

## THE FINAL CLASSICAL CHINESE EXAMINATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE BẮC HÀ LITERATI IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES THROUGH HAN-NOM SOURCES

Nguyễn Thị Oanh<sup>a</sup>

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### Abstract

The final Classical Chinese examination was held in 1919, with significant modifications to the format of the Metropolitan Examination (Hội examination), in which proficiency in Classical Chinese, Quoc ngu (Romanized Vietnamese), and French became a prerequisite for candidates nationwide to register. How did this shift influence the colonial protectorate government's educational policies prior to this event? How did the establishment of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in Vietnam in 1901, and the implementation of the protectorate state's policies through the EFEO's administration, manifest? Drawing on archival materials preserved at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies and various libraries in Hanoi, this article elucidates changes in colonial policy and their impact on education in Vietnam (1889-1916). The study highlights the pivotal role of the EFEO in executing educational policies designed to encourage scholars to study Quoc ngu, French, and Nom at the village level; promoting the translation of Vietnamese works into Quoc ngu and French; and encouraging the translation of Vietnamese works from Quoc ngu into Nom to serve the multilingual educational policy of the French protectorate administration in the early 20th century.

**Keywords:** the final Classical Chinese examination; École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO); educational policy; multilingual education

### Introduction

In the chronology of Vietnamese history, the period from 1888 to 1916 is generally categorized as the First French Colonial Exploitation in Vietnam. "In parallel with military pacification operations, the French colonialists also aggressively accelerated administrative organization activities to facilitate colonial exploitation in the Central and Northern regions" (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn [The National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty], 2012a, p. 26). At that time, among theorists within French political circles, there were two distinct trends regarding colonial policy: one advocating assimilation (assimilation) and the other advocating association (association). The perspective of the assimilation policy held that colonies and protectorates could not exist and develop as independent entities; rather, there must be a unified harmony between the metropole and the

<sup>a</sup> TICES, Thang Long University (oanhnt@thanglong.edu.vn)

colony across all spheres: economic, social, cultural, military, and security. Conversely, the perspective of the association policy argued that assimilation was utopian, and that in reality, governance should be conducted in a manner beneficial to both parties, respecting the differences between the metropole and the colony" (Nguyễn Thé Anh, 1970, p. 40). As early as 1902, Fernand Bernard warned: "A simmering hatred against the new masters exists everywhere. Only friendship between the two peoples can guarantee the future, yet this friendship can only be achieved if the administration changes its methods and the colonists alter their conduct" (Bernard, 1901, as cited in Ngô Văn Quý, 2006, p. 619). To implement the policy of association, the issue of education in French and Quoc ngu received significant attention from both the protectorate administration and the Imperial Court. In particular, during the period of approximately 12 years from 1906 to 1918, shifts in the policies of the Imperial Court and the protectorate administration regarding Quoc ngu and French education coupled with modifications to the examination content, such as reducing the number of questions on policy essays, royal edicts, and decrees, while increasing those on Quoc ngu essays, translation from Quoc ngu to French, French essays, and translation from French to Chinese (Bernard, 1901, as cited in Ngô Văn Quý, 2006, p. 619) – had a profound impact on the Imperial Court's educational policy and its implementation in the villages of the Northern Delta.

### **1. Modifications to the civil service examination regulations and their impact on the Imperial Court's policy regarding French and Quoc ngu education**

To implement the policy of association, the French language was not only aggressively pursued by the protectorate administration but also supported by the Imperial Court. Recognizing the importance of French language instruction, King Thành Thái established the National School for Western Studies as early as December 1896. "Previously, Resident Superior Brière discussed the matter of students at the Imperial Academy taking supplementary courses in Western script, suggesting that examination regulations should include a section on Western script, and proposing modifications to the study regulations at the Protocol Office; consequently, a Council was established to discuss and draft an edict for implementation." In his edict, King Thành Thái stated: "In our country, from the Imperial College in the capital to schools in the provinces and districts, Confucianism is studied everywhere; while it is thorough and complete, there remain significant deficiencies in Western learning. Recently, the Privy Council reported that the Governor-General of Indochina, Rousseau, visited the capital and held discussions with the Resident Superior, Brière, regarding the establishment of a school for Western script (omitted). We hereby approve the establishment of said school, designated as the National School, to teach the French language and script, with Classical Chinese taught for reference." The King's edict further emphasized: "Moreover, in current diplomatic relations, a clear understanding of language and sentiment is essential; the Directors of studies must carefully follow the curriculum and dedicate themselves to training students to be proficient in both Western and Classical Chinese scripts" (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 283). The National School for Western Studies was not only open to young Confucian scholars; the Doctoral laureates

and Vice-Doctoral laureates of the 1898 Metropolitan Examination were also sent there to study Western script (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 337).

