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Social Communication and Colonial Archaeology in Vietnam

Haydon Leslie Cherry

Department of History
National University of Singapore
g0202281@nus.edu.sg

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Asia Research Institute

National University of Singapore

Shaw Foundation Building, Block AS7, Level 4

5 Arts Link, Singapore 117570

Tel: (65) 6874 3810

Fax: (65) 6779 1428

Website: www.ari.nus.edu.sg

Email: arisec@nus.edu.sg

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Social Communication and Colonial Archaeology in Vietnam¹

Haydon Leslie Cherry

This paper is about archaeology and social communication in colonial Vietnam.² Its main focus is on the constitution of the Vietnamese bronze age in French colonial scholarship. The paper does several things. First, it provides a brief sketch of the early history of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, the institution chiefly responsible for archaeological scholarship in Vietnam during the colonial period. Second, it traces the major arguments that were offered by scholars of the École and their correspondents for the origins of the bronze age in Vietnam. Third, it considers these latter two discussions within the context of social communication and the emergence of a public sphere in the colony. Finally, it attempts to make *en passant*, a small contribution to the field of colonial discourse theory.

Social Communication and the Constitution of Colonial Knowledge: An Approach

It is possible to view the expansion of European empires in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as one aspect of the early stages of the development of global society. European conquest and settlement linked previously loosely connected cultures and civilisations through networks of coercion and communication.³ In a recent article, C.A. Bayly has suggested two complementary ways in which these links and networks might be studied.⁴ The first approach Bayly discusses stresses intercontinental exchange where the technical expansion of communications is crucial. Bayly suggests that Ian Steele's *The English Atlantic* embodies such an approach.⁵ The second approach Bayly discusses is concerned with the ways in which groups in different societies receive and transform information and representations. It considers the ways in which representations relate to structures of power and analyses the properties of the "information order" of different communities

¹ This is a revised version of a paper first given at the Inaugural Graduate Student Symposium at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 16-17 October 2003. It is based, in part, on research at the National Library of Việt Nam, 20 August – 13 September 2003. I am grateful to Dr. Mark Frost, Professor Momoki Shiro, Dr. Michael Montesano, Professor Anthony Reid and Mr. Trần Kỳ Phương for comments on my original presentation. Mr. Erik Holmberg read and commented upon the penultimate draft. I alone bare responsibility for the propositions affirmed within.

² During the colonial period Việt Nam was governed as three territories: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, in this paper referred to individually and severally however as Việt Nam. The inhabitants of those territories are here called Vietnamese. Before independence, Cambodia, Laos, Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina collectively constituted French Indochina.

³ A.G. Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, (London, 2002).

⁴ C.A. Bayly, "Informing Empire and Nation: Publicity, Propaganda and the Press 1880-1920." In *Information Media and Power Through the Ages*, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin, 2001), 180.

⁵ Ian Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675-1740: A Study in Communications and Community*, (New York, 1986).

as they evolve over time.⁶ Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is perhaps the best example of such a study.⁷

At the same time, Denys Lombard has written of the need for scholars to “transcend the heaviness of regional, colonial and ... nationalistic histories which have strongly partitioned off the historical space,” in South-east Asia.⁸ He suggests that this can be done through “reconstructing the contacts,” and “taking into account the networks” that linked parts of South-east Asia together.⁹ Lombard urges scholars to pay attention to three major networks: Chinese, Muslim and Christian.¹⁰ However, he makes no mention of the networks and contacts established during the colonial period, which linked different parts of South-east Asia to one another, and to the world. This paper hopes to take a small step in this direction by tracing the ways in which archaeological knowledge in Vietnam was constituted, contested and disseminated from multiple sites, both within and outside of the colony.

The École Française d'Extrême-Orient

The first dedicated scientific exploration of Indochina was undertaken by Henri Mouhot (1826-1861). Mouhot left London in April 1858 but died in Laos in November 1861. The posthumous publication of his journal in 1864 brought images of Angkor Wat to a European audience.¹¹ In 1865, the Société des Études Indochinoises was formed in Sàigòn to co-ordinate the study of France's newly acquired territories in the Far East.¹² However, it was a German linguist who began the first comparative grammar of the Cham language, and it was a Dutchman who began the first translation of Khmer temple inscriptions.¹³ If the economic opportunities of colonisation stimulated rivalry, so, too, did the opportunities for scholarship. At least in part “to remedy this humiliating situation,” the Mission Archéologique d'Indochine was established in Sàigòn in 1898.¹⁴ It was founded under the initiative of three members of the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres – the India specialists Auguste Barth and Émile Senart and the linguist Michel Bréal – with the support of the governor-general of French Indochina, Paul Doumer (1857-1932).¹⁵ A year later its name was changed to the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, after the prestigious French schools in Rome, Athens and Cairo. The first director of the École was Louis Finot (1864-1935).¹⁶ In 1902 it was transferred to Hà Nội along with the capital of the Indochinese Federation.

