony included a celebration at the existing library building at 34 Gia Long. However, due to economic difficulties and political uncertainty, these plans fragmented into separate building projects and was stalled until 1968, which is when official construction began.⁶⁵⁸ At the ceremonial cornerstone laying ceremony on the official library construction site, the State Secretary of Cultural Affairs delivered a speech recognizing the legacy of the colonial prison and the significance of the library for national culture: “Those tiles and stones of the former prison left here and there on the ground are witnesses of the noble sacrifices of those fighting for the nation’s freedom and its culture. The ghosts of these heroes, if any of them are still haunting this site, certainly would be satisfied with our present enterprise which aims at protecting and developing our national culture.”⁶⁵⁹ The State Secretary continued to describe the dream of the new national library as a “meeting center for Eastern and Western cultures as well as a source of information and communication for mankind.” However, due to many delays caused by the Second Indochina War, political instability, and budget limitations, the new building of the National Library at 69 Gia Long Street was not opened until December 23, 1971.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁷ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 2 “Hồ Sơ V/v Trả Lời Phỏng Vấn Đài Phát Thanh Báo Sài Gòn, Báo Ngô Luận về Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Nam Việt Năm 1949-1956,” Document: Report, Dated March 18, 1955.

⁶⁵⁸ Over time the cultural center project fragmented into separate building projects and the initial prison site was designated only for the building of the library. The humanities university was finished in 1957, followed by the law school in 1958. By 1959 Ngô Đình Diệm had proposed four national lotteries to raise money for the building of the national library project. In 1968 the Khám Lớn prison was destroyed and the Chí Hoa prison built in March 1953, replaced Khám Lớn as the regional detention facility.

⁶⁵⁹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 383 “Hồ Sơ V/v Xây Cát Thư Viện Quốc Gia Tại 69 Gia Long, Sài Gòn Năm 1960-1971 Tập 2: Lễ đặt Viên đá đầu Tiên,” Document: Speech by the State Secretary of Cultural Affairs delivered at the cornerstone laying ceremony for the National Library, December 28, 1968.

⁶⁶⁰ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 389 “Hồ Sơ V/v Xây Cát Thư Viện Quốc Gia Tại 69 Gia Long, Sài Gòn Năm 1960-1971 Tập 8: Lễ Khánh Thành Thư Viện Quốc Gia.”



Image 5-9. President Ngô Đình Diệm inaugurates the building of the National Library and Cultural Center project on April 3, 1956 with a bricklaying ceremony.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁶¹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 1022 “Tập Ảnh về Xây Dựng và Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1956-1971.”



Image 5-9 Bricklaying celebration on April 3, 1956 in the existing National Library building at 34 Gia Long. For additional photographs, see Appendix C.

The Post-Colonial National and Public Library Mission “To Inform, to Educate, and to Entertain”

The ‘National Library’ of South Vietnam was an amalgamation of both old and new, colonial and post-colonial. The National Library inherited colonial legacies of library organization but also sought to define its own identity as both a national institution and public library. Vietnamese administrators debated the notion of a ‘public library.’ The 10-page report “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam,” written between 1956-1957 by an anonymous Saigon library administrator, began with an ambitious declaration, describing the National Library of South Vietnam as “a library of information and general culture. With a collection of selectively chosen, organized books and intended for the public, the library has a three-part goal like all public libraries: to inform, to educate, and to entertain.”⁶⁶² The report made a temporal distinction between private or administrative libraries in the past, and the national, public Saigon library of the future. According to the report, the concept of a ‘public library’ had not existed in

⁶⁶² TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Documents: “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam” c. 1954-1957. Possibly written May 1956. “La Bibliothèque Nationale du Sud-Vietnam est une bibliothèque d’information et de culture Générale. Étant un dépôt de livres choisis et rangés en ordre, à l’intention du public, elle tend au triple but de toute bibliothèque publique: renseigner, enseigner, distraire.”

Vietnam's past. Briefly summarizing the history of libraries in early modern Vietnam prior to French colonialism, the author noted how private libraries and the royal court maintained literary works and documents written in Chinese characters during the Vietnamese Lý and Trần dynasties (11th to 15th centuries).⁶⁶³ The author then quickly transitioned into the French period, noting that the Cochinchina library and archives originated from government initiatives for colonial documentation.

In the rest of the report, the author examined the meaning, role, and function of the public library in the context of the post-colonial transfer of the library service to the Vietnamese state. Often the discussion on the meaning of a public library focused on the core responsibility of the library to serve its reading public. In order to accomplish its mission, the report focused on understanding the primary readers and types of preferred reading matter: "The loyal clientele of the Library consisted of university students. The most requested books are for study: history, geography, law, science. Novels in general, in particular the French novels, are less and less in demand. The foreign readers search for books of history or descriptions of customs and morals of Vietnam. Of the number of administrators who come, they request copies of texts such as the *Journal Officiel de l'Indochine* or the administrative bulletins of different regions of Vietnam."⁶⁶⁴ Administrators and foreign readers still relied upon the Saigon library, but in smaller numbers than in the colonial period. This shift in library clientele also sheds light on the expansion of literacy and education in Vietnamese among the rapidly increasing population of Saigon-Cholon.

The library administrator argued that acquisitions of new books and periodicals also must align with the needs of its readers as well as the three-part mission of a public library to "inform, educate, and entertain." The author elaborated on the importance of selective acquisitions based on reader behavior:

In other words, [acquisitions] must respond to the public's demands for information and above all [operate as] a public service to enable the public to do their work through access to documentation. The new acquisitions must also help students who are preparing for their exams or their research in a specific field. Lastly, the new acquisitions must provide good reading matter for the other frequent patrons of the library: novels of undisputed literary and moral value, good works of scientific vulgarization. In all ways possible the library is enriched with good works in its collections. The library completes existing collections. It creates new major collections of general culture and information, not specialty works of this or that scientific branch.

The purposeful acquisitions of reading matter such as general works, textbooks, as well as popular literature suggests how library administrators framed the library as a public resource for supplementary education for the larger community of literate Vietnamese.

The report concluded that the National Library of South Vietnam building constructed in 1900 could not sustain the high volume of readers and its growing collection of books, serials, and archives. With only 48 seats for readers, a library collection of 60,000 books, and a small archives storage with ten rows of storage shelves, the report called for the expansion of the National Library. The report highlighted the National Library as the de facto library for Saigon,

⁶⁶³ The author of the report recalled the loss of valuable books, court documents, poetry, historical works of calligraphy and xylography, by war and political upheaval in early-modern, pre-colonial Vietnam (15th to nineteenth century).

⁶⁶⁴ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: "La bibliothèque nationale du sud-Vietnam" c. 1954-1957.

the capital of Vietnam and a university city. The report called for the following improvements: a Reading Room with 150 seats, a collection of over 300,000 books, an archives storage facility with thirty rows of shelving.