Following the establishment of the National School for Western Studies in 1903, officials of the Privy Council submitted a petition to reform the examination regulations. Regarding the Provincial Examination (Thi Hương), they proposed that in addition to the existing three sessions used to select Bachelors, candidates who passed the re-examination could take additional tests in Western script, Western language, and Western law and mathematics; those who passed would be ranked as Licentiates, while those who failed would only be tested on Western script, law, and mathematics in the subsequent examination (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 442). The King approved the proposal and authorized the Privy Council to deliberate further.

King Thành Thái also promoted Western language learning within the royal family itself. In December 1903, the King issued a decree stating: “The Minister of Rites and Commander of the Royal Guards, Ngô Đình Khả, who is proficient in French script, is [from now on] permitted to visit the residences of my younger brothers, Duke Tuyên Hóa Bửu Tán and Bửu Kiêm, on a daily basis to tutor them so they may soon understand Western script” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 447). The King also recognized the importance of translating French literature into Quoc ngu and ordered the establishment of the School for Royals. The King’s edict declared: “The translation of Western literature into our country’s Quoc ngu is most essential; I have consulted and decided upon this matter, and hereby instruct royal relatives, princes, and grandsons to study in preparation for future utility; intelligent and perceptive youths are also permitted to attend” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 449).

In Tonkin, following the Privy Council’s 1903 petition to reform examination regulations, the King opened a grand assembly in 1906 to discuss revising educational regulations. Initially, Governor-General Beau, upon visiting the capital, intended only to open a general assembly to “discuss educational regulations, edit the nation’s old books, translate new Western books, and collect practical books available in Indochina to print for teaching purposes; future examinations would be based on these materials” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 485). Subsequently, the Resident Superior’s Office convened a conference to discuss educational regulations and the issues submitted by the Privy Council for approval (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, pp. 485–486) (hereafter referred to as the Decree of 1906).

The Decree of 1906 contained provisions regarding the Regional Examination. In the four sessions of the Regional Examination, the second session, Southern writing, required five essays in Quoc ngu. The third session required two essays in French: one translation from Classical Chinese to French and one from French to Vietnamese. The fourth session (re-examination) also required three tasks similar to the previous sessions: one essay in Classical Chinese, one on Vietnamese history, and one translation from French to Classical Chinese (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 493). By the 1909 Regional Examination, the third session required one essay in Quoc ngu, while examination centers in Tonkin specifically

required one translation from French into Quoc ngu (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 494). To assist Doctoral laureates, Vice-Doctoral laureates, and Licentiates in Annam, as well as Licentiates and Bachelors within the royal family, Licentiates in mathematics, and first-rank Bachelors in preparing to become mandarins capable of writing and speaking French and Quoc ngu for diplomatic purposes, the Imperial Court established the School of Administration in 1911 (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, pp. 603–604). In reality, learning the French foreign language was not easy for candidates of the Regional Examination; by 1912, the Resident Superior of Tonkin sent a dispatch to the Resident Superior's Office regarding testing methods and decrees, including changes to the Regional Examination regulations: “The first session consists of 4 essays on Classical Chinese policy; the second session consists of 3 topics in Quoc ngu; for the French session, those who do not wish to take it will not be compelled; a total of 26 points is required to enter the re-examination.” However, French learning and examination were still treated with leniency; in 1915, the Resident Superior's Office communicated the decree of the Resident Superior of Tonkin regarding the testing regulations of the Hà Nam Regional Examination center, allowing those who took the French session “not to be failed even with low scores” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 691). In the same year, the Supplement to the School of Administration program still showed leniency regarding the French essay task, stating “but those who do not wish to take it will not be compelled” (Article 1) (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 692). However, this did not last long; by 1916, when the School of Administration program was revised, a decree was issued stating: “[From now on], anyone wishing to study must undergo screening in Quoc ngu and French; only those who pass may be admitted. Graduates will be considered for official appointment first, while those who do not wish to study will be appointed by the ministries” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 708). By 1917, a review of the Regional Examination rules showed that the third session still included one topic on “translating Quoc ngu to French and one topic on translating French to Quoc ngu” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, p. 147). In addition to candidates, examiners were also required to be proficient in Quoc ngu (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 493). To encourage successful candidates entering the civil service to learn Quoc ngu, the Decree of 1906 also clearly stated: “After the implementation of this Decree, any newly appointed official who cannot demonstrate proficiency in Quoc ngu will not be employed.” It also recommended: “Quickly establish schools teaching Quoc ngu in provinces and towns so that incumbent Education Officers may attend.” In practice, the stipulation that those ignorant of Quoc ngu “would not be appointed or promoted within the prefecture, district, and canton administration” had been recorded in Decree 82 signed by the Governor of Cochinchina, Lafont, in 1878. The following year, 1879, the French administration introduced Quoc ngu into education, beginning in the villages of Cochinchina. Authorities reduced or exempted poll taxes and corvée labor for village notables if they knew Quoc ngu (Diễm Anh et al, 2017).

