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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Go East! 1905 as a Turning Point for the Transnational History of Vietnamese Education

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Abstract

This paper discusses the year 1905 as an educational watershed in colonial Vietnam. It focuses on the development of student mobility that transcended colonial and imperial boundaries and gave new momentum to educational training on a transnational scale. In the mid-1900s, the anti-colonial mandarin Phan Bội Châu launched a new nationalist movement called *Đông Du*, meaning 'Going East.' It centred on sending young men to Japan via Hong Kong to train them as effective anti-French activists. These students came from Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina and enrolled in a variety of curricula. Although this initiative collapsed in the late 1900s, it remained a watershed. Regional mobility did not disappear afterwards but mostly redirected itself towards China. This paper brings a great diversity of material face-to-face, including governmental archives and biographies, and challenges the colonial-based vision of Vietnamese education by highlighting its regional dimension, from the early twentieth century to the outset of the Second World War.

Keywords: Vietnam; Japan; *Đông Du*; Phan Bội Châu; mobility; education

"My purpose was twofold: (i) to make arrangement [sic] to bring the Marquis out of the country, and (ii) to dispatch a number of promising youths who would blaze the trail for the students we would secretly send abroad (Phan 1999: 91)."

In his memoirs, the Vietnamese nationalist Phan Bội Châu described the plan he established in 1905 after his first trip to Japan. As he was looking for foreign help in the struggle against French domination in Indochina,[1] he organised the departure of prince Cường Để, a descendant of Emperor Gia Long and considered the ideal pretender to the throne, for Japan. Besides this political move, he also sent some Vietnamese students to the Land of the Rising Sun to enhance their training in foreign institutions. He aimed to shape modern youth able to end colonial rule over his homeland.

His initiative, soon to be called *Đông Du* ("Going East"),[2] combined political and educational motives on a new scale. When other members of the scholar-gentry were organising schools in the Vietnamese territories of French Indochina (*Moussons 2009*), Phan turned educational training into a regional issue, emphasising the role of mobility in further education. *Đông Du* members could only benefit from universities and curricula recently established in Japan during the Meiji era (1868–1912) and based on the Western model. At that time, no similar higher education system existed in Vietnam, despite the creation of a medical school in Hanoi in 1902. Moreover, academic migration was restricted to a minimal number of individuals moving within the imperial sphere.

1905 and the birth of *Đông Du,* consequently, changed the educational possibilities offered to Vietnamese students. However, studies of *Đông Du* by several Southeast and East Asia specialists have heretofore relied upon a political or diplomatic lens. David G. Marr underlined the movement's anti-

[1]French Indochina comprised five different territories: one colony, Cochinchina, and four protectorates: Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos.

[2]One may use different translations of *Đông Du*. *Đông,* meaning 'East,' and '*Du*' reflect the idea of movement, so 'Going East' is the most literal translation. However, David G. Marr uses 'Eastern Study' in his work.

colonial dimension in his aptly named *Vietnamese Anticolonialism* published in 1971 (Marr 1971). Later historical studies have generally focused on a biographical approach. Scholars have scrutinised Phan Bôi Chau's life and actions to underscore both his political goals (Vĩnh 1988, 2009; Le Jariel 2008) and, more recently, his activities as a supporter of Pan-Asianism (Peng-Seng 2014).

Chizuru Namba wrote a history of Franco-Japanese diplomatic ties during the first half of the twentieth century. Her description of Phan's movement leads to an analysis of the repression that targeted it, which both French and Japanese authorities implemented (Namba 2012). In contrast, historians of education in Vietnam have neglected *Đông Du* so far. Their studies concentrate on French initiatives in the colony (Kelly 1982, 2000; Albatch and Kelly 1984; Trịnh 1993; Bezançon 2002), on the one hand, and academic mobility towards the metropole during the Interwar period (McConnell 1989; Trịnh 1993; Pomfret 2015), on the other hand.

This paper, therefore, aims to reconnect the educational and political dimensions of *Đông Du,* stressing the new impetus it gave to Vietnamese academic migration. It challenges colonial and imperial approaches of education in Vietnam by pointing out its global dimension as early as the first decade of the 1900s. This highlight on the regionalisation and internationalisation of education confirms the political aspect of schooling. It also stresses the role of colonised actors in the making of education, especially members of the scholar-gentry. Schooling was not only on the colonisers' agenda. Therefore, this paper offers a more complex picture of colonial societies in Asia. Historians of education traditionally focus on French influence and initiatives in Indochina, but an inverted vantage point helps us understand how Vietnamese efforts conversely affected French visions of education in its Asian colony.

I employ a methodology connecting materials that reflect the diversity of actors, ideas, and places — Vietnam, East and Southeast Asia, and the French Empire — involved in *Đông Du*. The methodology includes archival material found in the French Foreign Office Archives in La Courneuve, the French Overseas Archives in Aix-en-Provence, the National Archives of Vietnam's centre n°2 located in Ho Chi Minh City, and the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records' digital archive. It compares memoirs and pamphlets to official reports to give a global view of the 1905 educational watershed. Phan Bội Châu's memoirs also constitute a key-reference. Written during the interwar period, probably between 1929 and 1937 (Nguyễn 1997), this autobiography necessitates careful analysis since it relies upon its author's memories about 20 years after *Đông Du*. Georges Boudarel's translation into French includes remarks that refer to other sources, mostly from colonial authorities, to criticise Phan's work in historical terms.

Considering 1905 as a watershed in modern Vietnamese history entails consideration of what came before and after this specific year. Consequently, I first introduce the educational stakes concerning Vietnam and Asia before 1905. Then, I examine the origins and consequences of *Đông Du* to emphasise the mid-decade change and its direct ramifications, leading to the analysis of its medium and long-term effects.