Transferred Collections from Hanoi and the Off-Site Storage of the General Library at Pétrus Ky, 1955-1957

In 1955, the government of the Republic of Vietnam planned to combine the transferred Hanoi General Library and the University of Hanoi materials with the National Library in Saigon to create a new Service of the Central Library and Archives of Vietnam [Thư viện và Văn Khố Trung Ương Việt Nam].⁶⁶⁵ The new service would be in charge of all the libraries, the legal deposit, and archives in the country. However, the library building at 34 Gia Long was not large enough to receive the entire transferred collection from Hanoi as well as the existing archives, legal deposit, and library of South Vietnam that it housed since 1948. The ambitious proposal for the new building (comprised of the National Library of South Vietnam, the Archives of South Vietnam, the National Institute of Administration, the Faculty of Letters, and the Faculty of Law) was only in its early planning stages. Instead, the abandoned refectory hall [Khu vực Phòng Ăn] of the Pétrus Ky High School was designated as a temporary library for the transferred collection. The temporary library was often referred to as the General Library [Tổng Thư viện] (due to its Hanoi General Library contents) or the National Library at Pétrus Ky. The General Library at Pétrus Ky was placed under the management of the University Institute of Saigon. As the administration prepared the building for the temporary library at Pétrus Ky at Rue Nancy (today Nguyễn Văn Cừ street), the Hanoi transferred collections remained in an off-site in the Denis Frères storage facility in Khánh Hội, a village recently absorbed into Saigon. However, due to limited budget and personnel, many of the transferred materials from Hanoi remained for an indefinite amount of time uncatalogued and in storage rather than integrated into the circulating Saigon national library collection.

According to the 1956 report “General Situation” written for the Department of National Education, the General Library at the Pétrus Ky site began operations on January 1956. The report described the important new location of the General Library in Saigon:

The library finds itself in a building of the former refectory of the Pétrus Ky School. A beautiful room, but abandoned and unused for sometime now, has been arranged well for the use of storing the boxes carried away during the evacuation of the library; well-ventilated, surrounded by a vast field, [the library] offers a quiet retreat for workers and ordinary readers. The installation of this library in Saigon—the university and administrative capital of Vietnam—meets the needs of a cultured population and a Vietnamese elite.⁶⁶⁶

However, the report noted that the General Library at Pétrus Ky was currently located too far from the urban center of Saigon. If relocated, the “numerous Saigon intellectual class having a great taste for reading” could have better access to the important resources at the General Library.

⁶⁶⁵ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: “Phúc Trình Tổng Quát”, c. 1957.

⁶⁶⁶ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11 “Báo Cáo Hoạt động và Thành Tích Của Tổng Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1954-1958,” Document: “Situation Générale, rapport 1956.”

Every day, around 30 to 50 students, teachers, and administrators came to read newspapers, official journals and bulletins, consult dictionaries and encyclopedias and other works in the collection. The collection at the General Library included the transferred materials from Hanoi, regular purchases, and donations. Some of the important works in the collection include the “The French Prose” of Arland, the bibliography of books in French language on music by Dufourg, “General Mythology” published under the direction of F. Guirand, and the English-French dictionary by Harrap. The Vietnamese collection includes such notable work as *Dân luật tự trị*, *Hình luật tự trị*, *Phụ nữ tước Pháp Luật*, and Vietnamese-French dictionaries.

General Library at Pétrus Ky: Inherited Hanoi Collections, Serving Cholon, Building New International Collections, 1957-1958

It was not until 1957 that the General Library was able to obtain an approved budget to purchase essential supplies and open the library at Pétrus Ky to the public. The report commended the “dedication and hard work of Nguyễn Hùng Cường (the head manager of the storage) who emphasized the importance of technique, books, and furniture.” Under Cường’s management, 25,000 items of the collection were finally incorporated into the Pétrus Ky library location and accessible to the public by 1957. However, librarian-archivist Nguyễn Hùng Cường reported regretfully that only 100 boxes of the 700 had been opened by June 1957. Cường observed that many of the commonly used reference books needed to be rebound and the library only had enough tables and chairs for a maximum of 40 readers at a time.⁶⁶⁷

Decree 544/GD/CL on June 20, 1957 officially placed the General National Library [the former Indochina Pierre Pasquier Library] under the direct administration of the Ministry of National Education; the General National Library merged with the Southern Library [Thư viện Nam Phần] to form the “Thư viện Quốc Gia [National Library]. This new National Library centralized the nation-wide library and archive records and functioned as a model for other libraries in the country.⁶⁶⁸ In 1947 the National Library comprised of three-part institution scattered throughout Saigon: the reading and consultation library at 34 Gia Long (formerly the Cochinchina Library) and the General Library located at Pétrus Ky School (transferred materials from Hanoi Pierre Pasquier colonial library), and the temporarily closed Lending Section and the children’s library at 194D Pasteur street. According to the General Situation report, the Pétrus Ky General Library operations continued even with the many transfers and reorganization: “The library has continued to operate from its origin until now, making it convenient and helpful to readers to find information. The works are organized according to their size (small, medium, large) and does not use the international Dewey Decimal system.”⁶⁶⁹

Discussions regarding the physical merger of the 3-part institutions of the National Library still continued throughout 1957. A report written by librarian-archivists at the Pétrus Ky General Library at the end of the 1957 reveals the complex challenges of merging the libraries to form a National Library.⁶⁷⁰ The author argued that transferring the entirety of the General Library at Pétrus Ky would be expensive and impossible, given that currently the Gia Long library

⁶⁶⁷ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11, Document: “Tờ tường trình về tổng thư viện quốc gia,” July 18, 1957 by temporary director Nguyễn Hùng Cường.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11, Document: “Situation Générale, rapport 1956.”

⁶⁷⁰ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11, Document: “Internal Report to Submit” signed Nguyễn Hùng Cường, Trịnh Huy Đào/Dao, Nguyễn Văn Tấn on December 19, 1957.

location would not be able to receive Pétrus Ky's large collection: 150 metal bookcases full of books and newspapers, 400 unsorted boxes of materials, tables, chairs, and catalogs from the Pétrus Ky Reading Room. Furthermore, the Pétrus Ky General Library was built with a unique concrete and metal foundation higher than the ground floor which was ideal for the storage of archives and protection from humidity and termites. For these logistical reasons, the report proposed that the libraries at Pétrus Ky and Gia Long continue to operate separately until a new National Culture and Library building could readily receive the entirety of the national library collections.

Furthermore, the librarian-archivists at Pétrus Ky Library argued that their current library location served the large intellectual community of Cholon: "After evaluating the Pétrus Ky library, we recognize that this library has already been set up and organized with the most appropriate and advanced methods. The number of library readers has been increasing each day — intellectuals of the large and crowded Cholon region (and the neighboring universities such as the University of Sciences, Pétrus Ky School, Chu Văn An School, and Military University) often visit the library. The library has a great number of valuable reading matter that benefit readers when they are looking for specific information or reading books and newspapers to entertain their spirits. Pétrus Ky library has 40 places to sit for readers. Thus, in the meantime while we await the construction of the new Cultural Center and National Library building, we propose to use the Pétrus Ky library to serve the Cholon intellectuals and more generally, all those thirsty for knowledge."

