

TRAVELING *CIVILIZATION*:

THE SINOGRAPHIC TRANSLATIONAL NETWORK AND MODERN LEXICON BUILDING IN COLONIAL VIETNAM, 1890s-1910s

CIV	380
<p>Civilize, (siv'-il-ize) <i>v. t.</i> To instruct in the arts and refinements of civil life, 教化, 開化, 教導; to reclaim from a savage state, 教以禮儀, 化以禮法, 致之文明.</p> <p>Civilizer, (siv'-il-ize-er) <i>n.</i> One who civilizes, 訓人者, 感化人者, 教禮儀者.</p> <p>Civilly, (siv'-il-le) <i>adv.</i> In a civil manner, 都雅, 居庶民之狀, 按禮儀, 按民法; as, to</p>	<p>Claim claim</p> <p>Claim 索者 to cl 於已</p> <p>Claim claim</p>

Văn vũ kiêm-toán. — Văn-nhân, tài-lử. — Khôn văn tế, đại văn bia (T-ng). — Văn-chương phù-lục chẳng hay, Trở về làng cũ học dạy cho xong (C-d). — Văn-chương nếp dất, thông-minh lính trời (K). — Gồm hai văn vũ, rạch đòi sơn-hà (K).

Văn-lang 文郎. Tên cũ nước Nam.

Văn-minh 文明. Tên một chức điện hàm trong
tứ-tru: Văn-minh điện-dại học-sĩ.

Văn 紋. Khía dọc ngang ở lòng bàn tay, bàn chân:
Văn tay. Văn chân.

Văn 文. Nghe : Kiến văn. Phong-văn.

ぶんめい (名) 文明 文學、智識、教化、善ヲ開ケテ、
政治甚ダ正シク、風俗最モ善キヲ。一開化
ぶんめん (名) 文面 文章ノ上ノ趣意。
ぶんや (名) 文屋 ふみや 音便。學問スル處。約メテ

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TRAVELING *CIVILIZATION*: THE SINOGRAPHIC TRANSLATIONAL NETWORK AND MODERN LEXICON BUILDING IN COLONIAL VIETNAM, 1890s-1910s

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Traveling Civilization: The Sinographic Translational Network and Modern Lexicon Building in Colonial Vietnam, 1890s–1910s

Yufen Chang

FROM CIVILIZATION TO VĂN MINH IN COLONIAL VIETNAM:
A NEW FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Words are one of the most elementary tools of making and remaking the world. They travel and are constantly in motion. As words move across time and space, they simultaneously transform and are transformed by the world (Gluck 2009; Tsing 2009). But how exactly do words travel? What are the various routes they travel? What are the political, social, and cultural effects when a word takes a particular course and not another, privileging a particular set of meanings, while foreclosing others?

The word civilization has traveled far and wide, often stirring contention wherever it has gone. By the eighteenth century, if not before, it had come to refer to the West's understanding of itself as the bearer of the Enlightenment; the world's upper class whose manners, morality, scientific knowledge, political institutions, and cultural accomplishments were superior to those of its non-Western counterparts (Elias 2000). As the West's domination of the world spread via colonial and imperial projects, this myopic sense of civilization became *the* universal standard to which non-Western societies had to comply if their sovereignty was to be recognized by international law that was, itself, a Western construction and imposition (Gong 1984).

When the word civilization traveled to Vietnam under French colonial rule, it became *văn minh*, one of the most powerful words in the country between the 1900s and the 1910s. In the early 1900s, a Vietnamese reform movement called *Duy Tân* (literally meaning 'reform') inspired by Japan's successful Meiji Reform in 1868 and China's (failed) Hundred-Day Reform in 1898, was causing excitement and hope among the scholarly-gentry elite of Vietnam, especially central Vietnam known as Annam, where the royal capital of the Nguyễn court was located. All three reform movements shared the same goal, namely, to transform the country in question into an 'enlightened and civilized' nation. Around the same time, civilization and enlightenment also became a catchword in Korea, even though a comparable reform movement never took place in Korea. Whether termed *bunmei kaika* in Japanese, *wenming kaihua* in Chinese, *munmyeonggaehwa* in Korean, or *văn minh khai hoá* in Vietnamese, all were written as 文明開化 in Chinese characters. The climax of the *Duy Tân* movement was the founding of the Tonkin Free School in Hanoi in

1907. It was modeled after the Keio Free School, Japan's first modern university founded in 1887 by Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the most preeminent Meiji thinkers who coined the term 文明開化 that subsequently became the Meiji Renovation's slogan. The *Duy Tân* reformers named the manifesto of their movement *The Strategy for Civilization and New Learning*, or *Văn minh tân học sách* (文明新學策; anonymous authors, 1904). This manifesto and other publications, such as *The Reader for the People* (*Quốc dân đọc bản*; 國民讀本, anonymous authors, 1907), were used as the school materials for the Tonkin Free School. In these materials, the reformers called for the abolition of both the imperial examination and the use of Chinese script. They demanded instead the teaching of the Romanized *quốc ngữ* script invented by European missionaries in the mid-seventeenth century, as well as instruction in the 'practical learning' which they saw as necessary to survive the fierce competition of the modern world. They passionately expounded and disseminated to their fellow Vietnamese unfamiliar terms such as *state*, *race*, *society*, *sovereignty*, *people*, *evolution*, *competition*, among others. It was only with a thorough understanding of these words, they argued, that the Vietnamese would be able to develop a truly *văn minh* society and sovereign national state.

The *Duy Tân* movement, with its stronghold in Annam area, was put down by the colonial regime in 1908 when the French were crushing the anti-tax peasant revolt in Annam. Many of its leading members were executed, imprisoned, or exiled. Yet, even when the movement had died out, the word *văn minh* continued to haunt colonial Vietnam. After suppressing the movement, the French government began to advocate the policy of 'Franco-Vietnamese collaboration' in the late 1910s. The policy sought to appease elites in both colonial Vietnam and the métropole: while the former resented the French rule, the latter were unhappy with the increasing financial burden and unceasing political uprisings that came with ruling a remote colony. The policy of 'Franco-Vietnamese collaboration' justified French expansion in overseas colonies by emphasizing once again France's civilizing mission. Building Franco-Vietnamese schools was a major component of this endeavor, and Albert Sarraut, the two-time Governor-General of Indochina (1912–1914, 1917–1919), appropriated the *Duy Tân* emphasis on practical learning to justify Franco-Vietnamese schools' orientation toward vocational training. In line with the French emphasis on Enlightenment, Sarraut deemed the eradication of popular superstitions and corrupted local customs, and the liberation of the local population from despotism (thus justifying the French rule over the Nguyễn court) to be the greatest achievements of the French civilizing mission in Vietnam. He also held out a vague promise that once Vietnam achieved the goal of *văn minh*, some form of autonomy would be granted (Nguyễn Bá Trác 1917:3–4; Sarraut 1925). Newspapers, periodicals, and journals published essays featuring famous writers using colorful language to attack each other over the question of *văn minh* (Schaffer 1994; Tản Đà 1918). Even Emperor Khải Định (1885–1925), the twelfth ruler of the Nguyễn Dynasty, now reduced to a French puppet regime, asked the candidates of Vietnam's last imperial examination in 1919 to explicate the idea of *văn minh* and explain whether or not monarchism was an 'uncivilized' polity (*Nam Phong* no. 24:193–94, 1919).