Thus, in Tonkin and Annam, the study of Western language (French) and Quoc ngu was incorporated into the educational curriculum, and from the 1906 Provincial Examination onwards, French and Quoc ngu were utilized in examination topics. Although the “additional testing of Quoc ngu and French” was initially implemented only at the Nam Định

examination center, facing the requirement that candidates must know French, and especially Quoc ngu, prior to participating in the Regional Examination, the Imperial Court established the position of Instructor at the Imperial Academy in 1907 to specialize in teaching Quoc ngu and French in time for the examination (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 532). Beginning in 1908, the Imperial Court authorized the establishment of regulations for the upcoming Provincial (Thi Hương), Metropolitan (Thi Hội), and Palace (Thi Đinh) Examinations.. To effectively serve these examinations, the Court also permitted “the Compilation Office to select new-style essays in Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu, as well as royal edicts, decrees, memorials, and statements, to be copied and distributed as models for all localities” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 557).

In 1909, alongside Classical Chinese, the Imperial Court established regulations regarding the teaching methods for French and Quoc ngu (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 592). Testing in French was not compulsory, but Quoc ngu was mandatory. From 1914 to 1916, programs such as the Review of the Primary Education Curriculum (1914) (p. 664), the Supplementary Proposal on the Imperial Academy Curriculum (1915) (p. 698), and the Revision of the School of Administration Curriculum (1916) (p. 708) all emphasized the selection of individuals proficient in Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu, while limiting the age of first-year students entering the Imperial Academy: “First-year students over 26 years of age are not permitted to enroll. Licentiates over 26 are not permitted to enter the Academy, but those with some understanding of French may be admitted up to age 28” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 698). The purpose of opening the School of Administration was to allow Doctoral laureates and Vice-Doctoral laureates to further study French and Quoc ngu; however, as many who achieved these ranks were already advanced in years, the protectorate administration and the Imperial Court deemed that forcing their admission would yield little benefit. Consequently, it was redefined that “[From now on], anyone wishing to study must undergo screening in Quoc ngu and French; only those who pass may be admitted. Graduates will be considered for official appointment first, while those who do not wish to study will be appointed by the ministries” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 708).

Quoc ngu was utilized not only for education and examinations but also in daily administrative work related to civil and military affairs; without knowledge of Quoc ngu, matters could not be resolved swiftly. In 1914, the Ministry of War memorialized: “Currently, civilization is gradually evolving, and politics are being reformed; the study of Quoc ngu is essential. Yet, in remote areas within the capital and provinces, and among military personnel in various guards, very few know Quoc ngu. In moments of urgency, or when there are confidential matters requiring the control of correspondence, receipts, and signatures, Quoc ngu is strictly needed; ignorance of it makes public affairs difficult to expedite satisfactorily. We request that from now on, officers and soldiers of guards within the capital and provinces be ordered to study Quoc ngu - those proficient in Quoc ngu shall be appointed first as an incentive” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 667).

Thus, in the 1888-1916 period, education in French and Quoc ngu was the policy of both the protectorate administration and the Nguyen Imperial Court. After this period, the protectorate administration became increasingly determined to abolish Classical Chinese. In

1917, hearing that “The Governor-General wishes to abolish the School of Administration and the School for Mandarins to establish a College, with the intention of eliminating Classical Chinese,” the Minister of Justice, Tôn Thát Hân, memorialized: “Classical Chinese books are for conveying the Tao of learning, regarded by our country for thousands of years as a compass; please skillfully maintain them.” The King replied: “I have discussed this many times, but the outcome may not be as requested. Roughly speaking, the Protectorate wishes to abolish Classical Chinese (omitted). However, discussing it reasonably, ancient books translated into Quoc ngu and French do not amount to one or two parts out of ten; Classical Chinese cannot be abandoned immediately” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, pp. 166–167).

Nevertheless, the protectorate administration increasingly exerted pressure to “abolish Classical Chinese,” though it had not yet persuaded the King and certain contemporary high officials. The Resident Superior argued that only by abolishing the examination system in Tonkin would Classical Chinese be eliminated, but this policy was not yet agreed upon by the King and some high officials (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, pp. 192–193). However, the unequal struggle between the Imperial Court and the protectorate administration regarding whether to abolish Classical Chinese eventually reached its conclusion; in 1918, the Imperial Court was compelled to issue an order abolishing the civil service examinations and establishing the regulations for the final Metropolitan Examination to be held the following year (1919) (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, pp. 218–219).

## 2. Changes in civil service examination regulations and their impact on Quoc ngu and French education in the villages of Tonkin

From 1906, alongside the changes introducing Quoc ngu and French into the civil service examination regulations, the Imperial Court and the protectorate administration accelerated the implementation of Quoc ngu education in Vietnamese villages. The following section will address two issues:

### 2.1. Regarding the construction of schools and the engagement of village teachers

The Decree of 1906 contained several important points regarding Elementary education. It stipulated: “Village Schools are to be established by the villages themselves, while Primary Schools and Secondary Schools are to be established by the authorities”; and “Teaching methods in private schools are discretionary; students of private schools are permitted to take examinations and graduate according to the same regulations as students of public schools” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 486). Quoc ngu schools were to be “established in provinces, cities, or key locations within the province for incumbent teachers from villages to attend for training” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 488).