Towards New Education? (1860s-1905)

A Limited Renewal: Colonial Education in Vietnam before 1905

The French conquest of Indochina modified education within this Southeast Asian territory as early as the 1860s. These changes first targeted the nascent colony of Cochinchina: the colonial power created new schools to support its domination and development. For instance, the *Collège du Protectorat*, also known as *Collège des interprètes*, was established before the signature of the Treaty of Saigon ceding Cochinchina to the French in 1862 (Bezançon 2002: 42–44). It aimed at training translators and interpreters, i.e., intermediaries necessary to administer this new territory. Later, French control over Annam and Tonkin led to other educational reforms in these newly-created protectorates (Bezançon 2002; Kelly 1982). However, these colonial realisations did not include any higher schools or universities before 1902. As a consequence, Vietnamese students willing to complete their curricula had two radically different options. First, they could engage in traditional training, as Confucian education remained active in Annam and Tonkin until the late 1910s. Second, like a handful of young men, they could leave their homeland and enrol at higher schools and faculties located within the boundaries of the French colonial empire.

The Confucian system, inherited from the Chinese, excluded women and intended to train efficient civil servants, the so-called mandarins. It selected its elite via competitive examinations symbolising

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the link between education and government, in place since the eleventh century (Poisson 2004: 24). The mandarins-to-be had to climb the educational ladder, first becoming *cu-nhân* – licentiate – after passing regional examinations, and then *pho-bang* – doctor – or *tien-sin* – sub doctor – after metropolitan examinations organised in Huế (Bezançon 2002: 30; Poisson 2004: 25). Academic trajectories subsequently entailed mobility, as schools dedicated to the highest level of education existed only in the biggest administrative centres, including the imperial capital. Candidates could take examinations as many times as they wanted, including those of advanced ages. While that system was elitist, rewarding the best students, it did not cast anyone aside. Although sons of mandarins generally became candidates to a mandarin position, the selection was not made according to social background: "This official organisation concerned a quite significant number of classes: education was not the apanage of a restricted elite, and illiteracy was rare" (Bezançon 2002: 31). Here, social mobility joined geographical mobility. To get their qualifications, the students had to join examination centres located in specific areas, depending on the degree. Camps popped up for a few days to accommodate the candidates and, eventually, the examination site displayed the results on large notice boards.

French subjugation over Indochina did not sound the death knell for this Confucian system. The colonisers planned to control their new Asian lands both politically and economically, and education, consequently, became a major issue and tool for domination. It was supposed to help shape a loyal and efficient local population, regarding both the elite and the labour force. Furthermore, French officials justified their domination using the 'civilising argument': they described their mission as helping 'backwards peoples' to develop and modernise, thanks to the supposedly higher Western knowledge and *savoir-faire*. But they chose a progressive and differentiated policy rather than a united one. Colonial authorities first set up a 'Frenchified' educational system in Cochinchina and then decided to proceed more gradually in the central and northern provinces, Annam and Tonkin. Mandarin examinations continued in these areas until the end of the 1910s. The idea was not to replace but to adapt traditional education to train modern mandarins, reorganising schools for that purpose. Huế Quốc Học School gave courses in *quốc ngữ*, the Latinised Vietnamese alphabet, and the Hậu Bổ School opened with the same objective in Hanoi. Rather than abolishing it, the French dislocated traditional Vietnamese education and turned it into a three-speed system, thus 'denationalising' it (Kelly 1982).

Neither totally French nor wholly Vietnamese, education in the eastern territories of Indochina became a hybrid construction in the late nineteenth century. The French did not consider organising the colonial higher education system before the 1900s. Furthermore, the creation of the first higher school in 1902, dedicated to medical training (Monnais-Rousselot 1999; Legrandjacques 2016), reinforced the specific status of colonial education. Instead of establishing a university or a faculty similar to those in metropolitan areas, the French were willing to train native auxiliaries to assist European physicians. Consequently, the school did not offer any higher qualification similar to the degree of a medical doctor. This first, non-existent – and then, limited, further education stimulated the development of outbound academic migration. As early as the late nineteenth century, a handful of Vietnamese students enrolled in higher institutions located outside the colony, in metropolitan France or in French Algeria, where proper faculties and higher schools at times welcomed colonial students. In 1887, Nguyễn Khac Cân was studying in the School of Medicine of Algiers, founded in 1857. He then joined the medical faculty of Montpellier.[3] In 1902, Jean-Baptiste Cân lost the governmental grant that funded his medical training in Algiers.[4] Government money sometimes facilitated these departures, but they remained private initiatives. Some members of the Vietnamese upper classes achieved a Western education, which they considered to be modern, through sojourns that did not transcend imperial boundaries, despite the regional flows that were increasing in Asia.

[3]French National Overseas Archives (ANOM), Government General of Indochina (GGI), record 23,758: *Au sujet du boursier de la Cochinchine Nguyên Khac Cân à l'école de médecine d'Alger, 1888–1889.*

[4]Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia 2 (TTLTQG2), Government of Cochinchina (GouvCoch), record 4329: *Dossier relatif au rapatriement de M. Jean-Baptiste Cân, étudiant en médecine à Alger, bourse à l'École normale d'Alger à M. Tran Van Ngot, année 1902*: « Courrier de M. Vasselle pour le ministère des Colonies au gouverneur de la Cochinchine, 7 novembre 1902 ».

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Mobile Asia

While colonisation fitfully transformed education in Vietnam, new trends appeared in other East and South Asian territories. A modernising process took place on a regional scale, based on the dissemination of new ideas throughout the continent. It fostered two kinds of opposing but complementary actions: push-out and pull-in initiatives.