This paper seeks to trace how exactly the concept of civilization entered colonial Vietnam and in what ways its meaning shifted as it was translated into *văn minh* and variously seized upon and suppressed as an agenda for reform and a national and individual idea. The term *văn minh* is, in fact, a Vietnamese transliteration of the Chinese compound word *wenming* (文明). Accordingly, in the first half of the paper, I explore affinities between the words *văn minh*, *bunmei*, and *wenming*, as well as the regional connections

that linked Vietnam, Japan and China and shaped, in turn, their respective relations with Western civilizing projects such as those of France. Whereas a traditional analysis might ask the bilateral question of how the ‘very French’ notion of *mission civilisatrice* was taken up or hybridized in the Vietnamese context, I argue that a broader regional lens is required. Specifically, I argue that the word entered colonial Vietnam through the Sinographic translational network that connected Vietnam—especially central and northern Vietnam—to both China and Japan. It was through this network that other words pertaining to modernity also entered Vietnam and created a conceptual framework for understanding and interacting with the West. Only when this Sino-Japanese-Vietnamese conceptual framework was firmly established did French interpretations of civilization appear in colonial Vietnam via the discourse of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration and the institutions of Franco-Vietnamese schooling.

Many scholars in the field of Vietnamese studies have long noted that the majority of modern concepts in Vietnamese *quốc ngữ* were transliterations of Chinese loanwords, which in turn were coined by Meiji Japanese thinkers and were introduced to Vietnam through the reformist works of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao known as ‘new books’ (*tân thư*) in Vietnam (DeFrancis 1977; Dutton 2015a, b; Marr 1981; Tai 1992; Woodside 1976). Nevertheless, scholars have yet to fully contextualize the evolutions of Vietnamese intellectual debates and lexicon buildings within a broader East Asian intellectual sphere, which was built on the conceptual foundation of the Sinographic translational network. As a result, they have sometimes erroneously attributed some Vietnamese intellectuals’ seemingly ‘idiosyncratic’ perspectives and/or interpretations to pure agency. It has to be pointed out that since the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals have been engaged in vehement debates over how to assess and understand China, Chinese, and Chinese-ness. Intellectuals have been keen on attacking and defending Chinese culture, and the interests in reexamining ancient Chinese philosophical thoughts have been kindled for the purpose of finding out alternatives to Confucianism. It was not too difficult for Vietnamese intellectuals to appropriate Chinese critiques of China and use it as a national assertion for Vietnamese independence, as they did in *The Strategy for Civilization and New Learning*.

In his paper on the etymology of society/*xã hội*, George Dutton wrongfully attributed *qun/quân* (群), an alternative translation for society, to Liang Qichao, when this term was in fact coined by Yen Fu (Dutton 2015a:2003). In his examination of the *Duy Tân* scholars’ discussion of *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe’s classical adventure tale quoted in *The Strategy for Civilization and New Learning*, Dutton stated that the scholars might have used this tale to encourage the spirit of Social Darwinism and the technological skills among Vietnamese as a people so that they could survive the French threat. Nevertheless, without checking the original Chinese version of the textbook, Dutton failed to note that the scholars in fact were referring to the Chinese translation of the *Crusoe* story, most likely the earliest one that appeared in 1902 in Shanghai.¹ At the turn of the century, in China and overseas Chinese communities alike, the character Robinson Crusoe was used as an example to illustrate how important it is for people to collaborate: only when people collaborate does a society begin to evolve (Wang 2015). This argument was also appropriated

¹ Li and Yao (2015) reported that the earliest Chinese translation of Robinson Crusoe was published in Shanghai in 1902, and the second one in 1905 was very popular.

by the *Duy Tân* scholars. Similarly, in his article on the etymology of revolution/*cách mạng*, he failed to recognize that what he called the (Vietnamese) scholars ‘shorn off its classical Chinese baggage’ (Dutton 2015b:24) was in fact inspired by or even plagiarized from Chinese debates and discussions of revolutions. The list of ‘world revolutions’ that some Vietnamese scholars talked about that Dutton quoted (p. 22) was indeed from Chinese sources. The Vietnamese rendition for Ireland, ‘Ai nhi lan’, was a transliteration of ‘Ai er lan’ (愛爾蘭), the Chinese transliteration for Ireland (Dutton 2015b:22). As Dutton noted, French revolution was a main source of inspiration for colonial Vietnamese intellectuals in understanding revolution. Nevertheless, Chinese sources were equally plausible, as Shanghai, Guangzhou (Canton), and Hong Kong were regarded as the ‘Mecca’ by East Asian revolutionaries in the early twentieth century (Paterson 2011; Takeshi 2011), and during the 1910s and 1920s young Vietnamese revolutionaries were sent to Guangzhou for training (Tai 2010).

In the second half of the paper, I provide a comparative analysis of dictionaries—specifically, the ways in which they present, omit, define, and/or remain silent regarding the term civilization and affiliated words. As many scholars have eloquently demonstrated, producing a standardized spoken and written national language out of the plethora of local dialects, thereby creating a homogenous population with distinctive culture and language that requires the protection of its own political state, is a crucial part of nationalist projects. This process of linguistic nationalism calls for the compilation of modern encyclopedia-like dictionaries and grammar books, all of which seek to consolidate the standardization of a national language (Anderson 2006; Gellner 2008; Weber 1976). As such, dictionaries not only provide a useful database for both etymological study and tracing the itineraries of words, they also reflect various ideological struggles and sometimes capture their consequences within their pages, despite their neutral appearance as reference books immune to political contentions.

The study on regional connectivity—in this case, East Asian lexical connectivity—has the potential to free Vietnamese studies as a field not only from the straightjacket of nationalist politics. This is particularly timely and necessary in evaluating the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, which is always complicated and has been very tense of late due to the rise of China and resulting geopolitical challenges.² While scholars in the field of area studies with postcolonial sensitivity work very hard to both avoid nationalistic bias and honor local agency in their research, it is no easy task to accomplish. In particular, when a non-native scholar seeks to highlight local agency, he or she faces the danger of falling victim to the nationalistic bias inherent in their research subjects’ views.³ Focusing instead on regional connectivity helps us to look beyond the recent construct of nation-states and give us a better understanding of how individual countries have shaped and been shaped by their regional context, without losing sight to local agency. In this paper, I investigate

2 In May 2014, for example, Beijing placed a deep sea drilling rig in the disputed waters south of the Paracel Islands, which Vietnam claims to be its Exclusive Economic Zone. China’s aggression prompted a series of anti-Chinese demonstrations in Vietnam as well as violence against factories owned by Chinese, Taiwanese, and Koreans in Southern Vietnam. See Le Thu Huong (2014).

3 When Dutton quoted some modern Vietnamese scholars’ works to assert that colonial Vietnamese intellectuals in the 1920s broke away from the archaic classical Chinese baggage in their perception of *cách mạng* (the Vietnamese translation of revolution), he failed to make it transparent that the scholars he quoted suffer nationalistic bias in that they sought to emphasize Vietnam’s uniqueness from China.

how regional connectivity laid a lexical foundation for Vietnam's transformation from an aristocratic society to a nation-state via the route of its own colonization.

THE SINOGRAPHIC TRANSLATIONAL NETWORK

The Sinographic translational network is closely linked with *wenming*, the organizing principle of the Sinocentric tribute-trade system. *Wenming* was the pillar of Imperial China's foreign policies and East Asia's world order prior to the early twentieth century. Before it was appropriated by Japanese Meiji scholars as a translation of 'civilization' from English, the term *wenming* had existed in East Asia for millennia. Its earliest textual appearance dates back to the *Book of Changes* (*I Ching*), a famous divination book in East Asia and one of China's oldest texts—the earliest available manuscript of which dates between the fourth and second century BC. During the period that the various manuscripts of the *Book of Changes* were compiled, *wen* came to mean 'patterns', *ming* denoted 'illuminated and manifested brilliantly', and the compound word *wenming* referred to the patterns emerging from people's divination about and observation of heaven, earth, and human behaviors. As these patterns and signs grew into China's earliest writing script, *wen* gradually acquired meanings of words, characters, writings, texts, learning, literature, belles-lettres, etc., and took on the aura of sacredness and magic. *Wen* as a writing system was first standardized during the reign of Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇, 259–210 BC), and was tied to state administration, authority, prestige, and Confucian doctrine through the introduction of the civil examination system around the fifth century.