Naturally, the establishment of village Schools in local areas did not await 1906 (Elementary Learning [áu học] became the official designation from 1906); prior to this, villages in Tonkin had voluntarily contributed money and land to build schools (regrettably, no royal edicts on this matter have yet been found). The earliest document discovered by previous researchers is the *Học xá điền thổ bi ký* [Stele Record of the Academy’s Land and Fields], created in the 23rd year of Chinh Hoa (1702), recording that the two communes of

Vân Trung and Lang Trung in Bạch Hạc district (now Vân Trung commune, Vĩnh Tường district, Vĩnh Phúc province) jointly contributed property and land to construct a village school on an area of 3 sào (approximately 1,080 square meters) (Nguyễn Hữu Mùi, 2005, pp. 25–34). By the Nguyen Dynasty, the state officially issued orders permitting the use of public and private land for Village Schools. In 1853, King Tự Đức issued an edict approving: “Localities possessing public or private land for use as village schools to teach local children, thereby valuing education and enriching customs, are permitted to do so according to the convenience of the people” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, pp. 218–219).

The requirement that Village Teachers must be fluent in Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu was also clearly stated in the Decree of 1906: “One month after the implementation of this Decree, if any individual cannot demonstrate proficiency in Quoc ngu, the Political Officer will not approve their appointment as a Village Teacher” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 488). In reality, although the Decree was issued in 1906, prior to that, in 1905, in certain customary regulations of Thanh Trì district – a pilot area for administrative reform (Nguyễn Thị Lê Hà, 2013) – regulations regarding Village Teachers already required knowledge of Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu, accompanied by provisions for sustenance, rewards, and punitive sanctions: “The village previously had no village school; in the 17th year of Thành Thái (1905), the people obeyed the superior order to jointly build a Village School to open the people’s minds. Regarding the Village Teacher, regardless of whether he is from within or outside the commune, if he is proficient in Classical Chinese and understands Quoc ngu, he shall be invited to serve as [3a] Head Teacher. The students of the commune shall set aside 4 mẫu of autumn-crop land and 4 sào (approximately 1,080 square meters) of summer-crop land to entrust to the Village Teacher for cultivation to cover expenses. If the teachers at the school are not diligent, they will be replaced” (*Customs of Huynh Cung Commune*). Also in 1905, the customary regulations of Thanh Liệt commune, Thanh Liệt canton, recorded similar provisions regarding the Village Teacher: “[6a] Regarding the election of the Village Teacher. The selection of the individual is not restricted by their commune of origin, provided they understand Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu, they shall be appointed to the position of Head Teacher. Annually, 5 mẫu (1.8 hectares) of land at Hà Trại tract is granted; this land is entrusted to the Village Teacher to cover expenses. If the Village Teacher teaches carelessly or is not diligent, a report shall be made to the superior official to dismiss him and select another person as Head Teacher” (*Political Customs of Thanh Liet Commune*).

Following the implementation of the Decree of 1906 (i.e., from 1906 onwards), provisions regarding Village Teachers were recorded in the customary regulations of several villages in Thanh Trì district. For instance, the Customary Regulations of Liễu Ngoại commune, Ha Lieu canton, Thanh Trì district, state: [2b] “Regarding the election of the Village Teacher. One must select a person who understands Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu, regardless of which commune he is from, to fill the position. Annually, the entire population shall grant 30 quan (strings of cash) of money for his service. If any Village Teacher teaches without diligence, it shall be reported to the superior official for dismissal, and another person shall be selected as Head Teacher” (1908) (*Customs of Lieu Ngoai Commune*). The

Customary Regulations of Thanh Trì commune contained a similar provision: “The commune shall choose any person, regardless of their commune of origin, provided they understand Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu, to fill the position. Annually, 3 mǎu (1.08 hectares) of land at Trà Anh tract shall be granted and entrusted to the Village Teacher for cultivation; if the Village Teacher teaches poorly or without diligence, it shall be reported to the superior official to strip him of his position and rotate the election to another person as Head Teacher; if a Village Teacher has not yet been selected, that land shall be divided equally among the people for joint cultivation” (*Customs of Thanh Tri Commune*) (1909).

The author has not yet had the opportunity to examine the entirety of the customary regulations currently preserved at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies to determine the exact year from which the requirement for Village Teachers to know Classical Chinese and Quoc ngu began. However, based on certain villages implementing the pilot program for the reform of village administration in 1905, it can be seen that in some villages of Thanh Trì district, this requirement was implemented one year prior to the Decree.