'Push-out initiatives' refer to sending pupils and students abroad, where they had to enrol in modern institutions. From 1868, the Meiji reformation in Japan (1868–1912) matched the admission of hundreds of Japanese students to European and American schools. Similarly, in Siam, King Rama V (1868–1910) decreed in 1872 that his cousins were to study at the Raffles Institute in British-ruled Singapore (Baffie 2009: 40). In the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895), new flows developed within Asia. The Chinese defeat led some administrators to praise the reformation and modernisation of the Qing empire. They launched a pan-Asian policy resting upon a specific type of emigration (Maeder 1981: 161–166) that, from the late 1890s onwards, sent hundreds of Chinese to Japanese schools. These flows reached their apex in 1905, exceeding 10,000 people.[5] In the meantime, academic migration also developed from some colonial territories (*Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 1906: 481–482). Benefitting from private funding, a few Indian students left the British Raj to enrol at Tokyo Imperial University.[6] The colonial government became aware of this new mobility once the students set up in Japan and, thus, emphasised their 'disloyal' anti-colonial attitudes and connections with Indian nationalists, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Cioffo 2018).

Going abroad became a way to overtake or circumvent national or imperial training. The Japanese educational system underwent reformation during the Meiji era, with new universities set up from 1886. European models, especially those from Germany, inspired courses. Therefore, Japanese 'pull-in initiatives,' transplanting European school systems to the archipelago, led to push-out actions on the regional scale. Students sometimes entered schools explicitly designed for them that offered diversified curricula, including military arts, sciences, technical arts, languages, literature, history, and geography (Maeder 1981: 163).

However, the Vietnamese did not take part in these streams before 1905. They did not even seem to be aware of this new cartography of educational migration. Therefore, we must not over-analyse this regional influence. In fact, when the French Governor-General for Indochina ordered a report on Chinese students in Japan in 1905, it was not out of fear that Vietnamese students would follow alternative educational roads. Rather, it was to divert some pupils from China towards Indochinese institutions. No one expressed anxiety regarding Vietnamese student mobility at that time.[7] As Vĩnh Sính explains, "Vietnamese intellectuals remained even more isolated than their Chinese counterparts from the ideas about modernisation that were transforming Japanese society. It was not until the Chinese reformist literature reached Vietnam that Phan Châu Trinh [one of the leaders of the modernist tendency] and his associates began to explore these new ideas" (Vĩnh 2009: 20).

In the early twentieth century, Asian influence on Vietnamese education first came from flows of information and writings. David G. Marr underlined that both the use of junks and the role of the Chinese diaspora in Indochina spread Chinese literature in Indochina (Marr 1971: 130). The scholar-gentry and candidates to mandarin careers could read these books and journals and discover new theories coming from the neighbouring empire. Chinese reformism — together with Western philosophy (Nguyễn 1985: 299) — contributed to the emergence of a modernist tendency in 1900s Vietnam, first based on pull-in initiatives. Vietnamese modernists resigned from the traditional curriculum, some of them trying to disrupt mandarin examinations. In 1905, Phan Châu Trinh, Trần Qúy Cáp, and Huỳnh Thúc Kháng dressed up like candidates and infiltrated the Bình Định provincial examination. They aimed to convince other candidates to abandon the old educational system in favour of modern education and wrote a paper together that condemned traditional studies and competitive examinations (de Gantès et Nguyen 2009: 118). These preliminary actions, focusing on the shaping of a new youth through education, preceded meetings organised in Indochina. Nguyễn Thế Anh sums up the programme born from these encounters: "Diffusing Western scientific knowledge and political concepts"

[5]ANOM, GGI, record 23,740: *Étudiants chinois au Japon*.
[6]See, for instance: British Library, India Office Records, R/1/1/234: *Disloyal attitudes of three Indian students in Japan*.
[7]ANOM, GGI, record 23,740: *Étudiants chinois au Japon*.

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was as important as economic recovery through "the development of trade, industry and agriculture" (Nguyễn 1985: 302). Education became the core of what was called the *Duy Tân* tendency, without including educational sojourns abroad. One of its first implementations was the opening of a school called *Dục Thanh*, promoting physical and then general modern training in Cochinchina (Quinn-Judge, 2017: 26). However, the birth of another educational movement during the same year (1905) gave more substantial momentum to both education and anti-colonialism in Vietnam.

The 1905 Effect

The *Đông Du* movement, launched in 1905, gave a regional dimension to Vietnamese education, promoting educational training disconnected from the colonial power. Nevertheless, its leader, the anti-colonialist Phan Bội Châu, was not looking for an academic shelter when he first travelled to Japan. Contacts with Asian reformists and politicians played a vital role in shaping regional flows from Vietnam while retaining a national sense of belonging among the mobile students.

An Unexpected Watershed

When Phan left for Japan in 1905, his primary goal was not to shape a modern youth to change Vietnamese traditions but to get rid of the French to restore the Vietnamese monarchy. As an anti-colonialist and a nationalist, he looked for a decent pretender to the throne and foreign help in the struggle against French imperialists. His memoirs do not mention any educational tasks before his first trip to Japan. While he was roaming East Asia, he met Liang Qichao, a Chinese reformist who took shelter in Japan in 1898[8] and introduced Phan to some Japanese aristocrats. These men were reluctant to accept military support, fearing the outset of an international conflict involving imperialist powers:

> Now that you have come here, I have realized for the first time that the Vietnamese, like those in India, Poland, Egypt, and the Philippines, have lost the independence of their country; but nowhere else are things so gloomy. You should rally the intellectuals inside your country and send many abroad, so that their ears and eyes may be opened to new things. Regardless of where they went or what work they pursued, they could all breathe new, fresh air, and their spirit would not have to suffer from suffocation. This would be an immediate measure to save your country. (…)
>
> You might bring the members of your group here to Japan; our country would take in all of you; in case you wished to live in our country, we would provide accommodation for you, giving you the treatment accorded to foreign guests; you need to have no concern about your subsistence since chivalry and respect for patriotism are special traits of our Japanese people. (Phan 1999: 88)