Wenming found its outward expression in Imperial China's tribute-trade system. Established during the Han era in the second century and then matured during the Ming dynasty in the seventeenth century, the Sinocentric tribute-trade system provided the foundation of modern Asia as an interconnected region and conditioned the impact of Western expansion therein (Hamashita 2008). It was a concentrically hierarchical system that linked various polities and societies in Asia with the imperial center in Beijing. *Wenming* was a conceptual framework that dictated how participating members operated and defined their relationships both with China and with each other. For its part, China categorized its neighbors into different groups according to their different levels of *wenming* and asked them to send tributes to show their submission to the imperial center, that is, the apex of *wenming*. In return, the tribute missionaries would be rewarded with luxurious gifts and granted privileges to participate in lucrative trades with China, especially in the coastal areas (Fairbank 1968; Hamashita 2008).

As the tribute-trade system developed, the idea of *wenming* spread throughout East Asia and was accepted by learned men as the rightful principle for ordering the Sinographic cosmopolitan in which they resided (Kelley 2005; Palais 1995). Here, I follow Sheldon Pollock in defining the cosmopolitan as a mode of literary, intellectual, and political communication that is 'unbounded and potentially infinite in extension' as opposed to the vernacular one that is limited by national borders (Pollock 2000:593–594). In this paper, I use this term to describe the region defined by this mode. Chinese ideographs, along with Confucian doctrines and other classical teachings, were introduced to China's neighbors and became the official writing script for Vietnam, Ryukyu, Korea, and Japan—the four

‘first-degree barbarians’ in China’s *wenming* hierarchy.⁴ The installation of the imperial examination system further strengthened the position of Chinese script in Korea and Vietnam, but its influence was probably the strongest in the latter, whose native *chữ Nôm* (字喃) script failed to become a standardized system that could compete with Chinese characters before it became completely obsolete in the early twentieth century. Japan and Korea, in contrast, developed their own standardized *kana* (かな) scripts and *hangul* (한글) alphabet in the eighth and fourteenth centuries, respectively.

The Sinographic translational network was both the cultural, intellectual, and linguistic manifestation of and the successor to the Sinographic *wenming* cosmopolitan, which began to crumble under Western assault when China was humiliated by the British Empire in the two Opium Wars (1839–42, 1856–60). The Sinographic *wenming* cosmopolitan was established on the unequal relationship between the civilized center and its neighbors and margins whose distances from the center determined their level of civility, with Chinese ideographs as the *lingua franca* that allowed learned men to access and cultivate *wenming*. When it dissolved between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Sinographic translational network emerged in its place. The constituting entities of this network included the Sino-centric tribute trade system’s former center and members, who were connected by the shared legacy of Chinese script and classical learning and whose task of transforming into nation-states entailed the replacement of this very legacy with national writing script and vernacular literature. Like the Sinocentric tribute-trade system, the Sinographic translational network was one of the mechanisms that mediated the impact of the Western expansion on East Asia, in this case the cultural and intellectual aspects of the Western impact.

In this emerging network, the relationship between constituting societies was equal, at least theoretically, with Japan as the new nodal point that provided source texts on how to attain enlightenment and civilization for its East Asian neighbors. As it witnessed and was alarmed by China’s ordeal, the Tokugawa government and *samurai* intellectuals wasted no time getting themselves ready for the dual task of familiarizing themselves with the emerging hegemon on the one hand and cultivating an enlightened and civilized (i.e., *bunmei kaika*) Japanese nation on the other. New lexicons were needed to accomplish both tasks, and Japanese thinkers, notably Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉; 1835–1901), an influential thinker fluent in English, re-appropriated quite a few Chinese terms for neologisms to name new things, introduce new ideas, define new social and political relations, and interpret the new world. Among them was *bunmei*, the transliteration of *wenming* that he found suitable for translating civilization. It is worth noting that Fukuzawa Yukichi was influenced by the Scottish theory of ‘stages of the development of civilization’ not the French version (Craig 2009). Although it is difficult to pin down who was the first to adopt the compound word *wenming* to translate civilization and out of what motivations, this choice makes perfect sense, as both words are boundary markers that define civilization through its contrast to barbarous others. We also know that it is through Fukuzawa Yukichi’s influential book *An Outline of the Theory of Civilization* in 1875 that *bunmei* came to be associated with civilization (Craig 2009; Howland 2002).

4 The imperial examination was effective in Korea between 958 and 1894. It was introduced to Vietnam in 1075 and was abolished in 1919.

Sino-Japanese neologisms invented by Japanese scholars in the 1860s and the 1870s began to flood China in the 1890s, the same period that a small yet modernized Japan triumphed over China and Russia, two great empires, in 1895 and 1905, respectively. It is not that the Sino-Japanese neologisms met no rivals as they traveled to China. Some Chinese thinkers, most famously Yen Fu (1854–1921), worked hard to produce a ‘pure’ Chinese translation of the new concepts, and Western missionaries who in previous centuries had done Sino-European translation also had created Chinese loanwords for Western science and technology. Yet neither was able to match the popularity of the Sino-Japanese counterparts (Masini 1993; Liu 1996). These words were quickly absorbed into the Chinese lexicons, as well as the Korean language, when Korea was later colonized by Japan in 1910. From China, these terms then traveled southward to Vietnam, especially by means of the ‘new books’ (*tân thư*)—reformist writings by influential Chinese reform scholars Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929). These books entered Vietnam via the old tribute-trade route, now the Sinographic translational network, and could be found in the bookstores run by Chinese businessmen (Chew 2012; Đào Duy Anh 1989; Đinh Xuân Lâm 1997). The *Duy Tân* reformists, notably the two famous leaders Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940) and Phan Châu Trinh (1872–1926), devoured these books, and the former even became acquainted with Liang Qichao and had him publish and write the preface for his book *History of the Loss of Vietnam* (*Việt Nam Vong Quốc Sử*, 1905) (Phan Bội Châu 1999; Vĩnh Sinh 2009). Both Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were the leaders of the Hundred-Day Reform Movement in 1898, which urged the Qing government to follow the example of Japan to become *wenming kaihua*. Soon after the reform movement was suppressed by the Qing and the two leaders were exiled, Vietnamese learned men, now familiar with the stories of Japan’s and China’s reform efforts thanks to the *new books*, started to pursue *văn minh khai hóa* in the 1900s. It is no accident that the *Duy Tân* leadership concentrated in the Annam area, where the royal house was located and where the tradition of Confucian learning was the strongest among the three *pays* (Brocheux and Hémery 2009).