## 2.2. *Encouraging the study of French and Quoc ngu*

The Decree of 1906 contained a provision regarding Primary education: “Encourage the supplementary study of French, though it is voluntary and not improved.” To encourage those pursuing Classical Chinese and Western script professionally, some villages introduced preferential treatments alongside punitive sanctions, such as: “[38b] Any person pursuing Confucian Classical Chinese studies or Western script professionally is exempted by the village from patrol duties and miscellaneous corvée. If by the age of 25 their academic career has not changed and they must follow another trade, they shall be compelled to perform miscellaneous corvée and prepare 50 betel quids or fewer as a ritual offering to the people, to encourage diligence” (1909) (*Customs of Nam Du Thuong Commune*); “It is a regulation in the commune that anyone who pursues studies, knows Classical Chinese, passes the examination for Aspirants, or graduates in French with a diploma, shall be exempted from miscellaneous corvée, though they remain liable for poll tax and other taxes like other villagers. This is hereby established as a regulation” (1920) (*Customs of Tien Cau Commune*).

Prior to the issuance of the Decree of 1906, the encouragement of French and Quoc ngu learning had already been incorporated into the customary regulations of villages in Yên Lãng prefecture, Vĩnh Yên province (Nguyễn Thị Oanh, 2008, pp. 129–142). In Article 24 of the Customary Regulations of the first year of Dong Khanh (1886) of Tiên Câu commune, Bạch Trấp canton, it is clearly recorded: “Recently, students studying Classical Chinese, Quoc ngu, or Western script were to be exempted from miscellaneous labor tasks to allow them to focus on their studies; however, there were times they were not exempted if their studies did not lead to success. It is now redefined that any student pursuing studies shall be exempted to encourage the scholar’s spirit; if any person passes examinations or receives an appointment notice, they shall not be required to pay the celebratory fee in recognition of their diligent study; they need only present 50 betel nuts and register their name in the book for tax deduction” (*Customs of Trung Ha Commune*). The study of French appeared not only in the

Customary Regulations of Thanh Trì district, the gateway to the ancient Thang Long citadel, but also in areas west of the capital such as Vĩnh Yên, and further away in Central provinces like Nghệ An: “In the commune, any student currently studying either Classical Chinese or French shall have their miscellaneous corvée for the entire year exempted by the commune to promote the spirit of learning” (*Customs of Thuong Xa Commune*).

Currently, we have not been able to compile statistics on exactly how many Customary Regulations in villages encouraged the study of French and Quoc ngu; however, an examination of the Customary Regulations in the villages of Từ Liêm district prior to 1919 reveals no provisions related to the study of French and Quoc ngu, indicating that the Decree of 1906 could not yet be implemented across all villages in Tonkin and Annam.

### **3. The influence of the final classical Chinese examination on the Bắc Hà literati through the movement of translating classical Chinese into Nom and Quoc ngu, and the Nom – ization of Quoc ngu**

To disseminate the policies of the protectorate administration and the Imperial Court to the general populace, where French and Quoc ngu were not yet widespread in Tonkin and Annam, the protectorate administration and the Imperial Court placed special emphasis on developing Quoc ngu and Nom alongside Classical Chinese. In 1919, Resident Superior Charles discussed the matter, stating that Quoc ngu could be understood quickly; furthermore, as the national script was becoming gradually popularized, from that point forward, all official dispatches and legal cases of the ministries and provinces should utilize Quoc ngu, and court documents should also be translated from French into Quoc ngu for convenience and expediency. The Privy Council’s high officials agreed and submitted the proposal for approval and implementation (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, p. 225). The French not only exerted efforts in disseminating Quoc ngu and the French language through education in Franco-Vietnamese schools, but they also carried out the translation of numerous Vietnamese Han-Nom materials into French, such as G. Aubaret’s translation of *Gia Định thành thông chí* [Comprehensive Records of Gia Dinh Citadel] (嘉定城通誌) under the title Description de Gia Dinh, and Philastre’s translation of *Hoàng Việt luật lệ* [The Gia Long Code] (皇越律例) under the title Code Annamite” (Việt Anh, 2008, pp. 55–62; *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, p. 297).

To promote Vietnamese-French exchange, the Governor-General of Indochina at the time, Paul Beau, authorized: “... a number of mandarins, officials, or intellectuals of Northern and Central origin... to undertake study trips to France annually.” King Khải Định also asserted: “... desiring to advance toward civilization to strategize for benefits, one cannot do so without learning, and one cannot do so without studying abroad; thus, the Court should permit children to go to the West for study, so that one day, having achieved success and returned to the country, they may match the modernists” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, p. 230). Furthermore, the efforts of the Vietnamese intellectual class at the time accelerated French-Vietnamese cultural exchange and the popularization of Quoc ngu. One can mention prominent Confucian scholars of the time such as “Phan Thanh Giản (1796-1887), Phạm Phú Thứ (1820-1881), Ngụy Khắc Đản (1817-1878), and Nguyễn Trọng Hợp; or young, learned

individuals like Đặng Văn Nhã and Nguyễn Văn Đạo; or those from the Buddhist sangha like the Venerable Thanh Cao; or intellectuals pioneering the new culture like Trương Vĩnh Ký.” In 1865, Trương Vĩnh Ký (1818-1898) published the Gia Dinh Bao (Gia Dinh Gazette) with three objectives: “First, to popularize Quoc ngu among the entire Vietnamese population; second, to promote the dissemination of journalism within the territory of the Southern country; and third, to urge Vietnamese people to learn Quoc ngu.”