By 1958, the Pétrus Ky Library received an estimated number of 2,148 readers in April, 2,780 in June, averaging 109 readers each day.⁶⁷¹ The Pétrus Ky Library received new books in Vietnamese, French, and English donated from other departments, associations, and research institutes. For example, the American Information center which donated Ketchum Richard's "What is Communism", "Việt Mỹ" (Cơ quan Hội Việt Mỹ - Office of the Vietnam-American Association), Gardner Franck's "Des bibliothèques publiques pour l'Asie"; "Lá thư Tu nghiệp [Letters from abroad]"; and Tập San học viện Quốc gia hành chính thư viện...[On the National Academy of Library Administration]." Furthermore, the library sent out several requests to purchase new books from France.

National Library at Gia Long: Colonial Legacy Collections, Frantic Disorganized Operations, and Demands for More Personnel and Lending Services, 1957-1958

From 1946-1958, the 'National Library' existed in a transitional, post-colonial state and struggled to serve the increasing population of Saigon readers — students, intellectuals, administrators, and journalists. The National Library at 34 Gia Long Street [formerly 34 Rue de Lagrandière] inherited the Reading Room collections from the colonial Cochinchina Library. As the central library for Cochinchina, the collection also held one copy of legal deposit works published in Cochinchina before 1945. The collections comprised mainly of works focused on Indochina, the Far East and included a range of topics such as law, humanities, sciences, arts, and philosophy. According to a report in 1958, the collection also held important materials such as Larousse's encyclopedic dictionary collection, Indochina and French newspapers such as *Revue Indochinoise*, *Bulletin de l'école Française d'Extrême-Orient*, *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue*. However, this initial collection also lacked more popular Vietnamese language publications

⁶⁷¹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 11 "Báo Cáo Hoạt động và Thành Tích Của Tổng Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1954-1958."

such as *Nam Phong*, *Tri Tân*, *Đông Dương Tạp Chí*, or the serials were often incomplete.⁶⁷² Furthermore, the report regrettably noted that the previous French director of the library did not prioritize acquisitions of Vietnamese books published prior to 1945.

Besides the inherited collections of the Cochinchina Library from the colonial period, the National Library at Gia Long sought to build its collection by actively requesting books and serials on contemporary politics, science, libraries, and economics from France, updated books from America, and other contemporary international works.⁶⁷³ Furthermore, many libraries and institutions from all over the world such as UNESCO, the French national bibliography, and the Michigan University Vietnam Advisory Group donated many works to the national library in Saigon.

Attempts to build the libraries collection through the legal deposit was met with severe limitations. Standardized decrees for a new regime of legal deposit had not yet been implemented for nearly two decades since 1944. The director of the library Ky sent regular demands to newspapers, publishers, and institutions to figure out incomplete publication information. Reports show how Ky individually tracked down publishers to find out where their works were officially printed and if they had been filed into legal deposit.⁶⁷⁴ By 1957, the number of Vietnamese works (non-periodicals) submitted to the legal deposit increased to 1,562, compared to 132 in French, out of a total of 1,946 legal deposits.⁶⁷⁵ Since the number of Vietnamese language legal deposits were relatively high, the library purchased only 271 works in Vietnamese and 535 in French. Besides Vietnamese and French, in 1957 there were also a substantial number of legal deposits in other languages and several bi-lingual or tri-lingual works: English (98), Vietnamese-English (80), Vietnamese-French (26), Vietnamese-Chinese (32), English-Chinese (4), Vietnamese-French-English (2). Periodical legal deposits were also dominated by Vietnamese (833) compared to French (60), English (39), Vietnamese-English (49), Vietnamese-French (13), and Vietnamese-Chinese (12). In 1957, the total collection of the National Library at 34 Gia Long amounted to 80,522 works.

On July 17, 1957, the library closely surveyed its collections. Recognizing that the majority of the collections were in the French language, the library began initiatives to build its Vietnamese language collection and to translate its works.⁶⁷⁶ In particular, the library sought to collect more translated works from Chinese, French, and English into Vietnamese. From its survey, the library also highlighted the proliferation of doubly translated works. Many works in the library came to the Vietnamese language through French translations of English or Italian such as the following works:

- *Tâm hồn cao thượng* based on *Grands coeurs* by Piazzzi's translation of *Cuore* by Edmondo de Amicis
- *Thằng người gỗ* based on *Les aventures de pinokio* by Mme Comtesse de Gence's translation of *Pinocchio* by Carlo Lorenzini (Collodi)

⁶⁷² TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: "La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam" c. 1954-1957.

⁶⁷³ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7 "Tập Lưu Công Văn đi Từ Ngày 04/01-28/12/1957 Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia," April 1, 1957.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 10 "Báo Cáo Hoạt động Hàng Tuần, Hàng, Năm Năm 1957-1958 Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia," May 20, 1957." That year also accounted for 274 gifts of works: Vietnamese (52), French (76), English (112), Vietnamese-English (29), Vietnamese-French (1), English-French (1), Chinese (1), Vietnamese-Chinese (1).

⁶⁷⁶ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7, Document: Survey on state of translation in Vietnam, July 17, 1957.

- *Cuốn theo chiều gió* based on *Autant en emporte le vent* by P.F. Caille’s translation of *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell

In general, the Reading Room at 34 Gia Long Street continued the rules from the colonial period: to read the library books, readers consulted the Reading Room catalog which was divided by authors and topic.⁶⁷⁷ Each reader could submit at one time a request for two books; the books were pulled from the ‘magasin des livres [book storage]’ next to the Reading Room. Reports commended that the library staff could retrieve the books from the storage within an impressive five minutes since the books were methodically organized by size and topic. Other books for consultation in the Reading Room were “useful books” such as reference books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, directories, manuals, and over fifty journals in French, Vietnamese and English which could be consulted freely without a request.

However, the internal letters, library reports, and complaints from readers reveal a different reality. Despite claims that the Lending Section would soon reopen, by 1957 the Lending Section was still closed to the public while the building was occupied by the General Labor Bureau of Vietnam and the Government House of Representatives. Furthermore, the regular reports and daily letters sent by director of the National Library Phan Vô Ky to the Minister of National Education Đoàn Quan Tấn from 1956 to 1958 reveal the everyday state of libraries affairs in the new republic: frantic, poor, and disorganized.

The National Libraries and Archives of South Vietnam were severely understaffed—from high level directors and management to typists and guards. Working together with the National University and the Ministry of National Education, in 1956 and 1957 the National Library organized a training course to inculcate civil servants in the practices of administrative organization, archiving official documents, or management of libraries. In 1956 there was a class of 64 graduates and in 1957 there were 33. Even with the new trained cohort, the libraries and archives were still understaffed. In the letter on March 8, 1957, Ky requested the Ministry of National Education to provide another typist to help in the library with cataloging, recordkeeping, and the preparation of an upcoming exhibition.⁶⁷⁸ Current typist Trương Văn Chắt was too tired from his military duties to stay awake and complete work while the second typist Bùi Quang Một was preoccupied with completing the duties of the Ministry of Interior.