DICTIONARIES AND DIFFERENCE: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DICTIONARY ENTRIES OF *BUNMEI*, *WENMING*, *VĂN MINH*, AND *CIVILISATION*

I argue that the idea of civilization, although a French concept and a policy for French imperialist overseas expansion, first entered France’s most important colony in Asia between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not via France but through a Sinographic translational network. This network not only linked central and northern parts of colonial Vietnam to China through old tribute routes, but also extended Vietnam’s connections to Japan and the East Asian intellectual world. In this section, I outline the lexical itinerary of the idea of civilization via the Sinographic translational network, and rule out two possible competing routes. The first wove together French routes of Catholicism and international law, with the former present in Vietnam as early as the sixteenth century and the latter forced on Vietnam in the late nineteenth century. The second competing route was direct from Japan. During the pre-colonial period, there were some transactions between the two kingdoms, but when Japan rose to replace China as the new hegemon of Asia, direct routes between Japan and Vietnam likely developed and built on the old Sino-Vietnamese tribute routes. In what follows, I examine dictionary entries of Japanese *bunmei*, Chinese *wenming*, Vietnamese *văn minh*, and French *civilisation* in

order to chart and compare the French and the Sinographic routes, two possible routes for neologisms' journeys. I will also demonstrate that as the word began to travel more frequently via the French routes in the 1930s, its meaning began to change. Second, I will utilize the *quốc ngữ* collections housed by Vietnam's National Library (Thư viện Quốc gia Việt Nam) to further rule out the possibilities that the word civilization entered colonial Vietnam via Japan and international law.

I focus here on five groups of dictionaries, including eleven of the earliest modern dictionaries of the Japanese language, the Chinese language, the Vietnamese language as compiled by French scholars, the Vietnamese language as compiled by Vietnamese scholars of different political ideologies, as well as the French language as compiled by French and Vietnamese scholars. The first group is comprised of Japan's first modern dictionary *The Sea of Words* (*Genkai*; 言海) by Ōtsuki Fumihiko (大槻文彦; 1847–1928), a famous lexicographer, linguistic, and historian who is known for his contribution to modern Japanese dictionaries and grammars.⁵ The compilation started in 1875 and was single-handedly completed by Ōtsuki Fumihiko in 1891. The second group contains China's first modern encyclopedic dictionary of *The Origin of Words* (*Ciyuan*; 辭源). Started in 1908 in Shanghai with Lu Erkuei (陸爾達) as the editor-in-chief, the compilation of *The Origins of Words* took seven years to finish.⁶

The earliest Vietnamese dictionaries were produced by European Catholic missionaries, who had been producing missionary texts such as local translations of catechist texts, dictionaries, and grammar books—texts that are considered critical by postcolonial scholars for imposing Western ways of thinking on non-Western societies (Bolton and Hutton 2000; Liu 1995; Peterson 1999). The most notable missionary to make a lasting contribution to the *quốc ngữ* script is Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660), the French Jesuit missionary credited with the use of the Latin alphabet to transcribe Vietnamese sounds. The first Vietnamese dictionary in history resulted from his efforts to acquire the local language in order to win over local converts: he compiled a Portuguese-Latin-Vietnamese dictionary and had it published in Rome in 1651. This trilingual dictionary was the first of a lexical tradition that lasted for more than two centuries, that is, a tradition of French Catholic missionaries who were also Sinologists in charge of inventing, preserving, and systemizing the *quốc ngữ* script in the midst of the predominance of the Chinese characters in pre-colonial Vietnam's officialdom and intellectual field.

Unfortunately, very little scholarly attention has been paid to this body of missionary bilingual or trilingual dictionaries in Vietnam, and some have likely been lost; other than de Rhodes' seminal work, we do not know much about the succeeding Euro-Vietnamese dictionaries. What we know is that in 1838, Bishop Jean Louis Taberd published a critically acclaimed *Vietnamese-Latin Dictionary* (*Dictionairum Anamitico-Latinum*) in Serampore, India. Though significant, de Rhodes' dictionary is not discussed in this study, as he compiled the work well before the time when the modern idea of civilization became

5 The electronic version of *The Sea of Words* is available at <http://www.babelbible.net/genkai/genkai.cgi>

6 In the same year, the competitor of the publisher for *The Origin of Words* published *The Great Chinese Dictionary* (*Zhong hua da zi dian*; 中華大字典), which is an attempt to modernize the famous voluminous *Kang Xi Dictionary* in 1715, with prefaces from famous thinkers and translators. Nevertheless, since *The Great Chinese Dictionary* does not concern itself with terms relating to social sciences and humanities (Yang 2000), I only include *The Origin of Words* for this paper.

popular in Europe in the eighteenth century. For this study, from the French missionary dictionaries, I chose Taberd's *Vietnamese-Latin Dictionary*, J.F.M. Génibrel's *Vietnamese-French Dictionary* (*Dictionnaire Annamite-Français*) (1898, Saigon), Vietnamese linguist Jean Bonet's *Vietnamese-French Dictionary* (*Official Language and Vulgar Language* (大南國音字彙合解大法國音/*Dictionnaire Annamite-Français (Langue officielle et langue vulgaire)*) (1900, Paris), missionary A.L. Pilon's *Small Vietnamese-French Lexicon* (*Petit Lexique Annamite-Français*) (1908, Hong Kong), as well as Victor Barbier's *Vietnamese-French Dictionary* (*Dictionnaire Annamite-Français*, 1922, Hanoi). Barbier's dictionary was likely the last Vietnamese dictionary compiled by French scholars. Judging from the prefaces, all the authors of these five dictionaries had their French colleagues as their intended audience, and their purpose was to improve their knowledge about *quốc ngữ* script so to facilitate their evangelization.

The French monopoly over Vietnamese dictionaries was first broken by Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của (1834–1907), an erudite scholar well-versed in both Confucianism and Catholicism. In 1895, Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của published *Dictionary of Vietnamese* (*Dictionnaire Annamite/大南國音字彙/Đại Nam Quốc Âm Tự Vi*) in Saigon, the first Vietnamese-Vietnamese dictionary.⁷ Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký (1837–1898), Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của's contemporary and another erudite Confucian-Catholic scholar, published *Small French-Vietnamese Dictionary* (*Petit Dictionnaire français-annamite*) in 1887 in Saigon, the first French-Vietnamese volume edited by a local scholar (Nguyễn Đình Hoà 1991). Neither Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của nor Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký wrote preface to their works, but it is safe to surmise that both compiled their dictionaries in service of the colonial regime.

After the publication of Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của's dictionary, it was not until the early 1930s that other Vietnamese scholars picked up the time-consuming and labor-intensive editorial job. In 1931, *Vietnamese Dictionary* (*Việt Nam tự điển/越南字典*) was edited and published in Hanoi by the Association for Intellectual and Moral Formation in Vietnam, or 'Hội Khai Trí Tiến Đức' in Vietnamese and 'AFIMA' in French, which stands for 'Association pour la Formation Intellectuelle et Morale des Annamites', an elite club founded in 1919 and sponsored by the Indochinese Sûreté (Tài 1992). The most comprehensive dictionary for the Vietnamese language yet, it was published during the time when intellectuals were debating the question of whether or not pre-colonial Vietnam had ever produced 'national learning' and 'national literature' of which the descendants of 'dragon and fairy' could take pride. Despite some criticism, it was highly praised by intellectuals. A year later, *Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary* (*Hán Việt từ điển/漢越字典/Dictionnaire Sino-Annamite*) was published in Huế the royal capital. It is characterized by its attention to vocabularies in the fields of philosophy, social sciences, and humanities. The compiler was Đào Duy Anh (1904–1988), a leftist Marxist historian and linguist from Annam who was close to the leaders of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement. In his autobiography, Đào Duy Anh states that he had felt the pain of not having a descent dictionary while researching the national language, and by publishing a dictionary he hoped to address the issue faced by other intellectuals who, like him, wanted to perfect the

7 Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của's name is rendered more commonly as Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của. The minor differences between the two spellings result from the linguistic evolution of *quốc ngữ* over the past century. Here I follow the version that appears in the dictionary.

quốc ngữ script (Đào Duy Anh 1989). After *Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary*, Đào Duy Anh again single-handedly compiled *Franco-Vietnamese Dictionary* (*Pháp Việt tự điển*) and had it published in 1936.