The Nguyen Imperial Court also focused on translating necessary Classical Chinese books into Nom and Quoc ngu (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, p. 248), such as the translation of the *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* (completed in 1889) (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 81) under the new title *Khâm định nước Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* [Imperially Commissioned Collected Statutes and Precedents of Đại Nam] (VHN, AB.313/1-3) [See more: (Lê Văn Át, 2017, pp. 611–699)]... particularly books related to the law. High officials submitted a memorial proposing the translation of *Hoàng Việt luật lệ* into Quoc ngu, to which the King agreed (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, p. 254). The Court also established a Translation Office, selecting students proficient in Classical Chinese to work at the New Library to translate Classical Chinese books into Quoc ngu, such as *Luận ngữ thích nghĩa ca* (The Analects Explained in Verse), *Quốc triều Chính biên toát yếu* (Summary of the Principal Records of the National Dynasty), *Danh thần liệt truyện* (Biographies of Famous Officials), *Khâm định Việt sử cương mục* (Imperially Commissioned Text and Commentary of the History of Viet), *Nữ phạm điển nghĩa* (Explication of Rules for Women), and others (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012b, p. 254). Confucian scholars within the sphere of Classical Chinese studies were, in fact, the most active advocates for learning Quoc ngu, as seen in Trần Quý Cáp’s call: “Quoc ngu is the soul of the country, Must be brought out for our people to calculate, Books of Europe, America, books of China, This word and that meaning, translated clearly.”

However, given that Han-Nom had a thousand-year history of use, “de-Sinicization” was not easily accomplished overnight. The protectorate administration, under the policy of association, also held that it was necessary to “preserve the race.” Albert Pierre Sarraut, who served as Minister of Colonies from 1920 to 1924, adhered to the associationist policy with the view that “The policy towards the natives is the conservation of the race” (La politique indigène, c'est la conservation de la race) (Cao Tự Thanh, 2012, p. 20). Therefore, in addition to the continued teaching of Classical Chinese and Nom in Franco-Vietnamese schools, the Court established the Translation Office to translate Classical Chinese works into Quoc ngu and to translate from Quoc ngu into Nom, particularly regarding books related to administration and law, such as: *Hoàng Việt tăng san tân luật* [The Newly Revised Code of Imperial Vietnam], compiled by the Tonkin Law Institute, translated into Nom by Nguyễn Hoan (阮歡), printed by Ang Hien in Hanoi in the 8th year of Khải Định (1923) (VNv.123/1-3, Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, abbreviated VHN); *Bắc Kỳ dân luật tân san* [The Newly Revised Civil Code of Tonkin], translated into Nom by Phan Văn Lâm, first printed in the year Khải Định 1922 (VNv.12) and the following year 1923 (AB.471 VHN); and *Cải lương*

*hương hội nghị định* [Decree on the Reform of the Council of Notables] (AB.475, VHN), translated into Nom by Hoàng Xuân Tường, with a preface and printing in the year Khải Định, Nham Tuat (1922). In 1923, the Nom translation *Hoàng Việt tǎng san tân luật* dich xuat quoc am by Hoàng [Xuân] Tường was translated from the Quoc ngu version of *Hoàng Việt tân luật* printed in 1919 and reprinted in 1921. Recently, researchers have also discovered *Nam sử diễn âm* by Hoàng Cao Khải, which was transcribed from *Việt Nam sử lược* by Trần Trọng Kim (Nguyễn Thị Oanh, 2018a, pp. 70–83).

The reason for translating books from Quoc ngu into Nom was clearly stated by Hoàng Xuân Tường in the Preface: “Now, thanks to the Protectorate State expanding the path of politics and establishing this *Hoàng Việt tǎng san tân luật* [Revised New Laws of the Imperial Viet], consulting the laws of Great France [and] the laws of the national dynasty; at the outset, a copy of said law in Quoc ngu was printed and distributed to every village, desiring that the people read it to understand the law and avoid errors and violations. This is truly a form of formless kindness, like the Sage monarchs of the East in the past. However, because the common Quoc ngu has been established for only a short time, the notables of our country have long been accustomed to using the national script [Nom]; looking at [Quoc ngu] is like a mirror passing before the eyes, reading it is like water flowing through the ears. Currently, when they must consult the law to arrange public affairs, most remain hesitant when reading Quoc ngu.”

From the Preface, it can be seen that although the *Hoàng Việt tǎng san tân luật* in Quoc ngu had been distributed to every village (one copy each), due to the limited popularity of Quoc ngu, even village notables faced significant difficulties in reading, understanding, and applying the law within their scope of management. The difficulty arose because “the recognition of semantics via the ideographic system (Han and Nom) was completely replaced by the purely phonetic Latinized system (Quoc ngu); the Confucian intellectual class inevitably felt disoriented due to the loss of their semantic anchor—the script. Therefore, even though the Quoc ngu text existed, the scholars and officials of that time still needed a Nom version to thoroughly comprehend the semantics of the legal code” [See more: (Nguyễn Thị Oanh, 2018a)].