Surprisingly, this opinion, which Phan attributed to Count Okuma Shigenobu, does not cite student streams from East Asia, especially China, as a model. The rhetorical effect of stressing worldwide modernisation, including Europe and Africa, echoes Liang Qichao's actions to promote the training of national youths abroad. He was one of the instigators of this tendency in China in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, *Đông Du* found its genesis through meeting the Asian elite, encompassing Japan, Vietnam, and China (Peng-Seng 2014). Paradoxically, traditional education made possible this encounter, as these men could communicate using 'brush conversation' (Shiraishi 1988: 56) by mastering Chinese ideograms. Phan belonged to a 'sinicized cultural club' (Shiraishi 1988: 56), and this cultural connection facilitated Vietnam's entrance into an Asian modernising movement for education.

Phan Bội Châu organised *Đông Du* during his trip back to Tonkin at the end of the year. While secretly displaying his plan to his compatriots in the northern areas of the Indochinese peninsula, he listed four main rules to follow:

1. The qualifications for the selected youths were that they should be intelligent, studious, patient in hardship and persevering in adversity, and able to remain firmly determined and unshaken by circumstances.

[8]The Qing dynasty designated him an enemy after the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898.

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2. The arrangements for expenditures were to be made in concert with both the peaceful-action group and the militant-action group.[9]
3. The persons who were to act as escorts should be carefully selected and absolutely trustworthy.
4. To forestall infiltrators and the leaking of information, all correspondence and reports should use a special mark, and if possible it would be better yet to use invisible ink. (Phan 1999: 93)

Education became a political tool against colonial subjugation. A minority of male students, who distinguished themselves by their anti-colonial convictions, could train abroad. Thus, the emphasis on defiance in rules three and four reflects the anti-colonial use of training and a fear of repression by the French. Following that logic, students did not hesitate to change their names and keep secret their real identity during their journeys. As an anti-colonialist, Phan considered that foreign education should no longer be reserved for wealthy youths. He often complained that the richest Vietnamese families did not financially help deserving students from lesser backgrounds. More surprisingly, he did not seem, at first, to care about the students' curriculum in Japan but focused only on candidates and money. The latter became Phan's central issue. On Liang Qichao's recommendation, he wrote the *Khuyến quốc dân tư trợ du học văn* in 1906, an 'Appeal to my fellow countrymen to provide financial support for overseas studies,' which found clandestine yet broad distribution in Vietnam.

Đông Du offered a new dimension to Vietnamese education and broadened student mobility by associating it with anti-imperialism and promoting international and regional migration from Vietnamese territories. However, few students joined Phan's movement during the first years of its implementation. When Phan returned to Japan during the winter of 1905–1906, only three students accompanied him. The next group comprised six young men, while subsequent arrivals generally featured a similar number of young boys, mostly from Tonkin and Annam. The watershed happened in 1907, with the first big convoy arriving in Yokohama. It consisted of students from the three Vietnamese provinces: about 60 from Tonkin and Annam and 40 from Cochinchina (Phan 1999: 92). Critical financial donations made it possible, along with positive word-of-mouth from Japan, while modernist ideas spread in Indochina. At that time, *Đông Du* mobility quantitatively overtook any other Vietnamese student flow. It reached its apex in 1908, though it remains difficult to determine precisely how many young men were studying in the Land of the Rising Sun. Phan mentions 200 students, including a majority of Cochinchinese. However, a 1909 press article in the French newspaper *Le Temps* points out the recruitment of 500 members by secret agents.[10] Historians disagree about these figures. Yves Le Jariel estimates a hundred students, but Nguyễn Thế Anh sticks to 200 (Le Jariel 2008: 42; Nguyễn 1985: 268). In any case, they show that *Đông Du* invigorated the movement of Vietnamese students. It was the first massive organised flow of students that led to Japan instead of the imperial metropole.

Pre-existing flows were associated with the colonial order, and the authorities tended to control them through the creation of scholarships, for instance. In contrast, an opposite logic fostered *Đông Du* by assuming that the more students left for Japan, the easier it would be to oust the French. Therefore, an alternative network became necessary to outline the movement and shape a different cartography of student mobility derived from connections between several territories in Asia. Vietnam provided students and money. Intermediaries circulated information about Phan's work and collected funding. Writings were covertly distributed in Annam, Tonkin, and Cochinchina. In Japan, Phan and other members of *Đông Du*, like Prince Cường Để, welcomed newly-arrived students, assisted by members of the Japanese elite (mostly pan-Asian partisans) and other Asian reformists. The *Toà Dobunkai,* or East Asian Common Culture Association, founded in 1900, organised the arrival of East Asians in Tokyo. Later, Phan Bội Châu created the *Việt Nam Cộng Hien Họi*, another association made of four departments: economy, discipline, foreign relations, and secretariat. Each of these offices gathered members of the three *kỳ*[11] to organise student stays in Japan (Namba 2012: 30). Last but not least, other territories

[9]In his French translation, Georges Boudarel explains that the *Việt Nam Duy Tân Hội* divided into two factions: the peaceful faction and the radical and extremist faction.

[10]Japan Center for Asian Historical Records – National Archives of Japan (JACAR), B02032273000: "Affaires – coloniales. Le Japon et l'agitation indigène en Indo-Chine," *Le Temps*, 31 mai 1909.

[11]The "three *kỳ*" refers to the three Vietnamese provinces in Indochina: Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin.