THE ITINERARY OF CIVILIZATION: THE JOURNEY OF A WORD

Of the eleven dictionaries I consulted, all have entries of *wen*, *bun*, and *văn*. Nevertheless, a closer look at the compound word entries related to *wen*, *bun*, and *văn* shows that the neologism *văn minh* is absent from the Vietnamese dictionaries that are deeply rooted in French and Franco-Vietnamese traditions, namely, the dictionaries compiled by Taberd (1838), Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của (1895), Génibrel (1898), Bonet (1900), Pilon (1908), and Barbier (1922). It is not that Vietnamese Catholics were not aware of either the French concept of *civilisation* or the East Asian word of *văn minh* advocated by the *Duy Tân* movement. In fact it is reported that many Vietnamese Catholic clergymen were involved in the movement and as a result arrested by the French (Keith 2012). Moreover, the word *civilisation* and its affiliated words had already appeared in Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký's *Small French-Vietnamese Dictionary* in 1887. But as Table 1 below indicates, Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký did not use the new Sino-Vietnamese translation that entered Vietnam from both China and Japan via the route of Sinographic translational network. Rather, he relied on the old Sino-Vietnamese translation that had existed in Vietnam prior to the arrival of the French. Apparently, the French route, started by Catholic missionaries, bridged by multilingual Vietnamese intellectuals such as Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký and Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của, and completed by French colonial regime, did not provide an appealing path for the word of *civilisation* to travel to colonial Vietnam.

Table 1: Entries of *civilisation* and affiliated words in Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký's *Small French-Vietnamese Dictionary* in 1887

French words	The author's translation	English translation of the author's translation	Modern Sino-Vietnamese translation
Civilisation (p. 206)*	Giáo hoá; sự làm cho thuần thực; phép giáo hoá	<i>Jiao hua</i> ; to make (someone) well-trained; the way to <i>jiao hua</i> .†	văn minh
Égalité (p. 305)	Sự bằng nhau; sự đều (đồng đều) với nhau	Equal share; the state of being equal with each other	bình đẳng
État (p. 327)	Nước, nhà nước	Kingdom, realm, reign	quốc gia
Indépendant, e (p. 403)	Không dính ăn dính thua với..., ngoài..., thông thả, tự chủ, <i>Caractère indépendant</i> , tính tự cường	Being irrelevant or not related to, beyond, leisurely, autonomy. The character of <i>indépendant</i> : the state of self-strengthening	độc lập
Peuple (p. 524)	Dân, dân sự; con dân, thứ dân	People, civil, commoners	quốc dân (the people of a state)
Société (p. 626)	Hội (phường, công ti), bọn, phe; sự chung nhau; sự làm bạn	Club/accompany/association (group/guild, company), group/gang, side/camp/part; commonality, acquaintance	Xã hội, quần
Souveraineté (p. 634)	Quần vua, phép vua	The power/right of kings	Chủ quyền (national sovereignty)

* Trương Vĩnh Ký's example of the verb *civiliser* shows how the French Catholic Church was entangled in the *mission civilisatrice*. It reads 'Christianity civilized barbarians' or 'Le christainisme a civilize les barbares' in French and 'đạo (Thiên Chúa) Đức Chúa Giê Giu đã làm cho dân mọi rợ ra thuần thực' in Vietnamese.

† *Jiao hua* (教化) is a Sinocentric concept that means to educate and enlighten people with classical learning.

It is logical that Taberd did not enter *văn minh*, as Japanese scholars had not yet appropriated *wenming* as a translation of civilization when his dictionary was published, even though *văn minh* had been an integral part of the Vietnamese lexicon and the monarchs had long prided themselves as the rulers of a *văn minh* kingdom in the Sinographic *wenming* cosmopolitan (Nguyễn Công Hãng [1718] 2010). Taberd likely had extensive experiences dealing with the Nguyễn court, as he entered quite a few titles for traditional civilian officials at the provincial level (*praefectorum litteratorum dignitates*) as examples of compound words of *văn* (pp. 581–582). By the time that Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của's dictionary was published in Cochinchina, *bunmei* had been coined, the Meiji Renovation had achieved amazing success, and Chinese reformists had begun writing essays appealing for reform. It is possible that since Huỳnh Tịnh Paulus Của was based in Cochinchina, he was not exposed to the *new books*, as the Chinese reformist writings were available mainly in Central and Northern Vietnam that a few years later inspired intellectuals all over Vietnam to pursue *văn minh khai hoá*. Bonet's dictionary was concerned with the etymological relationship between Chinese and Vietnamese languages (pp. i–iii). Interestingly, Pilon was likely the first compiler to create an entry of 'Văn Lang' (文郎), allegedly the first kingdom of the Vietnamese people ruled by the mysterious Hùng Kings, a decade before renowned French Sinologist Henri Maspéro contested the exactitude of the founding myths of the Hùng Kings. The earliest elaborate discussion about Văn Lang appears in *The Complete Annals of The Great Việt Kingdom* (大越史記全書; *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư*) in 1479, which was itself an effort to Confucianize Vietnamese historiography (Wolters 2000). Trần Trọng Kim (1883–1953), one of the editors of the AFIMA's *Vietnamese Dictionary* in 1931 and an influential historian during the colonial time, argued in his seminal work *The Summary History of Vietnam* (*Việt Nam sử lược*) that Văn Lang and Hùng Kings were no more than tales and legends that historians appropriated to legitimize the rule of the Việt kingdom (Trần Trọng Kim [1919] 1928). But the ruling Vietnamese Communist party has been promoting and elevating Văn Lang and Hùng Kings in its official historiography of late, and in 2007 the government decreed that the Hùng Kings' Festival at the Hùng Temple ('Giỗ Tổ Hùng Vương' or 'lễ hội đền Hùng') on the 10th day of the third lunar month was to be a new national holiday (Kelley 2012; Nguyễn Thị Diệu 2013).

The silence about *văn minh* on the part of Pilon and Barbier was intriguing, especially that of Barbier, as his dictionary came out as late as 1922. It is safe to assume that both were aware of *văn minh*, not to mention that the idea of *civilisation* had come to define first the French nation during the French Revolution (Bell 2003; Stovall and Van Den Abbeele 2003) and then the French overseas expansion during the Third Republic era (Conklin 1997). By 1798, when the French Revolution was drawing to an end, the fifth edition of *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* already had an entry for 'civilisation' defined as 'the action to civilize or a state that is civilized', with the verb 'civilizer' explained as 'to render a criminal matter civil; to reduce a criminal cause by a common and civil procedure. It also signifies rendering civil, honest, and sociable; to polish customs.'⁸ In 1877, Émile Littré

8 The entry can be found in the ARTFL (American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language) Project, a joint collaboration between the University of Chicago and the French government. It contains a digitized dictionary database. The link for dictionary searching is <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois>, last accessed on 11 January 2016.

further specified that *civilisation* referred to the social lives of European nations.⁹ Since neither Pilon nor Barbier specified the reason why certain words were chosen while others were excluded, we are left with no data to explain why they both decided to shy away from *văn minh*, though it might not be exaggerating to suggest that both found this popular word in the early twentieth century too politically sensitive or even perverse to include in their dictionaries. This ambivalence toward civilization for fear of its double-edged effects was also evident in the textbooks used in Franco-Vietnamese schools (Kelley 1975).