Everyday infractions such as stolen trash cans and disruptive library patrons demonstrate how the library lacked personnel such as guards and Reading Room managers. On March 4, 1957 the National Library director Đoàn Quan Tấn deplored the poor state of the library building, reporting that pieces of the ceiling fall off during reading hours nearly hitting readers.⁶⁷⁹ After painting of the ceiling in October 1953, several instances of large ceiling pieces falling off had been reported: in January 1956 a large piece of the ceiling fell off during the crowded reading hours, but luckily only a few dusty pieces of the ceiling brushed the shoulders of a few readers; on March 3, 1957 again an even larger piece of the ceiling fell off but luckily no one was in the Reading Room. The library requested both the director of the Ministry of National Education and the director of Education Office of the South to provide financial support to fix the ceiling in order to avoid the possibility of a dangerous accident.

⁶⁷⁷ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, Document: “La bibliothèque nationale du sud-vietnam” c. 1954-1957.

⁶⁷⁸ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7, Document: Letter from Phan Vô Ky to Minister of National Education, March 8, 1957.

⁶⁷⁹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7 “Tập Lưu Công Văn đi Từ Ngày 04/01-28/12/1957 Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia,” April 1, 1957.”

The organization and staff or lack thereof in these libraries did not hamper the voracious appetites of Saigon readers. The reading library at Gia Long operated as a lending library on a special needs basis for administrators and institutions throughout Saigon. This service was especially important in the years when the Lending Section had been closed. For example, exchanges between the director Đoàn Quan Tấn of the Gia Long National Library and governmental offices in 1957 show requests for such books as “History and Description of low Cochinchina (Histoire et description de la Basse Cochinchine (Aubaret translator),” “The Voyage of Lourdes by Dr. Alexis Carrel (Le voyage de Lourdes by Dr. Alexis Carrel)”, and a curated book list on Indochinese history and politics sent to the Vietnamese embassy in New Delhi, India.⁶⁸⁰

Several readers complained in newspapers of the library’s limited services and space. Library readers called for the expansion of the Reading Room at 34 Gia Long and the re-opening of the Lending Section at 14 Lê Văn Duyệt street (formerly President Thinh street, or 194D Pasteur).⁶⁸¹ On 1956 June 28, the newspaper *Dân Chủ* number 290, posted the letter “Please open the Lending Section of the library,” signed by “a few soldiers and civil servants.”⁶⁸² The letter requested that the Ministry of National Education open up the Lending Section (mentioned in Vietnamese and French *phòng cho mượn sách* (section de prêt) at the Gia Long Library. The letter begged to find a building to re-open the Lending Section, which on the date it was closed had over 10,000 works, 1,168 registered borrowers, and an average borrowing number of 2,500 works each month. The national library director submitted this newspaper excerpt to the attention of the Director of Ministry of National Education in Saigon.

Following the public newspaper demands, on April 26, 1957 Đoàn Quan Tấn requested in earnest for the reopening of the Lending Section. These requests continued throughout the year, with specific requests for a large building, staff, a budget to purchase more books, supply furniture, and move existing collections from storage. Not until April 1958 did the Lending Section reopen at 194D Pasteur, with the addition of a new Children’s Reading Room with 14 seats for readers. The re-opened Lending Section was referred to as the *Thư viện cho Mượn và phòng Đọc thiếu nhi* [Lending Library and Children’s Reading Room]. The reopened Lending Section reported to have 13,700 books (of which 3,000 were Vietnamese, and many of which were gifts from America) and a daily reader average of 115 readers. Each reader was permitted to borrow 2 books at a time.

Limited Space: The Struggle for Seats and Designated Public and Study Space

By 1957 the Gia Long Reading Room still only had a limited number of highly prized reading seats. Saigon readers—administrators, teachers, university and high school students—rushed through the doors of the Gia Long library, pushing each other out of the way in a scramble for the 48 seats available in the central Reading Room.

⁶⁸⁰ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7, Document: Letter from Phan Vô Ky to the District 1 Saigon Police on June 13, 1957 and to the Ministry of National Education on June 28, 1957.

⁶⁸¹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7, Document: Letter from Phan Vô Ky to Ministry of National Education August 2, 1957.

⁶⁸² “Xin mở thư viện cho mượn sách đọc [Please open up the Lending Section],” *Dân Chủ*, March 21, 1957. This article was published in the section: “Tiếng dân kêu” [Voice from the people].

During the summer months, university students clamber in front of the library doors before the morning and noon opening hours. When the library re-opens, students rush and flood the central staircase—yelling and pushing each other, necessitating the military police to come to keep them quiet. Because of this commotion, female students hesitate to be part of the scramble and instead retreat home.⁶⁸³

In a letter to the police department of District 1 Saigon on June 13, 1957, Phan Vô Ky requested back up to maintain order and security in the library. The Reading Room at Gia Long could not handle the earnest university readers on summer holiday who aggressively pushed readers out of the way to claim the limited seating in the Reading Room at opening hours. Ky had emphasized that order and propriety needed to be maintained since “the library is located next to the Ministry of Economics where the President works”, but these warnings had been largely ineffective. Ky begged the police to send security support during the opening hours and the early afternoon. According to Phan Vô Ky in 1957, the library had become a ‘space of study’ for university students who crowded in the library Reading Room to study and socialize during the summer months. The students took up all the Reading Room seats away from other readers such as workers and teachers, “scare” away female readers, and their rambunctious behavior necessitated higher police security to maintain order.

The limited seating caused daily issues for both builders and users—library readers fought over the limited seating and library administrators contemplated how to fairly allocate seats for the readers. Library administrators complained over the disorder caused by the eager university student crowds and were concerned of losing other types of readers such as teachers, workers, and female students. By 1957 both library administration and readers recognized that the National Southern Library at 34 Gia Long was far too small and limited in resources to adequately meet the needs of the readers of Saigon— a booming capital with over 2 million citizens. By the 1950s, the urban growth of Saigon and its schools produced a larger population of Vietnamese students. This changing demographics of urban, literate Saigonese was reflected in the library Reading Room, transformed into a space for students to study and to socialize. Students were among the most ardent and eager readers, actively supplementing their schooling with library materials.

In response to these demands, on August 2, 1957 Phan Vô Ky proposed a budget to the Ministry of National Education to add four more tables and 16 chairs to the Reading Room, to rearrange the Reading Room in order to add 14 more chairs, and to open a new Researchers room with 12 seats. These additions would bring the total number of seats to 90 places for readers. Additionally, the creation of a Researcher’s Room next to the Reading Room could separate out the more ‘serious’ readers from the social student readers in the main room. Furthermore on December 26, 1957, Nguyễn Bá Cường requested more workers from the Ministry of National Education to provide services and meet the demands of the increasing number of readers.

Misreading and Hierarchies of Readers: Controlling Readers and Library Surveillance

⁶⁸³ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7, Document: Letter from Phan Vô Ky to the District 1 Saigon Police on June 13, 1957.