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became stopovers during the trip. Hong Kong was a major transit hub. Commercial firms in touch with Phan helped students, providing them with subsidies and letters of introduction. A special agency was then created by Phan to supervise *Đông Du* travels. Thus, in May 1907, when seven penniless students arrived in the British colony, one of them decided to remain there to learn English, whilst five others chose to wait for money. Only one left Hong Kong, determined to do whatever he could to reach Japan, including accepting poorly-paid jobs (Phan 1969: 85).

The will to join or complete a specific curriculum motivated previous migration, but *Đông Du* members considered this issue only after arrival. Phan had no precise knowledge about courses and did not visit any schools during his 1905 preliminary trip. The initial enrolments occurred thanks to Japanese collaborators, especially Viscount Inukai Tsuyoshi, who was well-acquainted with the Tokyo education milieu. The development of pan-Asian ideas since the late nineteenth century (Peng-Seng 2014) explains this Japanese interest. Furthermore, turning the archipelago into an 'educational hub' reinforced Japan's position as a leading country on the regional and international scene. As *Đông Du* was an anti-colonial movement, it highlighted military training. It differed from earlier student mobility that focused on medical, industrial, or commercial studies. Japan did not open a specific school for the Vietnamese, but they could benefit from the private institutions under governmental supervision that the country implemented for Chinese students.

Non-Japanese students were usually separate from Japanese youth. As a result, the *Shinbu Gakko* became one of the major schools for *Đông Du* members. The *Shinbu Gakko*, created in 1903, was first dedicated to pupils from China, even though the teaching staff was Japanese. In 1905, there were no fewer than 300 military students. As early as 1906, the school admitted some Vietnamese men after they justified their sufficient educational background. Georges Boudarel also mentions the existence of a preparatory school for military studies (Phan 1969: 85), but material about it is lacking.

Studying in Japan required a good command of Japanese. The *Tōa Dōbun Shoin*,[12] linked to the *Toà Dobunkai*, was a private school dispensing Japanese classes. It created Vietnamese sections in 1906. After this first unavoidable step, some students chose to join non-military institutions: the *Seisoku Eigo Gakko* (an English-language school), the higher school of industrial sciences, Waseda University (Phan 1969: 102), or medical schools (Le Jariel 2008: 53). Moreover, children sometimes took part in *Đông Du*, too young to join high or higher schools. An attempt to send them to elementary school in Koishikawa was made but quickly failed (Phan 1969: 102). These experiences show an interest in acquiring 'modern' education. The learning of classics and traditional scriptures was no longer on the agenda, and studies were not finalised by competitive examinations but by degrees obtained after passing final tests. This new learning fit the world context at the beginning of the twentieth century, as new weapons and industrial techniques were adopted, and learning the languages of powerful countries was becoming a common trend. Outside the classrooms, Phan and his associates supported a Vietnamese community life, and most of the students lived in boarding schools that implemented military discipline. Everyday life had to contribute to developing an *esprit de corps* among the young nationalists, sometimes reinforced by wearing uniforms.

Educating a Nation

The educational turning point of the mid-1900s inserts Vietnam into an Asian reforming-through-education movement. Nevertheless, this regional context does not distinguish this watershed as a pan-Asian one: pan-Asianism was a tool to strengthen nationalism, rather than an end in itself. Instead, a Vietnamese renewal was at stake, using imported Asian initiatives to rebuild education at a national level. When *Đông Du* members joined Japanese schools originally set up for Chinese students, they were more interested in benefiting from pre-existing institutions than allying with their northern neighbours. The diffusion of Western knowledge in Vietnam aimed to revivify the local youth as a whole when the French divided the former Annam empire into three distinct provinces. As David

[12]Another *Tōa Dōbun Shoin* was created in Shanghai in 1900 "to train young Japanese for business and government service related to China." See D. Reynolds "Chinese Area Studies in Prewar China: Japan's Tōa Dōbun Shoin in Shanghai, 1900–1945," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45, 5 (1986), p. 945–70.

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G. Marr states in *Vietnamese anticolonialism*, although "a traditional regional separation" existed before colonisation, it became "a new, more rigid foreign-enforced separation based above all on economic advantages to the colons and political expediency for the French administration" (Marr 1971: 79). Colonial education reinforced this division by using differentiated policies for each territory (Kelly 1982).

In contrast, Vietnamese activists and modernists alike aimed to spread this educational wind of change in the three *kỳ*, bringing unity amongst the Vietnamese people. Shortly after his graduation and his father's death in the early 1900s, Phan Bôi Châu travelled throughout Vietnam. Tonkin and Annam's unification with Cochinchina may not have been in his mind at that time, since he had planned to gather "every loyal man from the North and the Centre to move together into action" (Phan 1999: 110). Yet, *Việt Nam Duy Tân Hội*, the party he founded in 1904, encompassed the southern Indochinese colony. A few years later, a similar move characterised *Đông Du* after Phan Bôi Châu regretted that his students were only from the North and the Centre:

> Our students, though not many, still comprise those from both Trung-Kỳ [Annam] and Bắc-Kỳ [Tonkin]. It cannot be said that this is without significance. The only thing is, one can hardly find a soul from Nam-Kỳ [Cochinchina]. We should arrange to do something about this in short order. In launching our movement in Nam-Kỳ, in order to be effective, we should certainly make use of the people's sentiment of nostalgia for the old days. Now, you [prince Cường Để] are a direct descendant of the founder of the dynasty, and you yourself have gone overseas. It would be a good idea to draw up an appeal and send people back to Nam-Kỳ to rally the youth and impel them to go overseas to study. To use the rich resources of Nam-Kỳ to nourish the talents from Trung-Kỳ and Bắc-Kỳ as well is an excellent plan. (Phan 1999: 65)