⁶ Bayly borrows the idea of an “information order” from Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring and the Urban Regional Process* (Oxford, 1989).

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, 1991)

⁸ Denys Lombard. “Networks and Synchronisms in South-east Asian History,” *Journal of South-east Asian Studies* 26, 1 (March 1995), 10-11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹¹ Henri Mouhot, *Travels in Siam, Cambodia and Laos 1858-1860*, (Singapore, 1989).

¹² Bernard Groslier, *Indochina*, trans. James Hogarth, (Cleveland, 1966), 157.

¹³ “L'École Française d'Extrême-Orient depuis son origine jusqu'en 1920,” *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 21 (1922), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Groslier, *op. cit.*, 157.

¹⁶ Henri Parmentier, *Guide au musée de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, (Hà Nội, 1915), 2.

A museum for the study and display of Indochinese antiquities was very early established by the École. However, a typhoon destroyed the original building in 1903, resulting in many objects being sent to the Louvre. In 1910 the museum was reopened in a new building, which was the adapted residence of the early French mission to Tonkin, before the military campaign of 1883.¹⁷ Each room of the museum honoured a French military hero, government official, or scholar who had served in Indochina.¹⁸ The museum's collection soon exceeded the space available and it was demolished in 1925 to make way for a new building designed by Ernest Hébrard, which was finished in 1932.¹⁹ The new museum was named the Musée Louis Finot who had recently retired from the École to take a chair in Indochinese history and philology at the College de France.

Once established, the École quickly amassed a vast collection of artefacts. Official excavations collected sculptures and bas reliefs from abandoned temple sites. It is unclear just how the École amassed the thousands of stone, wood, iron, bronze, porcelain, and paper objects that came to constitute its collection.²⁰ The École was not simply involved in the loot and plunder of the material cultures of Indochina however. It restored the Temple of Literature and the One Pillar Pagoda in Hanoi along with Nguyễn Gia Long's palace at Huế and various other pagodas.²¹ In Cambodia, scholars from the École and Cambodian workers restored the temples of Angkor; in David Chandler's view, probably France's most valuable legacy to Cambodia.²² In addition to archaeological artefacts, the École also accumulated an extensive library. In 1941 the collection comprised 14,500 European works in 39,500 volumes; 4,000 Chinese works in 27,000 volumes; and approximately 5,000 Annamese Vietnamese works copied from the Imperial Library in Huế. The library also held 2,000 Japanese works and 2,000 Lao and Cambodian manuscripts.²³

The Archaeology of the Bronze Age

From the 1920s, archaeologists at the École began to pay close, but by no means exclusive, attention to artefacts from the South-east Asian bronze age. Western scholars had long known of such artefacts. As early as 1705 the naturalist G.E. Rumpf mentioned the now famous drum, Bulan Pejeng, or Moon of Pejeng from Central Bali.²⁴ In 1902, Franz Heger published *Alte Metallstrommeln aus Südostasien* [Old Metal Drums in South-east Asia] in which he described 144 bronze drums from South-east Asia and Southern China and proposed a four-fold classification system, known as Heger Types I-IV which continues to be in use.²⁵

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*. (Chicago, 1991), 193-199.

²⁰ The literature on colonialism and museums is vast. This paper has been influenced by "The Transformation of Objects into Artifacts, Antiquities, and Art in Nineteenth-Century India," by Bernard Cohn in *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. (Princeton, 1996), 76-105.

²¹ Groslier, *op. cit.*, p.191.

²² David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 2nd ed., (Chiang Mai, 1996), 151.

²³ *Les Civilisations de l'Indochine et l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*. (Hà Nội, 1941), 11-12.

²⁴ Ian Glover and Belinda Syme, "The Bronze Age in South-east Asia: Its Recognition, Dating and Recent Research," *Man and Environment XVIII* (2), 1993, 41.