To promote the study of Quoc ngu, several textbooks serving Quoc ngu and Nom education were also compiled from Classical Chinese books, such as *Khải đồng thuyết ước* compiled by Phạm Phúc Trai (Phạm Vọng) of Kim Giang, first printed in the 34th year of Tự Đức (1881), and translated into Nom and Quoc ngu by Chu Ngọc Phiến in the 7th year of Bao Dai (1932) (VNv.132, VHN). Several dictionaries were translated into Quoc ngu, such as *Ngữ thiên tự dịch Quốc ngữ*, “translated into Quoc ngu by Canton Chief Nguyễn Bích, printed by Lieu Chang Duong in the 3rd year of Duy Tân (1909) (AB.229, VHN). *Tam thiên tự giải dịch Quốc ngữ*, printed in 1908 (VNv.120, VHN); printed in the year Duy Tân, Kỷ Dậu (1909) (VNv.121; VNv.131, VHN).

#### 4. The Influence of the École française d'Extrême-Orient on the Bắc Hà Literati Before and After the Conclusion of the Classical Chinese Examinations

According to Kim Vinh Kien (Kim Vĩnh Kiên, 1932, p. 126), the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) was established on December 15, 1898. Originally named the Mission archéologique d'Indochine (Archaeological Mission of Indochina), it was renamed the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) on January 20, 1900. The Institute's research was academic in nature and occupied a significant position in the world of Indochinese studies.

The EFEO was not only a gathering place for leading researchers from the metropole (France) but also involved renowned scholars and researchers from countries such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, Thailand, India, and Japan. In 1901, the EFEO was established in Hanoi (Đường Thái Minh, 2000, p. 22). Alongside its research, the EFEO Library was created to collect materials for research in history, archaeology, sociology, epigraphy, and more. In addition to collecting and purchasing books, the Library received many donated or exchanged books. The Library was divided into seven departments: European Studies, Chinese Studies, Annamese Studies, Japanese Studies, Maps, Manuscripts, and Rubbings.

The EFEO's greatest contribution to Vietnam's heritage repository is the Annamese Book Collection (i.e., Han-Nom books). Without the EFEO's Han-Nom collection, we would be unable to comprehend the influence of the final Classical Chinese examination on the movement to translate Classical Chinese works into Nom and Quoc ngu, as well as the Nomization of Quoc ngu during this period. Local documents were also collected by the French, forming the collections of Customary Regulations, Deity Records, Land Registers, Village Chronicles, Ancient Chronicles, and Village Codes of the EFEO Library (now the Library of the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies and the Library of Social Sciences Information). Some documents on Customary Regulations in Hà Nam province clearly record the EFEO sending personnel to investigate local customs: "The First Notable of Kỳ Dịch hamlet, Hoa Khê commune, Bạch Sam canton, Duy Tiên district, Hà Nam province, submits this report. In compliance with the order of the School of the Far East<sup>1</sup> to send personnel to inquire directly with the villagers regarding new and old customs, we hereby declare. We, the people, respectfully follow the specific customs of our village as observed from the past to the present" (*Customs of Thuong Hamlet*). In addition to sending personnel directly to localities to investigate customs, the EFEO also provided funding for Vietnamese mandarins to conduct investigations into local customs. For instance, Mr. Phạm Xuân Lộc, who compiled *Bắc Ninh tinh khảo dí* [Investigation of Anomalies in Bac Ninh Province] (symbols Paris. SA.HM. 2167 and Paris. SA.PD. 2382), traveled to Bắc Ninh in October 1920 to conduct investigations at the request (and with funding) of the EFEO.

Beyond the Han-Nom books collected and purchased by the EFEO, a number of donated books are recorded in *Dai Nam thực lục đê lục kỷ phu biên* [The Veritable Records of the Great South: Supplement to the Sixth Chronicle], which are currently preserved at the Library of the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, such as *Van quoc cong phap* (International

<sup>1</sup> Bac co: i.e., The École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO).

Law) (A.49; VHv.1535/1-2; VHv.1530/1-3, VHN). This book was donated by Resident Superior Brière in 1895<sup>2</sup>. The following year, 1896, Resident Superior Brière presented 7 maps and 10 sets of Western books translated into Chinese (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, pp. 265–266).