Despite its different administrative status, the colony of Cochinchina became the first financial source for Phan's movement as well as a central student base. From October 1907 to June 1908, several arrivals took place, and the Cochinchinese represented half of the headcount. Even if Phan stressed local and provincial specificities and differences, he became more and more invested in creating a feeling of unity among the young men in Japan and promoted contacts between the different Vietnamese intellectual forces:

> (…) the people from the Three Regions up until then had not come into contact with each other; moreover, their temperaments and habits were quite dissimilar. Those from Nam-Kỳ tended to be forthright and honest but short-tempered; in addition, they could be strongly susceptible to material considerations. Those from Trung-Kỳ tended to be loyal and impetuous and liked adventure, but their manners were crude and there was a feeling that it was hard for them to blend in well. Those from Bắc-Kỳ were effusive in speech but fell short in sincerity. Though among each of the groups there were excellent elements, for these streams to merge together was indeed difficult. For more than a year I was acutely troubled, but I could not speak out, and I feel painfully ashamed that my talent and virtue were so unequal to bringing about any improvement. (Phan 1999: 140)

Here, daily community life in community and uniting the Vietnamese youth seem more important than taking lessons in Japan-based institutions. French archives confirm this unifying tendency by stating the role of Vietnamese intermediaries in the three provinces. For instance, they depict Gilbert Chiếu as a recruitment agent and propagandist in Cochinchina, while other sources mention the arrest of Phan's collaborators in Tonkin and Annam.[13]

1905's Educational Legacy in the Long Run

Đông Du quickly disappeared in the late 1900s, targeted by colonial repression. This lust for learning linked to political and ideological motivations, threatening the colonial order. Therefore, it was hardly surprising that the colonial state intervened. However, forbidding a movement does not necessarily

[13]ANOM, GGI, record 22494 : *Rapport du Résident supérieur p.i. au Tonkin, Groleau, au Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, 28 novembre 1906*; Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia 1 (TTLTQG1 – Hanoi), Résidence supérieure du Tonkin (RST), record 20607: *Renseignements sur les individus signalés comme intermédiaires entre Phan Boi Chau et feu Dang Thai Than.*

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mean suppressing its impact, and 1905 remains a turning point with long-run effects, no matter how short-lived *Đông Du* was. It renewed student mobility and made it more political than before. Colonial authorities did not manage to stop academic migration on a regional scale, and China quickly replaced Japan as a new destination for anti-colonial students.

Imperial Reactions

From the summer of 1906 onwards, French administrators in Indochina started to notice and worry about Vietnamese departures for Japan.[14] At that point, one may presume that subsequent French efforts to expand educational opportunities in Vietnam were reactions to fears about Vietnamese students travelling abroad. In 1907, an Indochinese University opened in Hanoi, per Governor-General Paul Beau's wish (Bezançon 2002; Hoàng 2016; Legrandjacques 2016). It consisted of three faculties: sciences, law and administration, and arts. Moreover, Hanoi School of Medicine created in 1902 continued to welcome young natives independently from the university. Consequently, modern studies became attainable in Indochina, even though military training was never part of the plan. However, one can refute the hypothesis of redirected flows from Japan to Indochina. The decree to create the Indochinese University was published in May 1906, when *Đông Du* was still in its early stages, and French officials were unaware of Phan Bội Châu 's Japanese activities. Even though the Indochinese University gave the Vietnamese the possibility — despite closing for a year in 1908 – of enhancing their studies without leaving their motherland, this higher education development within Indochina did not directly link to *Đông Du*. Later, when this movement was abolished, and students had to return to their hometowns, Indochinese higher schools did not offer admission as compensation.

Instead, the colonial answer to Vietnamese educational initiatives was repression. To struggle against *Đông Du*, colonial authorities chose to react on different levels. They followed the East Asian network created by Phan's organisation. The fear of losing control of the Vietnamese elite predominated, and official reports dealing with *Đông Du* insisted on the scholar-gentry's involvement, using traditional mobility as propaganda:

> Finally, the Nam Định competitive examination may also give, so it appears, for the lettered men committed to that cause, the opportunity to diffuse propaganda and raise funds from candidates, these funds being sent to Japan. Some graduates may have been to Nam Định to get into the camp fraudulently and write for the candidates, for the same purpose, dissertations sold at a high price.[15]

However, competitive examinations did not disappear before the end of the next decade. Phan's collaborators in Indochina still suffered surveillance and arrest, like Gilbert Chiếu in 1908. The authorities applied pressure to the students' families, too, asking them to write letters urging their children to return home. Furthermore, the Resident Superior of Tonkin, Groleau, considered using imperial decrees to make foreign stays illegal.

Secondly, repression occurred at a trans-imperial level, through negotiations and collaboration with Japan. Correspondence between the French embassy in Japan and the Japanese Foreign Office developed, including some memoranda and lists of students.[16] The Japanese government was eager to preserve friendly relations with Western powers, including France, especially since they recognised Japan as an equal power following its 1905 victory over Russia. The 1907 Paris Treaty led to mutual recognition of the French and Japanese spheres of influence in Asia. As a result, Japanese collaborators, generally members of the political class, could no longer support *Đông Du*.

Last but not least, colonial officials acted in Hong Kong, where a spy succeeded in stealing secret documents describing how the movement worked. French and Japanese initiatives began disturbing the

[14]In his report dated 28 November 1906, the temporary *Résident supérieur* for Tonkin Groleau mentioned his former report dated July-August 1906. ANOM, GGI, record 22494 : *Rapport du Résident supérieur p.i. au Tonkin, Groleau, au Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, 28 novembre 1906.*

[15]ANOM, GGI, record 22494: *Rapport du Résident supérieur p.i. au Tonkin, Groleau, au Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, 28 novembre 1906.* Personal translation.