²⁵ Nguyễn Duy Hinh, "Bronze Drums in Vietnam," *Vietnam Forum* 9 (1987): 1-2

Heger first presented his analysis in a paper entitled, “On the Old Metal Drums of South-east Asia” at the First International Congress of Far Eastern Studies, held in Hà Nội from Wednesday 3 December to Monday 8 December 1902.²⁶ The Congress was part of the colonial exhibition of agricultural and industrial products held that year.²⁷ It was attended by diverse participants, from Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ceylon, China, the United States of America, Holland, British India, the Netherlands East Indies, France, Italy, French Indochina, Japan, Madagascar, Norway and Siam. Participants at the Congress travelled to Hà Nội by first class passage at the expense of the colonial government on one of the French maritime lines. Their spouses and those attending but not participating also travelled at a substantially reduced rate.²⁸ Papers were given not only by such European luminaries as Paul Pelliot, Henri Parmentier, Franz Heger and Marcel Mauss, but also by Indochinese scholars: Nguyễn Khắc Huê, Trần Bản Hanh and Son Diêp. The paper by Nguyễn Khắc Huê, delivered by M. Chéon, was a translation and interpretation of an inscription from the tomb of the notable nineteenth-century scholar, Võ Trường Toản.²⁹ Other Asians, including Shams-ul-Ulama Jivanji Jamshedi Modi, Lala Bhaij Nath, and the Japanese delegation of N. Okamoto, J. Takakusu, B. Nanjio and R. Fujishima also gave papers. Gyan Prakash would seem to be fairly clearly mistaken when he wrote of colonial discourse that “Orientalism was a European enterprise from the beginning. The scholars were European; and the [orientals] appeared as inert objects of knowledge.”³⁰ During the colonial period, non-European scholars and intellectuals were actively involved in the production of knowledge about Asian peoples and pasts.

The recovery of the Vietnamese past was not the sole preserve of colonial scholars, but was also engaged in by members of the French educated indigenous intelligentsia.³¹ Nguyễn Văn Tố wrote a number of articles on representations of humans, animals and plants in traditional Vietnamese art and on the Vietnamese practice of changing names. Trần Văn Giáp produced important articles on the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, on the steles at the Temple of Literature in Hà Nội and on the life of a mandarin of the sixteenth century on the basis of the discovery of a funerary stele. Đỗ Xuân Hôp wrote articles of paleontological significance. All were members of the *École*.

It would be a mistake to view Vietnamese scholarship in the colonial period as a “derivative discourse”.³² The mistake rests on the premise that French metropolitan

²⁶ Franz Heger, “Sur d’anciens tambours de metal du Sud-est Asie,” In *Premier Congrès International des études d’Extrême-Orient Hanoi (1902). Compte Rendu Analytique des Séances*, (Hà Nội, 1903), 89-91.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 119-121.

³⁰ Prakash, Gyan. “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32(2), April 1990, 384.

³¹ For an extensive bibliography of colonial era scholarship, including the work of indigenous scholars, see Louis Bezacier, *Archéologie au Viêt-Nam d’après les Travaux de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient*, (Saïgòn, 1959), 27-50. Bezacier’s bibliography is also useful for its indication of the wide range of investigations the French considered “archaeological”. It is clear that for the French, “archaeology” extended to the usual auxiliary disciplines such as paleography and numismatics, but also to linguistics and ethnography.

³² Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Delhi, 1986).

archaeology was fully conceptually formed and that Vietnamese scholars were thus merely imitators, in style, if not in substance of French thought that was being exported to the colony. In fact, French archaeological thought was far from fully formed in the first part of the twentieth century. Additionally, this thought in no way constituted a unified or uncontradictory whole.³³ Archaeological thought in both the colony and the metropole ought to be thought of as developing simultaneously in a wider regional and global context, mutually informing one another, though not necessarily equally.

If Vietnamese, and indeed other Asians were involved in the production of scholarship about their pasts, it is however the case that colonial scholars certainly did not believe that the Vietnamese had been involved in the production of the ancient bronze drums found in Tonkin. In 1924, a fisherman discovered a number of bronze articles at Đông-sơn village on the Ma River, in the province of Thanh-hóa. He sold the collection to a French customs officer, Emile Pajot (1873-1929). Pajot was a former ship's cook and circus artist who, despite his dubious qualifications, began excavations at Đông-sơn in 1925 on behalf of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*.³⁴ In 1929 Victor Goloubew (1879-1945) published Pajot's findings in the article, "L'âge du Bronze au Tonkin et Dans le Nord-Annam," in the *Bulletin* of the *École*.³⁵ This was the first comprehensive treatment of the new discoveries in Indochina. Goloubew dated the Đông-sơn drums, of Heger Type I, to either the first century C.E. or the first century B.C.E., and argued that they were of Chinese origin. The drums were thus not of local provenance.