Historical research and ethnographic surveys by French intellectuals were also introduced in the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*<sup>3</sup>. The achievements of French ethnographic research began to influence the world of Vietnamese laureates. For example, “Governor of Thanh Hóa, Vương Duy Trinh, compiled the *Thanh Hóa quan phong ký thảng* [Records of Observing Customs and Scenic Sites in Thanh Hóa] (in the 15th year of Thành Thái, 1903, Duy Trinh gathered scenic spots and folk songs within the region into a collection) and sent it to the French Doctor of Laws Giả Ké Dũng (likely L. Cadière) for translation” (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 475). Currently, the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies still preserves many collected materials on ethnography and epigraphy that were influenced by French intellectuals, such as *Ái Châu bi ký* [Epigraphic Records of Ái Châu], copied by Hồ Đắc Du in the 3rd year of Duy Tân (1909) (VHN, VHv.1739); *An Nam phong thổ thoại* [Tales of the Customs and Geography of An Nam] (VHN, AB.483), summarized by Lay Buddhist Thiện Bản Trần Tất Văn; *Bắc Ninh phong thổ tạp ký* [Miscellaneous Records on the Customs and Geography of Bắc Ninh] (VHN, A.425); *Yên Lãng dân phong tục lệ* [Folk Customs and Regulations of Yên Lãng], compiled by Vũ Liên in the 2nd year of Khải Định (1917), and others.

In addition to introducing the research achievements of French scholars, the EFEO also collected numerous works by Japanese scholars on Vietnam. Among contemporary Japanese scholars studying Vietnam, notable figures included Matsumoto Nobuhiro (松本信廣), Takakusu Junjiro (高楠順次郎) (who was an Honorary Member of the EFEO at the time), Yamamoto Tatsuro (山本達郎), and others. In particular, the writings of Matsumoto Nobuhiro focused on history, culture, ethnicity, and language. He also had people copy Emile Gaspardone's Bibliography of Annamese Books to take back to Japan and published it in the *Journal of Historical Studies* (Vol. 13, No. 4, Tokyo 1935, pp. 117-204). Matsumoto Nobuhiro is recognized by Japanese scholars as a pioneer in many fields, including Southeast Asian Studies, Vietnamese Studies, Ethnology, Mythology, and Indochinese History. He played a crucial role in Japan-Vietnam research and in training the succeeding generation of Vietnamese studies scholars in Japan at Keio University (Nguyễn Thị Oanh & Đinh Huyền Phương, 2019, pp. 173–183).

<sup>2</sup> Resident Superior Brière presented the famous books: *Cách vật nhập môn* [Introduction to Investigation of Things]; *Công pháp tiêm lâm* [Guide to Public Law]; *Công pháp hội thông* [Comprehensive Public Law]; *Văn Quốc công pháp* [International Law]; *Phú quốc sách* [Strategies for Wealthy Nations], one set each. Ordered the secretaries Than Trong Hue and Hoang Trong Phu to bring them back to translate for royal review (*Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, 2012a, p. 256).

<sup>3</sup> *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO Bulletin), published in Hanoi, 1 volume per year, typically containing 4 issues per volume. The first volume was printed in 1901.

During his tenure at the EFEO, he frequently interacted not only with French and European scholars but also with Vietnamese intellectuals of the time, including Minister Phạm Quỳnh and those working at the EFEO. Thanks to Minister Phạm Quỳnh, Mr. Gaspardone, and Mr. Trần Kinh Hòa, Matsumoto Nobuhiro was able to reprint 6 sets of *Đại Nam thực lục* [Selection of strange tales in lĩnh Nam] and bring them back to Japan (Nguyễn Thị Oanh, 2018b, pp. 77–82).

## 5. Conclusion

The foregoing discusses several issues related to the final Classical Chinese examination and its influence on the policies of the Imperial Court and the contemporary protectorate administration regarding French and Quoc ngu education. To align with the French policy of association (politique d'association) at the time, the Imperial Court implemented numerous policies to encourage the study of French and Quoc ngu. These policies were also implemented in certain Vietnamese villages during that period. To ensure the dominance of French and Quoc ngu over traditional scholarship, the protectorate administration resolutely pursued the abolition of Classical Chinese, resulting in its official abolition in 1918. However, due to resistance from intellectuals of the traditional school (cựu học), combined with the policy of “racial preservation” advocated by French intellectuals, the Imperial Court and the protectorate administration continued to organize the teaching of Classical Chinese and promoted the translation of works from French to Classical Chinese; from Classical Chinese to Nom; from Classical Chinese to Quoc ngu; and conversely, from Quoc ngu to Nom. The movement of translating Quoc ngu into Nom aimed to enable Vietnamese people who had not yet mastered Quoc ngu to access the knowledge and civilization conveyed by books, while simultaneously serving the multilingual educational policy of the French protectorate administration in the early 20th century. It also demonstrates the Bắc Hà literati's positive response in steering the country along the path of “civilized evolution.”

Alongside the restructuring of the economy and the reorganization of the administrative apparatus down to the village level by the Imperial Court and the protectorate administration, the establishment of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) made significant contributions to culture and the humanities. In particular, the vast quantity of Han-Nom books collected, printed, copied, preserved, and stored in the Library, which remain to this day, has become an invaluable asset for research into the history, culture, literature, and language of Vietnam prior to the Modern period. The research achievements of French and foreign scholars, such as those from Japan, not only influenced Vietnamese intellectuals of that time but also helped Vietnamese knowledge gradually integrate with humanity and the era.

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