[16]See the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR), B02032273000.

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increasing student mobility towards Japan as early as the second half of 1907. Ultimately, Phan Bội Châu abolished his anti-colonial organisation in September 1908. In 1909, other measures followed this decision to facilitate the students' way home. In April, the French ambassador in Japan wrote to the Japanese Foreign Office to announce an extension of six months for unauthorised Vietnamese to leave the archipelago.[17]

Đông Du and its suppression nevertheless influenced the French idea of education in Indochina. French defiance regarding student mobility as a whole, including imperial migration, increased in the wake of *Đông Du*. The French reinforced control over Vietnamese student flows from 1908, even when they went towards the French metropole rather than Japan. The newly nominated Governor-General in Indochina, Antony Klobukowski, created an official group to monitor Indochinese students leaving for the metropole, the *Groupe de l'enseignement indochinois en France*. Attempts to control academic mobility multiplied until the outset of the Second World War, partly because of *Đông Du*.

Open-ended Student Mobility

The year 1908 marked both the apex and decline of *Đông Du*, despite the arrival of fresh students in early 1909. In February, Lun Van Dau became the first Christian student to reach Tokyo and planned to follow a three-year curriculum.[18] In Japan, he met seventeen other Vietnamese, including three children from Cochinchina. His experience contradicts a complete disappearance of Vietnamese student mobility towards Japan after 1908. Even though Phan Bội Châu left Japan in March 1909 to focus on anti-colonial terrorism and never led another student movement, historians must reconsider the 1905 educational legacies. This period does not illustrate a mere parenthesis and a failed attempt to use education as a political weapon. It signals a significant turning point in Vietnamese nationalist and modernist mentalities through their use of foreign education and academic migration.

In the late 1900s, most of the Vietnamese students who had left for Japan went back to their native land. Details are lacking concerning their lives after *Đông Du*. Notwithstanding, some young men chose to stay abroad, pursuing their studies, looking for a job, or devoting themselves to anti-colonial action. Phan Bội Châu's memoirs describe some of these trajectories through detailed portraits of 20 former *Đông Du* members, summarised in table 1. Among these untamed students, five were Cochinchinese, while six came from Tonkin, and seven from Annam. This distribution seems to assert the French authorities' idea of a major anti-colonial hotbed existing in Annam. At least fourteen of these members continued their studies after 1908, and three of them stayed in either Japan or China. The chosen curriculum impacted on their careers: admission to military schools, first founded for Chinese students, led to positions in the Chinese army. In several cases, the survival of connections with the Chinese milieu in Tokyo made this continuance easier. Hoang Dinh Tuân's tale is particularly illustrative: he met some Chinese students after the *Tōa Dōbun Shoin*'s closure. They introduced him to the Chinese ambassador in Japan, who granted him Chinese nationality. Hoang then joined a Japanese high school as a Chinese scholarship-holder. After passing his degree, he joined the school for industrial sciences. Then, he went to China, where he became a teacher and a newspaper editor.

Đông Du led to some transnational careers, generally linked to activism, strengthening connections between east and southeast Asian territories. Phan's memoirs openly label four students as activists, without considering those sent to prison. They were located in China and Vietnam but also Siam or Hong Kong. Clearly, academic mobility led to political mobility on an even wider regional scale. Furthermore, Phan kept some connections with his former *protégés*. For instance, Lê Câu Tinh specialised in weapon manufacturing and created a double-bottom trunk to help him carry guns illegally to Indochina via Siam (Phan 1999: 105–106). In 1909, the British police in Hong Kong arrested another former student, Nguyên Quynh Lân, for transporting illegal weapons. His unfortunate experience illuminates the British colony's role as an anti-colonial hub for Phan's supporters. However, his quick release also highlights its ambiguous nature, as British authorities "were still nurturing good wishes" for Vietnamese independentists, according to Phan (Phan 1999: 104).

[17]JACAR, B02032272900: "Letter from the French ambassador to the Foreign Minister Count Komary, 21st April 1909."
[18]JACAR, B02032273000: "Letter from Lun Van Dau seized at priest Cu Linh's home, 27th February 1909."

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Table 1. Đông Du members pursuing activities outside of Vietnam after the movement's abolition
This table derives from information included in Phan Bội Châu's memoirs, translated by Georges Boudarel (Phan 1969: 97–108). It gives the name, location, and activities of *Đông Du*'s members after its abolition. It is based on Phan's memories many years after these events happened, thereby explaining an approximation or lack of information for some cases.

Student name	Location and main activity after the abolition of *Đông Du*	Student name	Location after the abolition of *Đông Du*
Tran Vân Nhut	Japan - studies at Waseda University.	**Hoang Vi Hung**	China – studies.
Tran Vân An	Siam (death).	**Lam Quang Trun**	Japan; China – studies.
Hoang Hung	Japan; Hong Kong - activism, bomb-making.	**Hoang Trong Mâu**	China - studies; Hong Kong – arrest.
Nguyên Mach Chi	Hong Kong; Europe.	**Trân Huu Luc**	Japan - studies; China - studies; Siam - activism; Hanoi - arrest and execution.
Dang Tu Mân	Japan – work and studies; China - activism; Hong Kong - prison; Annam - activism.	**Nguyên Quynh Lâm**	Japan - studies; China - army and studies; Hong Kong – arrest; China – army.
Cao Truc Hai	Japan - secretary for a Western trader (death from smallpox)	**Lê Câu Tinh**	Japan - weapon manufacturing; Siam (death of illness).
Hoang Dinh Tuân	Japan - studies after getting Chinese nationality; China – teacher and editor.	**Dinh Doan Tê**	Japan – work and studies; Siam (death of illness).
Luong Lâp Nham	China - studies; Hanoi - prison.	**Phan Lai Luong**	Japan - studies; China (death of illness).
Luong Nghi Khanh	Japan - studies; Hong Kong - arrest; Cambodia - deportation.	**Mai Lao Bang**	Japan - studies; Siam - prison and expulsion; China - prison; Hanoi - prison.
Dàm Ky Sinh	Japan - work; Vietnam – activism and arrest (death in Cao Bang).	**Yên Dan**	Japan - studies at higher school of industry.