On the other hand, Ōtsuki Fumihiko in Japan, Lu Erkuei and his colleagues in China, the AFIMA, and the anti-colonial Marxist Đào Duy Anh all provided entries for *bunmei*, *wenming*, and *văn minh*. When juxtaposing the Japanese and Chinese dictionaries with the *Duy Tân* publications, a connection made possible by the Sinographic translational network emerges between *bunmei*, *wenming*, and *văn minh*. To begin, after Fukuzawa Yukichi's *An Outline of the Theory of Civilization* was published in 1875, the word civilization was again entered in the third edition of *A Japanese and English Dictionary; with an English and Japanese Index* in 1886 by American Christian missionary James Curtis Hepburn, whose first edition in 1876 is the first Japanese-English dictionary in history (Howland 2002:38).¹⁰ When Ōtsuki Fumihiko published *The Sea of Words* in 1891, the first modern East Asian language dictionary and very likely also the first such dictionaries that includes the entry of civilization, it appears that civilization as *the* universal standard for sovereignty recognition was already fixed and accepted by Japanese scholars. In fact, Ōtsuki Fumihiko even omitted from his entry the original Chinese meanings of *wenming*, namely, the manifestation of patterns. Also missing from the entry are the historical associations between *wenming* and the Sino-centric world order and the fact that *bunmei* was adopted by some Japanese emperors for their reign titles. Rather than indulging his readers in East Asia's splendid past of *wenming* and *bunmei*, Ōtsuki Fumihiko painted a hopeful and forward-looking picture of linear, universal civilizational progress, a picture that was made popular by Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Outline*. In his entry, Ōtsuki Fumihiko described *bunmei* as the apogee of human progress, the resulting perfection of which could supposedly be discerned in the areas of literature/humanities, knowledge, education, politics, and customs. He ended his entry by providing an example phrase *bunmei kaika*, or enlightened civilization, with *kaika* read almost like a synonym of *bunmei*: 'being open and adaptive, things and human knowledge evolve with time and progress as desired' (p. 164).

More than two decades later, China, during the Republican Era, published its first modern Chinese dictionary *The Origin of Words*. Its entry of *wenming* consists of three definitions. The origin of *wenming* found in *Book of Changes* was retained in the first definition, and in the third one it included an example of *wenming* being used to designate the regnal year by an obscure empire during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), Imperial China's most cosmopolitan era. Although the insertions of the references to *Book of Changes* and a regnal title gave *The Origins of Words* a historical aura, again, the

9 See <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois>, last accessed on 11 January 2016.

10 Also see the Meiji University's library website for an introduction to the rare collection of James Curtis Hepburn's dictionaries at <http://mgda.meijigakuin.ac.jp/mgda/waei/kaisetsu/kakuhun.html#column06>, last accessed on 11 January 2016.

associations between *wenming* and the tribute-trade system were absent. This absence attests to the fact that the old world order that located China as the center of *wenming* had been replaced by a new international world order of civilization in which China was no more than a secondary player. Before the editors proceeded to give the second definition of *wenming*, they inserted the English word ‘civilization’ to inform the reader of its newly added meaning, which was clearly influenced by Fukuzawa Yukichi’s adoption of popular ‘theory of stages of civilization’ from Scotland. Two keywords stood out for the modern definition of *wenming*: one was enlightenment/*kai hoa*, which more often than not was interchangeable with civilization, and the other was savagism, defined as the opposite of civilization.

Table 2: The definitions of *bunmei*, *wenming*, and *văn minh* in earliest modern East Asian dictionaries

Year	Title of Dictionary	Original Entry	English Translation
1891	<i>The Sea of Words</i> (p. 905)	ぶんめい。文明。文學、智識、教化、善ク開ケテ、政治甚ダ正シク。風俗最モ善キフ。「--開化」	ぶんめい。The state in which literature/humanities, * knowledge, and education are progressing and becoming more open, politics evolving toward the right way, and custom the most perfect. (example) ‘Civilization and Enlightenment.’
1915	<i>The Origins of Words</i> (Chinese) (p. 192)	文明。(一) 易乾文言：「見龍在田，天下文明」。疏：「陽氣在田，始生萬物。故天下有文章而光明也。」(二) (Civilization) 人類社會開化之狀態，用為形容詞，與野蠻相對待。(三) 唐睿宗年號(六八四)	1. <i>Book of Changes</i> , ‘Qian’ hexagram: ‘When one sees the dragon appearing in the field, it is the time when <i>wenming</i> prevails All-under-Heaven (<i>tianxia</i>).’ [†] Commentary: ‘Only when the <i>yang</i> energy exists in the field can creation begin. Therefore when there is literature, All-under-Heaven is illuminated.’ 2. (Civilization) the state in which human societies have become enlightened. It is an adjective, and is the opposite of savagism. 3. The regnal title of Emperor Rueli Zong (684) during the Tang Dynasty.
1931	<i>Vietnamese Dictionary</i> (p. 626)	Văn minh. Văn và sáng sủa, nói về xã hội hay thời đại đã khai hóa tới một trình độ cao.	Văn minh. Being refined and luminous, it refers to a society or an epoch that has achieved a high level of enlightenment.
1932	<i>Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary</i> (p. 537)	Cái tia của đạo đức, phát hiện ra ở nơi chính trị, pháp luật, học thuật, điển chương v. v., gọi là văn minh. Phản đối với dã man.	The radiance of morality. When it manifests in the areas of politics, laws, learnings, institutions, etc., it is called civilization. It is the opposite of savagism.

* In classical Japanese and Vietnamese, 文學 (ぶんがく/bungaku in Japanese, *văn học* in Vietnamese) denotes both literature and humanities.

[†] Here I consulted missionary James Legge’s translation in 1889, which can be found online at <http://www.biroco.com/yijing/Legge1899.pdf>, accessed on 27 September 2014.

Vietnam’s first modern dictionary entries of civilization as *văn minh* appeared in AFIMA’s *Vietnamese Dictionary* in 1931 and Đào Duy Anh’s *Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary* in 1932. AFIMA’s entry paid particular attention to the behavioral aspect of civilization elucidated by Norbert Elias (2000) by denoting *văn minh* as the state of being refined

and luminous. It also seemed to suggest that the physical and intellectual manifestation of civilization could be achieved only when a society or an era 'has enlightened to a high level' (đã khai hoá tới một trình độ cao). Đào Duy Anh's entry, on the other hand, had a strong moral tone. In addition to contrasting *văn minh* with *dã man* (i.e., savagism), he defined *văn minh* as 'the radiance of morality' that manifests in politics, law, learning, institutions, and so on. The different emphases between the two earliest modern Vietnamese dictionaries edited by Vietnamese scholars reflected and coincided with the different political ideologies to which the two authors subscribed. As a conservative elite club, AFIMA was an avid moral crusader that often resorted to traditional moralism as a means of social control, and its members did not hesitate to express their feelings of embarrassment when they saw their fellow Vietnamese behaving in ways that lacked the characteristics of soft manners and courteousness.¹¹ By contrast, without explicitly criticizing the French civilizing mission as an immoral enterprise, Đào Duy Anh intended to emphasize that the authentic ideal of civilization should be a moral one. His views toward *văn minh* became clearer when he argued that 'social aid had become common practice in civilized countries' in his *A Summary of Vietnamese Cultural History* in 1938 (quoted from Nguyen-Marshall, 2008:1).

Given the fact that the AFIMA and Đào Duy Anh published their dictionaries in the early 1930s, it would be unreasonable to assert that their explanations of *văn minh* were solely based on the Sino-Japanese definitions that entered Vietnam via the Sinographic translational network between the 1900s and the 1910s, especially because the 1920s was a decade that witnessed the large-scale construction of a Franco-Vietnamese schooling system designed to facilitate Franco-Vietnamese collaboration (Kelley 1982). My goal here is not to deny the critical role that the French colonial regime played in shaping the colonial Vietnamese perception of civilization and enlightenment. Instead, what I wish to emphasize is that before the 1920s, the idea of civilization had already entered colonial Vietnam via the route of the Sinographic translational network, and was thus already present as a conceptual map and lexical compass for Vietnamese intellectuals to navigate and understand the West. The entries of *văn minh* in the dictionaries compiled by the AFIMA and Đào Duy Anh in the early 1930s indicate that the connotations of *văn minh* as a form of Western supremacy and the universal standard for granting sovereignty had already been established in colonial Vietnam.