In the same letter to the ministry of national education, Phan Vô Ky proposed a series of changes to take place after the annual closure July 15-August 15.⁶⁸⁴ Phan Vô Ky proposed to create a system of daily reading cards to monitor and limit the access to the library according to the number of seats available. Each week there would only be a total of 480 access cards color coded by day and session (morning or afternoon session). Furthermore, each day 8 of these seats would be reserved for ‘infrequent’ but important readers such as professors and administrators. Ky developed this system in the hopes of restoring order in the Reading Room—“to prevent groups of university students from turning the Reading Room into a study room for themselves...to allow those who wish to consult library materials to not have to push and shove and to guarantee a proper seat for readers...and for the library to be able to monitor greedy readers and thieves.”⁶⁸⁵

The National Library at Gia Long and Ministry of National Education also created new regulations to take place after August 15, 1957. They included more detailed monitoring and controlling of reader access and behavior: on entering the library, readers must provide their reader card so that the library could collect reader usage statistics; on exiting the Reading Room all reader belongings and bags must be inspected to prevent stolen materials.⁶⁸⁶ Furthermore, the regulations included a clause that emphasized the communal and public use of the library: “For the benefit of the collective, the library requests that readers protect the books and newspapers by not writing on them, folding the pages, or hyper-extending the binding.” Readers must also return reference books where they belong “to convenient and not disadvantage other readers.” Finally, for the first time the library included a clause that permitted the library to refuse entrance to any reader who “dressed inappropriately or behaved impolitely.” By 1958, the Gia long library reported a daily average of 200, compared to 80 in the colonial period.

The separation of serious, infrequent, researcher, and student readers sheds light on the underlying hierarchy of ‘ideal’ library readers. Library administrators of the Saigon national library at 34 Gia Long complained about the lack of decorum and serious reading similar to the discourse on the Hanoi Central Library Reading Room of the 1920s and 1930s—there were ‘too many students’ who took up seats from the more ‘serious’ readers. The hierarchies of leisure and serious readers reflect the continual debate over the mission of the library. Was the functional role of the national library a public educational resource for all, regardless if they were students, researchers, or administrators? Should the space be used for study by Vietnamese university students or as a research resource for administrators and professors? Concerns over the existing library collections also pushed question of the library mission to the surface. With the majority of the collections in French, the library was not meeting the literacy needs of the larger Vietnamese-language reading public. Since the library was officially under the Ministry of National Education, what was the role of the library to provide ‘national’ education and mass literacy to the Vietnamese people?

The ambitious vision of the library as both ‘national’ and ‘public’ confronted everyday realities of limited personnel, space, and funding to fulfill the needs of all the Saigon-Cholon readers. The organization of the National Library was in a state of flux between 1945 and 1958, divided between three locations throughout the city—the inherited Cochinchina Library at 34

⁶⁸⁴ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7, Document: Letter from Phan Vô Ky to Ministry of National Education on June 28, 1957.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 7, Document: Library regulations, signed by Ministry of Education on August 14, 1957.

Gia Long, the transferred Hanoi materials at Pétrus Ky School, and the Lending Section at 194D Pasteur. The national library system attempted to maintain regular operations such as Reading Room functions, legal deposit of newly published materials, and cataloging library collections. With such limited personnel and resources, the national library system struggled to meet reader demands for diverse reading material and seating space.

Besides the National Library system at 34 Gia Long, Pétrus Ky, and the Lending Section at 194D Pasteur, universities, associations, and departments also developed their own libraries serving the diverse Saigon reading public. According to the report on the development of libraries in southern Vietnam from 1953 to 1957, there were specialist libraries for university departments, the library of the Historical Research Institute of Saigon, the Oceanographic Institute of Nha Trang, the University of Hue, the Catholic University in Dalat, and public libraries within departments of national defense (for example, the Directorate of Psychological warfare, of Information and Youth Affairs). Besides these official libraries, associations created private and semi-private libraries such as those belonging to the Society of Indochinese Studies, Associations of Popular Culture, of Vietnam-America, L'Alliance Française, French Cultural Mission, American Information Services, and British Information Services.⁶⁸⁷ According to the report, “these libraries are very recent creations and attract an increasing number of assiduous readers.”⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁷ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102 “H òSơ v òTổ Chức và Hoạt động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Nam Ph ãn Năm 1951-1957,” Document: “Le developpement des bibliothèques au viet-nam de 1953 à 1957.” C. 1957.

⁶⁸⁸ TTLT2, TVQGNV, Folder 102, “Le developpement des bibliothèques au viet-nam de 1953 à 1957.” C. 1957.



Images 5-10 and 5-11. Dalat Library, c. 1965⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁹ TTLT2, TTV, Folder 1 “Tập Ảnh về Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Trung Ương Đông Dương, Tổng Thư Viện Tại Hà Nội, Sài Gòn, Thư Viện Cambodge Năm 1936-1940,” n.d.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the decolonization of libraries in Vietnam from 1945-1958. In this transitional period, the mission of the library was brought into question. The library was not just a storehouse of documents but symbolized a nation-state's capacity to preserve its documentary heritage and define its public citizenry through access to library reading matter. For the French, the purpose of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina was to record the colonial history of France in Indochina through its investment into building modern institutions of information, recordkeeping, and popular education and literacy. Furthermore, the future organization of libraries and archives reflected the fragile visions for French reconquest of its former colony from 1946 to 1954. For the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the inheritance of French archives and libraries institutions provided a foundation of state-building in Hanoi. From 1945 to 1946, the new DRV government established its infrastructure modeled off of colonial government offices, reporting procedures, and systems of legal deposit and control of print. For the Republic of Vietnam based in Saigon, the inheritance of the colonial institutions (former Cochinchina Library and the transferred Hanoi collection) intersected with post-colonial nation-building efforts from 1946 to 1958. The new southern state re-evaluated its Saigon library collections and envisioned a new social, political, and educational mission of the library as both 'national' and 'public.' The new National Library administrators discussed how to transform its library collections—the majority of which were in the French language—to meet the needs of its primary library users—Vietnamese university students, researchers, teachers, and administrators from the urbanizing Saigon-Cholon area. Furthermore, proposals to build a new comprehensive national library system since 1955 functioned as political signals of RVN state legitimacy to provide public services and educational resources to its citizens. However, due to budgetary challenges and political priorities during the Second Indochina War, the ambitious project to build a new Saigon national library was not realized until 1971.

The new post-colonial states sought to redefine the roles and purpose of the library for national culture, national heritage, and the control of information and public access. Like the colonial period, the library held tremendous symbolic value of modernity, legitimacy, and state capacity. Colonial practices of library science continued to inform the overall library functions as a system of government documentation with the legal deposit, national bibliography, and close relationship with government archives. At the same time, the Saigon National Library sought to redefine and open up the library as a public, educational resource for its citizens. With the building of new nation-states in North Vietnam and South Vietnam, the creation of a 'national' library and public libraries for its citizens legitimized overall state capacity to document national heritage through its library collections and to provide citizens with mass information, education, and literacy.