Obviously, these 20 former students represent only a small part of the total headcount, but the survival of student mobility after the movement's abolition must not be underestimated. Nguyễn Thế Anh mentions a fine given to the population of Hanh Thiên in 1912 because five students from this town were still in Japan (Vĩnh 1988: 20). In May 1915, further evidence of such continuity appeared in an official report by the political bureau chief: "The Annamite students' emigration towards China and Japan, resulting from reactions after Governor-General Beau's departure in 1907 — how have we been really progressing for nine years? — is not relenting, quite the contrary."[19]

This excerpt confirms the apex of flows towards Japan in 1908 without taking the movement's suppression into account. In 1915, ten years after the birth of *Đông Du*, student mobility in Asia was seemingly a persistent trend, rather than something thwarted by French repression. It outlined a larger reception area, including China. The dislocation of the Qing empire and the birth of a Chinese Republic led to the development of new modern schools that attracted Vietnamese students until the Second World War. In 1924, the new Canton University and Whampoa military academy started to attract many Asians. Military training remained a priority. According to Daniel Hémery, Vietnamese students were more numerous in China and Siam than in France at the end of the Great War (Hémery 1975: 22). In the 1920s, a Vietnamese journal, *Hồn Nam Việt*, estimated that there were two thousand students from Vietnam in Chinese institutions. Thus, in 1905, Phan Bội Châu's *Đông Du* laid the foundations of a student mobility movement on a regional scale – a desire that the French authorities were unable to suppress despite the abolition of *Đông Du* itself.

Conclusion

In March 1928, three Vietnamese — Nguyen Van Kiem, Luu Binh Giang and Phan Trong Doan — wrote to the Governor-General of Indochina for repatriation to their homeland.[20] They had been staying in China as students for a year. They first joined a preparatory school and then passed Whampoa Academy's entrance examination. They estimated a hundred Indochinese trainees and two thousand Chinese enrolled at this military school. Finally, they underscored the possibility of enhancing their Chinese training by joining another class in Japan, Russia, or Germany. This account highlights the permanence of regional student mobility from the Vietnamese provinces of French Indochina. A significant number of Vietnamese continued to reach Chinese higher schools, while some Japanese sojourns still seemed possible in the late 1920s. These events confirm both 1905 as a watershed year and *Đông Du*'s long-lasting legacy.

The year 1905 signalled an important change in Vietnamese education: while the French had been reshaping schooling on the colonial and imperial scales for a few decades, the birth of *Đông Du* gave a regional and extra-imperial dimension to educational training. First, it emphasised the involvement of Vietnamese in educational matters, outside of the colonial sphere of monitoring. Such agency was not new, as Vietnamese modernists in Indochina's simultaneously created schools, including Hanoi's Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục, opened in 1907 (de Gantès et Nguyen, 2009; Vĩnh 2009). However, Phan's movement went further than his compatriots' plans by transcending colonial boundaries to offer a higher level of education to young men from Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. Its momentum was properly Vietnamese. At the same time, it integrated this territory and its population into a larger network of regional and international migration already exploited by other Asian — colonial and non-colonial — communities. It allowed Vietnamese to get higher training that did not exist in the colony at that time while intertwining education and politics. Anti-colonial and anti-imperial feelings indeed motivated *Đông Du*. This activist dimension to education remained after the movement's abolition, leading new candidates to Asian institutions, including Whampoa Academy, a school training military officers for nationalist purposes in 1920s China.

[19]ANOM, GGI, record 51537: *Correspondances diverses relatives aux bourses d'études dans la Métropole accordées à des Indigènes, 1911–1917*: "Note du chef de bureau politique au Gouvernement général de l'Indochine pour Monsieur le directeur des affaires politiques et indigènes, 26 mai 1915."

[20]ANOM, Service de liaison avec les originaires des territoires de la France d'outre-mer (SLOTFOM), record III, 10: *École spéciale internationale de Canton, école militaire de Whampoa*: "Rapport de mars 1928."

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In a nutshell, 1905 linked higher education with anti-colonialism for a long time through initiatives independent from colonial authorities. Simultaneously, it reinforced the use of academic migration to shape higher education in Asian colonies. Analysing education in colonial Indochina necessitates considering multiple attempts and actions, including the establishment of colonial schools alongside the development of student mobility. Although migrating initiatives from the colonised people existed before 1905, leading to metropolitan and Algerian institutions, Vietnamese reformists' initiatives reinforced this complementarity at the dawn of the twentieth century. The reopening of the Indochinese University in 1917 did not put an end to it; quite the opposite. One must not over-interpret causal links, as in the case of the first Indochinese University, which was not a reaction to *Đông Du*, but mutual influence existed. This influence was not limited to France and Western knowledge. It also came from other Asian territories, especially from Chinese reformists, some of them taking shelter in Japan. Whilst previous studies have restricted themselves to analysing education at the Indochinese level, a more global analysis is now needed, emphasising regional and international connections during the whole colonial period. Such analysis will give a better understanding of the shaping of Vietnamese education, the history of which is, as this paper demonstrates, deeply linked to nationalism and anti-colonialism.

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