One might argue that the French lexical influence entered colonial Vietnam via the route of international law, one of the primary means used by the West to force the 'uncivilized' non-West to comply with Europe's rules of the game (Gong 1984). Nevertheless, France did not use the pretext of *civilisation* to force upon Vietnam the unequal treaties that eventually turned Vietnam into a French colony.¹² Also, Vietnam did not seem to have an opportunity to negotiate the terms of treaties with France, as China and Japan did with various Western powers (Liu 2006). American lawyer and jurist Henry Wheaton's (1785–1848) renowned work *Elements of International Law* (1836) was

11 The most notable examples come from journalist and writer Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882–1936), who ran a column 'Observing our shortcomings' (Xét tật mình) in *The Journal of Đại Nam* (*Đại Nam đang cổ tòng báo*) in 1907 and in *Indochina Review* (*Đông Dương tạp chí*) in 1913.

12 The content of the Treaty of Huế (Traité de Hué) can be found at [http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Trait%C3%A9_de_Hu%C3%A9_\(1884\)](http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Trait%C3%A9_de_Hu%C3%A9_(1884)), last accessed on 11 January 2016.

translated into Chinese in 1865 as *Wan guo cong fa* (萬國公法) by American missionaries in China and was soon introduced to Japan.¹³ Yet, no evidence indicating the existence of any Vietnamese translations of treaties of international law by either Wheaton or other scholars during the colonial time can be found in Vietnam's National Library (Thư viện quốc gia Việt Nam), which houses the world's largest *quốc ngữ* publications in both pre-colonial and post-colonial eras.¹⁴ Some early Vietnamese discussions about international law appeared in 1930 (Đỗ Nam 1930–1931).

In theory, colonial Vietnamese intellectuals might have wanted to borrow directly from Japan in order to comprehend the West, without relying on the mediation of the Chinese sources. During the colonial period, to be sure, a narrative that condemned the imperial examination as the culprit responsible for Vietnam's failure to catch up with human progress became dominant. In this narrative, Japan—where the civil exam was in effect only briefly—served as the contrasting case that consolidated the proposed causal relationship between the exam system and the lack of evolution in Vietnam, China, and Korea.¹⁵ This narrative emerged as early as the 1900s, evidenced in the *Duy Tân* activists' advocacy of the Eastern Study Movement (*Phong trào Đông Du*), which encouraged Vietnamese youths to go to Japan to study the secrets to modernity. Nevertheless, words affiliated with civilization, namely, the concepts of state, society, nationalism, sovereignty, and people,¹⁶ which are rendered in Sino-Vietnamese as *quốc gia* (Chinese: *guojia*), *xã hội/quần* (Chinese: *shehue/chun*), *chủ nghĩa quốc gia* (Chinese: *guojia zuyi*), *chủ quyền* (Chinese: *zuquan*), and *quốc dân/nhân dân* (Chinese: *guomin/renmin*), appeared neither in dictionaries where the word civilization was absent nor in Ōtsuki Fumihiko's *The Seas of Word* in 1891. It is difficult to determine whether these words entered Vietnam from China or Japan through the mediation of China. What we do know is that the usage and meanings of these affiliated neologisms were still unstable in Japan prior to the twentieth century and, therefore, were not included in Ōtsuki Fumihiko's dictionary in the 1880s. We can also be sure that through the *new books*, the *Duy Tân* intellectuals could find essays on those affiliated concepts expounded by reformists Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei.

The hypothesis that the routes between Vietnam and Japan had already been established as part of the Sinographic translational network and that the idea of civilization and its affiliated words traveled to colonial Vietnam directly from Japan can be falsified by

13 The digitized version of Henry Wheaton's original *Elements of International Law* and its Chinese and Japanese translations can be found in HathiTrust Digital Library. The original version is at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044103157699;view=iup;seq=43>; the Chinese version: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=keio.10811740099;view=iup;seq=8>; the Japanese version: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=keio.10811568105;view=iup;seq=7>;

14 I did a search on the website of National Library of Vietnam at <http://103.23.144.229/opac/> using the keywords *công pháp quốc tế/quốc tế công pháp*, *công pháp vạn quốc/vạn quốc công pháp*, *hiến pháp vạn quốc/vạn quốc hiến pháp*, as well as *hiến pháp quốc tế / quốc tế hiến pháp*, and the earliest work under the similar title is Trịnh Quốc Quang's *The Elementary Knowledge of International Law (Quốc tế công pháp thường thức)* in 1946.

15 This narrative has been dominant since the colonial period to today, and the examples are plenty. See Confucian scholar and doctoral degree holder Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1931) and Thượng Chi (Phạm Quỳnh, 1931).

16 Literally, *chủ nghĩa quốc gia* means statism; nationalism should be *chủ nghĩa dân tộc*. But colonial Vietnamese intellectuals conflated *quốc gia* with nation-state.

two pieces of evidence. First, there were two ways of translating ‘society’ in colonial Vietnam, namely, *xã hội* and *quần*. While *xã hội* was rendered from *shehui* (社會), which originally was the Sino-Japanese *shakai* (社会; しやかい), *quần* nevertheless was, in fact, coined not by Japanese Meiji scholars but by Yen Fu when he translated Herbert Spencer’s *The Principles of Sociology*, the seminal work in 1897 that popularized the Darwinist ideology of the survival of the fittest ‘in search of wealth and power’ for China (Schwatz 1964). An ardent Chinese nationalist, Yen Fu took great pains to invent Chinese translation for the West, hoping to provide a more appealing alternative to the Sino-Japanese loanwords (Liu 1995; Schwatz 1964). Unfortunately, his translational efforts failed: except the terms *chun* (群) for society and *chunxue* (群學) for sociology, which are rendered as *quần* and *quần học* respectively in Vietnamese, his translations were forgotten. In post-colonial Vietnam as in China, *quần* and *chun* have become obsolete translations for society, yet the entry of *quần học* as an alternative translation of sociology still appears in Đào Duy Anh’s *Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary* in 1932 (p. 161). It is worth noting that the term sociology is missing from both Pilon’s dictionary in 1908 and Barbier’s in 1922, since sociology as a discipline was established between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries by French thinker Émile Durkheim (1858–1907), the father of sociology.

Second, a survey of the existing online catalog of colonial *quốc ngữ* publications available in the National Library of Vietnam reveals that of the 88 *quốc ngữ* publishers active during the colonial period, none published books translated from Japanese.¹⁷ This does not mean that no Japanese works were ever introduced to colonial Vietnam, but if they were, they likely entered Vietnam in Chinese translation via the Sinographic translational network. The Japanese writers who were introduced into colonial Vietnam arrived via the French sources in the early 1940s, the decade after the first generation of intellectuals who received Franco-Vietnamese education in the 1920s were mature enough to rebel against their Sino-Vietnamese predecessors’ reliance on the Chinese sources and translations that entered Vietnam via the Sinographic translational network in the 1930s. The spearhead of this youthful rebellion was the Self-Strengthening Literary Group (*Tự lực văn đoàn*) founded in 1932, which encouraged publication of original *quốc ngữ* literary works and the translation of important Western literature (Hà Minh Đức 2007). This group also founded the Association for Enlightenment (*Hội Ánh sáng*) in 1937. Among their translations were the works of Yamata Kikou and Nagai Kafu; the former was based in Paris and wrote in French in the 1920s, while the latter’s works were translated into French also in the 1920s. Nagai Kafu’s work appears in Vietnam in 1943, together with that of French novelist Alphonse Daudet and French socialist writer Eugene Dabit in a selected book *Remote Hometown* (*Hương xa*) translated by Khái Hưng, one of the founding members of the Self-Strengthening group.¹⁷ Yamata Kikou’s work appears a year later in another edited book titled *Strange Flowers: Short Stories and Memoirs* (*Hoa lạ: đoản biên và ký ức*) by anonymous translators with works by female American Nobel prize winner in literature Pearl S. Buck, French writer Andre Corthis, and Chinese female socialist writer Bai Wei (appears in Vietnamese transliteration Bạch Vi). Both books were published by Đời Nay, the Self-Strengthening group’s publishing house active between 1934 and 1945.