EPILOGUE

Quantifying Culture: Books as Social Transformation and State Control

On September 1956, the newly formed Ministry of Culture of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam published “Report on the State of Culture.”⁶⁹⁰ Criticizing the “eighty years of colonial state oppression,” the report argued that in the past two years, the new DRV state yielded comparatively higher success to “advance culture” than the many decades of French colonialism. The report defended this claim by calling out French failures to provide the Vietnamese masses access to cultural resources such as libraries, books, and cinema. It argued that the French colonial authorities only dedicated “1/1000th of its budget for cultural projects” and established a few cultural institutions only serving the urban upper classes. The report stated that “in 1939 only three libraries (Hanoi, Saigon, Phnom Penh), 22 cinemas, and 20 opera houses existed. In the same year, only 1,560,000 books were printed, which averaged to only one book for every fifteen people.”⁶⁹¹ The final point of critique declared that the French conducted an “evil cultural policy” denying Vietnamese cultural education and literacy. It stated that “millions of Vietnamese sought out educational resources but were denied even the opportunity to watch a film or read a book.” The report boasted the following statistics on DRV cultural production and distribution: “from January 1955 to September 1956, the Central Publishing Branch [Ngành Xuất Bản Trung Ương] distributed over 8,321,482 books and newspapers...averaging to one book for every two people. All 29 provinces in the north have a municipal library...over 100 cultural exhibitions were held all over the country attracting tens of millions of viewers.” While these outcries read as Communist indictments of colonial oppression, they shed light on two fundamental claims regarding culture and the new Communist nation-state. First, the development of ‘culture’ was a measure of state legitimacy and commitment to its citizens. Second, ‘culture’ could be quantified through the number of libraries, books, film, and other cultural products [văn hoá phẩm].

With the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords and the return of the Communist government to Hanoi, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam redefined the role, functions, and organization of libraries. Libraries were officially placed in the state project of ‘culture.’ Official Communist policy in the DRV defined culture in materialist terms through cultural products (books, music, film) and institutions (libraries, museums, cultural houses). Culture was also seen

⁶⁹⁰ The Ministry of Culture was established in September 1955. TTLT3, BVH, Folder 6 “Báo Cáo của Bộ Văn Hoá về Tình Hình Hoạt động của Văn Hoá Của Nước Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hoà Trong 2 Năm Hoà Bình Tháng 1/1955-9/1956.” Furthermore, the report emphasized the dangerous and polluting content of the culture propagated by the colonists: “It was a culture of enslavement and depravity, producing reactionaries, misleading and destroying the Vietnamese people in order to easily dominate them. This cultural context led Vietnamese to pursue such debaucheries such as alcohol, wine, and promiscuous behavior.”

⁶⁹¹ The statistic of number of people per book is a reoccurring measure of cultural progress in the DRV state. In a 1955 report on the distribution of books into bookstores, the statistic of how many people per book was included to compare the distribution of books by province. This statistic demonstrates how there were not enough books for each person. The record also focuses on the spatial distribution of books, comparing Hanoi to mountainous and isolated regions. TTLT3, BVH, Folder 1994 “Báo Cáo Thống Kê Tình Hình Phân Phối Công Việc Cho Các Nhà in và Tổng Kết Công Tác Phát Hành Của Các Hiệu Sách Nhân Dân Năm 1955 Của Nhà in Quốc Gia Trung ương,” May 24, 1956.

as a pragmatic tool for building a new socialist society. The DRV state prioritized the production and circulation of books ‘of value’ such as scientific and technical manuals, language primers, works of Lenin, and socialist realist texts.⁶⁹² On September 1955, the Ministry of Culture declared its four-part mission:

1. To develop optimistic and healthy cultural activities to generate inspiration for productivity and the political struggle.
2. To raise the cultural level of the masses.
3. To raise the people’s political level (patriotism, love of labor, love of class, the collective spirit, the internationalist spirit, and the will to strive to fulfill immediate responsibilities).
4. To construct national culture, make good use of past heritage, [fight] against enslaving culture, eradicate vestiges of the enemy’s culture, and study the progressive cultures of other countries.⁶⁹³

On September 1956, the DRV National Assembly renamed the Ministry of Propaganda as the Ministry of Culture [Bộ Văn Hoá]. The Ministry of Culture was responsible for all institutions and activities related to ‘cultural work’—mass culture, libraries, publishing, museums, exhibitions, art, and cinema.⁶⁹⁴ The Ministry of Culture was divided into five main departments: Bureau of Publication [Cục Xuất Bản] which oversaw all publishing houses, printing presses, distribution; Bureau of Cinema [Cục Điện Ảnh] which oversaw national film industry and cinema theater network; Department of Arts [Vụ Nghệ Thuật] in charge of national troupes of all performing genres and schools teaching performing arts; Department of Mass Culture and Libraries [Vụ Văn Hoá Đại Chúng và Thư Viện] which organized libraries, exhibits, cultural houses, museums, and the preservation of historical sites; and the Department of Cultural Liaison [Vụ Liên Lạc Văn Hoá] which organized international exchanges. The structure of the Ministry of Culture and its subdivisions extended down to the commune [xã] level. Included within these efforts are what historian Kim N. B. Ninh describes as the controlled creation of civil society within the visions of a socialist system.⁶⁹⁵

The communist vision and institutions of culture offer an analytical lens to understand the legacies and transformations of libraries over the course of the long twentieth century. This epilogue poses a series of questions to interrogate the relationship between print and power in

⁶⁹² For an examination of revolutionary intellectuals, the evolution of socialist realism, and the Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm affair during the 1950s, see Peter Zinoman, “Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm and Vietnamese ‘Reform Communism’ in the 1950s: A Revisionist Interpretation,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 60–100, Lại Nguyên Ân and Alec Holcombe, “The Heart and Mind of the Poet Xuân Diệu: 1954–1958,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 1–90.

⁶⁹³ TTLT3, BVH, Folder 2 “Báo cáo tổng quát tình hình hoạt động văn hoá nước Việt Nam Dân chủ cộng hoà trong hai năm hoà bình (từ tháng 1 năm 1955 đến tháng 9 năm 1956),” as cited in Kim N.B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 169. (As of 2017, this folder was censored and I was not able to consult the folder directly).

⁶⁹⁴ In 1977, the Ministry of Culture was merged with the Directorate of Information and was renamed the Ministry of Culture and Information.

⁶⁹⁵ My work engages with the limited number of scholarship on cultural institutions within socialist state building such as Kim N.B. Ninh’s, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam (1945-1965)* and Thaveeporn Vasavakul’s doctoral dissertation addressing the educational policy in post-colonial Vietnam Thaveeporn Vasavakul, “Schools and Politics in South and North Viet Nam: A Comparative Study of State Apparatus, State Policy, and State Power (1945-1965).” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1994).

state-building, cultural hegemony, and information access. I conclude this dissertation with these open-ended questions to provoke a deeper conversation around colonial legacies on knowledge and the nation-state. There is tremendous potential for more critical and comparative scholarship on libraries and print control in post-colonial contexts. Through these questions, I seek to lay the groundwork for my future work in this field, as well as to invite further scholarship and inquiry.