¹⁷ See appendix for the list of the publishers.

Between the 1900s and the 1910s, when the idea of civilization had made its way from Scotland to Japan and emerged as *văn minh* in colonial Vietnam by way of the Sinographic translational network, it was primarily an idea of a collective nature. As researchers note, when Japanese Meiji scholars were coining and interpreting neologisms, they tried to dilute the liberal nature of those terms by injecting into them an emphasis on one's responsibilities toward society, nation, and the state (Howland 2002). This worry was shared by Chinese reformist thinkers, whose writings subsequently directed colonial Vietnamese intellectuals in the 1900s and the 1910s to focus more on the collective rather than the individualistic aspects of the idea of civilization and its affiliated words. Since the 1920s, the younger generation of colonial Vietnamese intellectuals grew more familiar with the French *civilisation*, and *văn minh* began to acquire individualistic connotations. Rather than state, society, nationalism, sovereignty, and people, *văn minh* was increasingly connected with words such as individual, individualism, ego, happiness, and so on, indicating the advance of 'transformative rearticulations of individual agency and the proper relations between self and society' since the 1920s (Bradley 2004:66). Still, these neologisms were coined in Sino-Vietnamese manners as *cá nhân*, *chủ nghĩa cá nhân*, *bản ngã*, and *khoái lạc*, indicating that the conceptual framework for understanding and coming to terms with the West had been firmly established on the foundation of the loanwords that traveled from Japan and China via the Sinographic translational network.

CONCLUSION

Joining emerging scholarship on the global circulation of words, this paper argues that a regional perspective is necessary for the fields of postcolonial studies and Vietnamese studies. In order to avoid the trap of nationalist politics and transcend the familiar dichotomy between the West and the local, this study focuses on the hitherto neglected mechanism of regional connectivity and examines how the Sinographic translational network mediated the enterprise of modern knowledge-building in colonial Vietnam. It seeks to answer the question of why civilization—an idea that was widely acknowledged as 'very French' by Europeans in the period of Enlightenment and inspired Japan, China, and Vietnam to adopt reform measures between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries—was translated into Sino-Vietnamese *văn minh* rather than something closer to French *civilisation* in colonial Vietnam, France's most important colony in Asia. I argue that the word civilization and its affiliated words traveled to colonial Vietnam between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries via the Sinographic translational network, which emerged out of the ruins of the Sino-centric tribute-trade system that had regulated the East Asian world order and connected colonial Vietnam to both China and Japan.

To support my argument, I compare the French and East Asian routes traveled by the term civilization by studying some of the earliest modern dictionaries of Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese, and French. I show that, first, between the 1900s and the 1910s, the word entered colonial Vietnam via the Sinographic translational network. Neither the French Catholic missionary texts nor international laws seemed to provide an appealing route for this word to travel. As a result, like their Japanese and Chinese counterparts, when colonial Vietnamese intellectuals in the 1900s and the 1910s promulgated *văn minh*, they tended to give it a collective tone and pair it with words such as state, society, nation, people, sovereignty, and so on. By contrast, since the 1920s, when the Franco-

Vietnamese schools were established and the French routes grew more appealing, the younger generation of intellectuals, whose Franco-Vietnamese education enabled them to directly access French sources, tended to associate the idea of *văn minh* with individualism and individual accomplishments. Second, during the colonial period, the Sinographic translational network operating in Vietnam overlapped with the old Sinocentric tribute trade system. While the lexical routes between China and Japan were established after the Meiji Renovation, as many Chinese intellectuals and students flooded Japan in pursuit of the latest techniques of modernization, the direct lexical connections between colonial Vietnam and Japan did not exist, in spite of the Eastern Study Movement in the 1900s, in which some hundred Vietnamese youths stowed away to Japan for study. Colonial Vietnam's cultural links to Japan were established indirectly via the medium of Chinese sources.

APPENDIX

Alphabetically, the 88 *quốc ngữ* publishers are as follows:

Á Châu ^a	Huyền Nga	Nam Cường	Taupin
Auteur	Huỳnh Văn Tài	Nam Đồng thư xã	Tân Á
Âu tây tư tưởng ^b	Hương Giang thư quán	Nam Kỳ thư quán ^c	Tân dân
Bảo tồn	Hương hát thư điểm	Nam Mỹ	Tân Đông Á
Center	Hương Sơn	Nam Phong tùng thư	Tân Việt
Cổ kim thư xã	J. Viết	Nữ lưu thư quán	Tập sách Dân chúng
Công lực	Kim Đức Giang	Nghiêm hàm	Tiếng Dân
Cường học thư xã	Kim Khuê	Ngo Tu Ha	Tư tưởng mới
D'Extreme-Orient	Khuê Văn	Nguyễn Văn Của ^d	Thạch Thị Mai
Dịch thuật tùng thư	Lê Cường	Nguyễn Văn Viết	Thực nghiệp
Đại đồng thư xã	Lê Chi	Nhật Nam	Trần Trọng Cảnh
Đắc Lập	Lê Mai ấn quán	Phạm Văn Thịnh	Trúc Khê thư cục
Đỗ Phương Quế	Lê Văn Phúc	Phú Văn Đường	Trung Bắc tân văn
Đông Kinh ấn quán ^e	Lê Văn Tân	Phương Châu	Vạn quyền thư lâu
Đông Pháp	Long Quang	Phương Đông	Văn nghệ tùng thư
Đông Tây	Mạc Đình Tư	Phương Đông	Văn tưởng
Đồng Xuân thư quán	Mai Linh	Quan Hải tùng thư	Vị Giang văn khố
Đời nay	Mai Lĩnh	Quốc dân thư xã	Viễn Đông
Đuốc Tuệ	Mìn Sang	Quốc gia tùng thư	Việt dân
Đức Lưu Phương	Minh Đức	Schneider	Vĩnh & Thành
Giác quán	Mỹ Khoan	Tam Kỳ	Vĩnh Hưng Long
Hàn Thuyên	Mỹ Thắng	Tân Đà thư điểm	Xưa nay

^a Possibly also known as 'Asiatic' or 'Impr. Asiatic'.

^b Possibly also known as 'Âu tây'.

^c Possibly also known as 'Impr. Saigonnaise'.

^d Possibly also known as 'Impr. de l'Union Nguyễn Văn Của' or 'Impr. de l'Union'.

^e Possibly also known as 'Tonkinoise'.

The above list is by no means comprehensive, not only because French rule stretched from 1868 to 1945 and many publishers emerged during this long time period, but also because the list is, to my knowledge, the first anyone has attempted to compile regarding colonial Vietnamese literature. Furthermore, there are complications, such as the possibility that owners of publishing companies could have changed the names of their companies, most likely out of fear of colonial censorship or the desire for a fresh start for their business after a former closure. In addition, a publisher might have both Vietnamese and French names, and without a close study it is difficult to determine, for instance, if 'Á Châu' and 'Asiatic' Vietnamese and French words for 'Asia' respectively, are the same publisher.

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