Libraries for Revolution and Measuring Socialist Transformation

What was the role of libraries for revolution and socialist transformation? What was the relationship between culture, libraries, and education? According to the DRV vision of culture, libraries and reading matter could be an instrument to spread revolutionary thinking and socialist ideas to the people. In principle, these ideas would build a loyal citizenry committed to the ideological and political platform of the Vietnamese Communist Party of the DRV state. However, existing library infrastructure from the colonial period held a collection of primarily French language, outdated books and serials, located in cities. By the 1950s most of the rural population only had a basic literacy of the national language, quốc ngữ. Thus, the DRV strategized libraries and print among other forms of media (radio, imagery, music) for distributing communist ideology. The communist state combined education, literacy, and ideology as an interwoven cultural project, which parallel the 1930s projects of colonial propaganda and print control. These institutionalized methods of ‘colonizing the minds’ reflect the tactics of authoritarian regimes to expand government legitimacy through culture, education, and language. These methods of legitimacy building often relied upon a totalitarian approach to controlling information by removing potential ‘misreading’ of subversive texts. For example, a 1956 Ministry of Culture Report observed the dangers of books which strayed from the official party line.⁶⁹⁶ The report claimed that unsanctioned books negatively harmed the education of youth and even “pushed students to travel south.” The report requested all booksellers to re-examine their books and to officially submit to the Culture Service a catalog of dangerous books which did not fit the party line.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture questioned how to spread and measure socialist transformation. Newly organized departments such as the Central Book Distributor [Sở Phát Hành Sách Trung Ương] and the Central Vietnamese Printer [Quốc Doanh In Việt Nam] attempted to systematically bring cultural and social transformation to the countryside through the production and dissemination of books. The Central Distributor brought to the countryside new technical primers on agriculture and hero memoirs for socialist emulation.⁶⁹⁷ The materials brought to the countryside emphasized ‘practical’ knowledge such as guides on technology, agriculture, and language. Ideally, the distributor would send down to the countryside cadres to introduce new books as well as build libraries in rural towns and villages. But in practice, these projects were rarely realized. On November 23, 1959 the Party issued Directive 172 CT/TU on publishing and emphasized the importance of “instilling reading practices among cadres and the people; and motivating people to read books for the purpose of improving their level of politics, culture, profession, and technology...”⁶⁹⁸ By 1960, the Ministry of Culture praised the widespread successes of a “Reading Movement.” The report exclaimed that people have stopped

⁶⁹⁶ TTLT3, BVH, Folder 29 “Công Văn Của Bộ Văn Hoá về Chi Tiêu Phát Hành Sách Năm 1957.”

⁶⁹⁷ TTLT3, BVH, Folder 36 “Báo Cáo Tổng Kết 3 Năm (1955-1957) Của Sở Phát Hành Sách.”

⁶⁹⁸ TTLT3, BVH, Folder 318 “Báo cáo tổng kết công tác phát hành sách năm (1965-1968) và phương hướng nhiệm vụ hai năm (1969-1970).”

reading novels and newspapers “and instead rush to read argumentative books, science, and works of research. For example, the works of Marx-Lenin, Ho Chi Minh and other leaders of the party...there are never enough books shipped from the Central Distributor [to meet their needs].”⁶⁹⁹ The report portrays an overwhelmingly positive reception of ideological books by all readers. While most likely an exaggeration, the argumentative framing reveals how the DRV government measured social and ideological transformation. According to the same report, “mass culture movements have brought more happiness to the people.” In other words, the measurement of state legitimacy (and widespread approval) was directly correlated with the distribution and reception of Communist texts.

This dissertation examined the history of colonial libraries and print control from 1865 to 1958. I situated libraries within the politics of production, dissemination, and preservation of print matter. I point to similar mechanisms of print control and documentary heritage in the post-colonial north and south Vietnamese states. I show how various state and non-state actors debated what constituted ‘good reading’ and instituted policies to prevent the dangers of ‘misreading.’ Yet in practice, policies of print control were fragmented, changing, and often challenged by builders and users. The library was both symbol and tool, official and undermined.

⁶⁹⁹ TTLT3, BVH, Folder 1384 “Tập Tài Liệu về Tuyên Truyền, Giới Thiệu Việt Nam ở Nước Ngoài Năm 1960,” September 28, 1960.”

ARCHIVES

Vietnam

Trung tâm lưu trữ quốc gia 1 [National Archives Center 1] in Hanoi, abbreviated as TTLT1. I consulted the following collections:

- Direction des archives et des bibliothèques – Direction of Archives and Libraries abbreviated as DABI
- Gouvernement Generale de l’Indochine – Governor General of Indochina, abbreviated as GGI
- Mairie d’Hanoi – Mayor of Hanoi, abbreviated as MH
- Resident superieure de Tonkin (Ancien fonds) - Resident Superior of Tonkin Former Collection (divided between Aix-en-Provence and Hanoi) abbreviated as RSTAF
- Sở thông tin tuyên truyền bắc việt - Service of information and Propaganda of North Vietnam, abbreviated as STTTBV

Trung tâm lưu trữ quốc gia 2 [National Archives Center 2] in Saigon, abbreviated as TTLT2. I consulted the following collections:

- Gouvernement de la Cochinchine - Phủ thống đốc Nam Kỳ [Cochinchina Government], abbreviated as GC
- Nha Văn khố và Thư viện Quốc gia (1950-1975) – National Archives and Library, abbreviated as NVKTVQG
- Phủ thủ tướng Quốc gia Việt Nam – Prime Minister’s Secretariat of Vietnam, abbreviated as PTTQGVN
- Thư viện Quốc gia Nam Việt (1945-1957) – National Library of Southern Vietnam, abbreviated as TVQGNV
- Tổng Thư viện (1940-1956) – General Library, abbreviated as TTV
- Phủ thủ tướng Việt Nam Cộng Hoà (1954-1975) – Prime Minister’s Secretariat of Republic of Vietnam, abbreviated as PTTVNCH

Trung tâm lưu trữ quốc gia 3 [National Archives Center 3] in Hanoi, abbreviated as TTLT3. I consulted the following collections:

- Phủ Thủ tướng - Prime Minister’s Secretariat, abbreviated as PTT
- Bộ Nội Vụ - Ministry of Internal Affairs, abbreviated as BNV
- Bộ Văn Hoá – Ministry of Culture, abbreviated as BVH

France

Archives nationale d’outre-mer [National Archives of Overseas Territories] in Aix-en-Provence, France, abbreviated as ANOM. I consulted the following collections:

- Archives Privées Papiers Boudet 86 - Private Archives Boudet Papers, abbreviated as PB
- Gouvernement Generale de l’Indochine – Governor General of Indochian, abbreviated as GGI

- Resident superieure de Tonkin (Ancien fonds) - Resident Superior of Tonkin Former Collection (divided between Aix-en-Provence and Hanoi) abbreviated as RSTAF
- Resident superieure de Tonkin (Nouveau fonds) - Resident Superior of Tonkin New Collection (divided between Aix-en-Provence and Hanoi) abbreviated as RSTNF
- Haut Commissariat de France pour l'Indochine – High Commission of France for Indochina, abbreviated as HCI
- Bibliothèque – Library [of ANOM]

LIBRARIES

- Thư viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam – National Library of Vietnam in Hanoi, Vietnam abbreviated as TVQG.
- Bibliothèque Nationale de France - National Library of France in Paris, France abbreviated as BNF.
- Thư viện Khoa học xã hội managed by Viện Thông tin Khoa học xã hội - Library of Social Sciences managed by Institute of Social Sciences Information in Hanoi Vietnam abbreviated as TVKHXH.
- Kyoto University Southeast Asia Library

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Examples of Vietnamese Applications to the Hanoi Central Library Lending Section, 1941

The request reads “I, the undersigned ____ profession ____, residing at ____ street, request the privilege to borrow home the works available in the Lending Section of the Pierre Pasquier Library. I acknowledge the regulations of April 28, 1922 and comply with its rules, in particular in which it regards the replacement of lost or damaged books.” The application notes that all applicants must also submit a document attesting to the applicant’s place of residence.⁶⁸⁷

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INDOCHINE
FRANÇAISE
18
CENTS
TIMBRE FISCAL

Processus

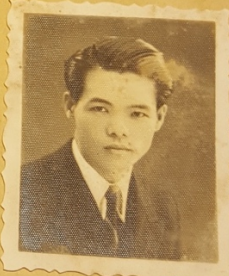
Je soussigné (1) Dào Chai Lạc
profession secrétaire à l'Agence Radiodégraphique de
l'Indochine et du Pacifique
demeurant à Hanoï, rue Hatting no 11
désireux de participer au prêt à domicile des ouvrages de la Section de
prêt dépendant de la Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier, déclare avoir pris
connaissance du règlement du 28 Avril 1922 et m'engage à me con-
former aux prescriptions de celui-ci, en particulier, à celle qui concer-
nent le remplacement des livres perdus ou détériorés.

Hanoi, le 13 juil 1941
Signature : Maich

(1) Toute demande doit être accompagnée d'une pièce attestant le domicile du demandeur, par ex. une quittance de loyer.

Imp. au-Think Hanoi

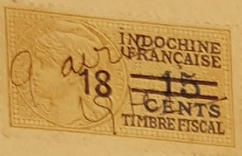
Vu :
Le Directeur des Archives
et des Bibliothèques.



⁶⁸⁷ TTLT1, DABI, Folder 2299 “Demandes de participation au prêt à domicile des ouvrages de la Bibliothèque centrale de l'Indochine formulées par les indigènes domiciles à Hanoi, 1941 [Requests for access to works in the Lending Section of the Central Library of Indochina from indigenous living in Hanoi, 1941].”

DIRECTION DES ARCHIVES
et des
BIBLIOTHÈQUES
**BIBLIOTHÈQUE
PIERRE PASQUIER**
SECTION DE PRÊT

12
N° 18332



(1) Toute demande doit être accompagnée d'une pièce attestant le domicile du demandeur, par ex. une quittance de loyer.

Tout d'identité

no. T. 44115.

Phuylthuy 2/4/1928

Je soussigné (1) Nguyen Dinh Lieu
profession Secrétaire de 2^{me} classe de Résidence
demeurant à Hanoi, rue Mal Petain no 80
désireux de participer au prêt à domicile des ouvrages de la Section de prêt dépendant de la Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier, déclare avoir pris connaissance du règlement du 28 Avril 1922 et m'engage à me conformer aux prescriptions de celui-ci, en particulier, à celle qui concernent le remplacement des livres perdus ou détériorés.

Hanoi, le 9 Avril 1941

Signature :

Ng. D. Lieu

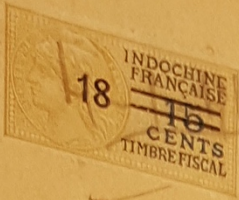
Hap an-Thinh Hanoi

Vu :
Le Directeur des Archives
et des Bibliothèques,



DIRECTION DES ARCHIVES
et des
BIBLIOTHÈQUES
BIBLIOTHÈQUE
PIERRE PASQUIER
SECTION DE PRÊT

nom: Nguyễn Tuyết Vân
30-6-1941 N° 18044



(1) Toute demande doit être accompagnée d'une pièce attestant le domicile du demandeur, par ex. une quittance de loyer.

Je soussignée(1) Nguyễn Tuyết Vân
profession étudiante du P.C.B.
demeurant à Hanoi, rue des Papiers n° 95
désireux de participer au prêt à domicile des ouvrages de la Section de prêt dépendant de la Bibliothèque Pierre Pasquier, déclare avoir pris connaissance du règlement du 28 Avril 1922 et m'engage à me conformer aux prescriptions de celui-ci, en particulier, à celle qui concernent le remplacement des livres perdus ou détériorés.

Carte d'étudiante
année scolaire
1940-1941

Hanoi, le 4 Janvier 1941

Signature :

Tuyết Vân



Imp. An-Thinh Hanoi

n° 87

Vu :
Le Directeur des Archives
et des Bibliothèques,

APPENDIX B

List of Books in the library of Phạm văn Chiêu, 1931

List of Books

Classiques français [French Classics]

Beaumarchais - Le Barbier de Deville
Boileau - œuvres poétiques
Bossuet - Oraisons funèbres, Sermons
Buffon - Morceaux choisis
Chateaubriand - Mémoires d'outré tombé Christianisme, les Martyrs, Atala, René
Conneille - Cid, Cinica, Horace, Polyeucte
Descartes - Discours de la méthode
Diderot - Jacques la fataliste
Fenelon - Dialogué des morts, Éducation des filles, Télémaque
Folorian - Fables
Hugo - Les Misérables
Bruyère - Les caractères de la Bruyère
Fontaine - Fables
Lamartine - Graziella, Raphaël
Michelet - Jean d'arc
Moliere - L'avare, Les femmes savants, Les précieuses ridicules, Tartuffe
Masset - La confession d'un enfant du siècle, Les Nuits
Pascal - Pensées, Les provinciales
Raciné - Andromaque, Plaideurs
Rousseau - Émile
Sevigne - Lettrés choisis
Vigny - œuvres poétiques
Voltaire - Le siècle de Louis XIV, Candide, Henriade, Charles XII

Classiques annamites [Vietnamese Classics]

Bạch vân Thi tập (Nguyễn Bình Khiêm)
Nguyễn Công Trứ
Đức Tông Bà Huyện Thanh Quân
Quế sơn Thi tập
Vị xuyên Thi tập Chu Mạnh Trinh
Hoa tiên
Kim Vân Kiều
Quan Âm thị Kính
Bàn nữ thần
Cung oán Ngâm khúc
Chinh phụ ngâm
Phan Trầ
Lục Vân Tiên
Lái vãi
Nguyễn Bá Học

Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu
Phạm Quỳnh
Trương Vĩnh Ký
Hồ Biểu Thánh
Từ Châm Á
Nguyễn Trọng Thuật
Tố Tâm⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁸TTLT2, GC, Folder 17005 “Dossier Relatif à la Demande d’ouverture des Salles de Lecture des Bibliothèques Années 1931-1935” Document: Petition, November 17, 1931.

APPENDIX C

Photographs of the Bricklaying Celebration for the Building of the National Library and Cultural Center Project on April 3, 1956⁶⁸⁹



⁶⁸⁹ TTLT2, NVKTVQG, Folder 1022 “Tập Ảnh về Xây Dựng và Hoạt Động Của Thư Viện Quốc Gia Năm 1956-1971.”