Goloubew reiterated these arguments in a paper entitled "On the Origin and Diffusion of the Metal Drums," in 1932, at the First Congress of Prehistorians of the Far East, which was held in Hà Nội.³⁶ He also engaged with the work of Dutch scholars of the Netherlands East Indies, explaining that the bronze age of the latter was the result of technological diffusion through Indochina. This Congress ran from 26 January 1932 to 31 January 1932 and was attended by delegates from Japan, Siam, Hong Kong, British Malaya and the Straits Settlements, the Netherlands East Indies, the Philippines and French Indochina.

The Second Congress of Prehistorians of the Far East, was held in Manila in 1935, but the proceedings were never published.³⁷ In 1938, the Third Congress was held in Singapore from 24 January to 30 January, under the auspices of the Government of the Straits Settlements, at the Raffles Museum.³⁸ Delegates attended representing the governments of Hong Kong, the Netherlands East Indies, French

³³ For further discussion of French metropolitan archaeology see Alain Schnapp, "French Archaeology: Between National Identity and Cultural Identity" in Margarita Díaz-Andreu and Timothy Chapman eds., *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe* (London, 1996); Françoise Audouze and André Leroi-Gourhan, 'France: A Continental Insularity,' *World Archaeology* 13(2):170-189; Michael Dietler, "'Our Ancestors the Gauls': Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe," *American Anthropologist* 96(3):584-605.

³⁴ Glover and Syme, *op. cit.*, 43.

³⁵ Victor Goloubew. "L'âge du bronze au Tonkin et dans le Nord Annam." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 29 (1929): 1-46.

³⁶ Victor Goloubew, "Sur l'Origine et la Diffusion des Tambours Métalliques." In *Praehistorica Asiae Orientalis: Premier Congrès des Préhistoriens d'Extrême-Orient, Hanoi 1932*, (Hà Nội, 1932), 137-150.

³⁷ P.I. Boriskovskii, "Vietnam in Primeval Times I," *Soviet Anthropology and Archaeology* 1966, 25, 29.

³⁸ F.N. Chasen and M.W.F. Tweedie eds., *Proceedings of the Third Congress of Prehistorians of the Far East. Singapore 24th January – 30th January 1938* (Singapore, 1940).

Indochina, the Philippines, the Malay States, and the Straits Settlements. Owing to the interruption of World War II and subsequent anti-colonial struggles in South-east Asia, the Fourth Far Eastern Prehistory Congress was not held in Manila until 1953.³⁹ What is important about these conferences is that the details of the bronze age in Indochina continued to be constituted in this colonial ecumene and that, although small in number, South-east Asians were taking part, if not necessarily as equals.

Apparently to quell criticisms that the French investigations into the bronze age at Đông-sơn were merely a hunt for treasure, a Swedish archaeologist, Olov Janse (1895-1985), was appointed to head the excavations.⁴⁰ He worked there from 1934 to 1939 under the auspices of the French Department of National Education, the Museums of Paris, the Government-General of Indochina, and the École Française d'Extrême-Orient. Janse's excavations unearthed a number of artefacts, including bronze weapons, drums, personal ornaments and containers. The results of his investigations in Indochina were published in three successive volumes between 1947 and 1958.⁴¹ Janse argued that the Đông-sơn culture was the result of Chinese influences in the third or fourth century B.C.E. Before that time Đông-sơn had been inhabited by a "stone-age" "Indonesian" or proto-Malayan people.⁴² "Chinese pioneers" or possibly "sinicised Thais" brought the use of tools and weapons made of bronze and iron and other Chinese cultural elements.⁴³ Janse suggested that, as a consequence of Chinese conquest, sinicised "Indonesians" or "proto-Annamites" [Vietnamese] may have migrated south, bringing "elements of a relatively high civilisation with them."⁴⁴

In 1942, Bernhard Karlgren (1889-1978), the Swedish sinologist, published "The Date of the Early Đông-sơn Culture," in the *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*. For Karlgren too, the Đông-sơn culture was fundamentally Chinese. Bernhard Karlgren was the director of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, and a pioneer in the establishment of Swedish sinology. The China Research Committee of the Swedish National Museum established the museum in 1926 and it opened its doors to the public in 1929.⁴⁵ Karlgren was familiar with the scholarship on Đông-sơn through the *Bulletin* of the École. First published in 1902, the *Bulletin* was the principal means by which French scholarship from and about the Indochinese territories was disseminated. It formed an important part of the library collections of universities, museums and learned societies throughout the world. Karlgren argued that the Đông-sơn bronze artefacts were related to the pre-Han central Chinese bronze culture of Huai, and dated them to the 4th–3rd century B.C.E.⁴⁶ Karlgren was in specific disagreement with the published conclusions of Robert von Heine-Geldern (1885-1968). Heine-Geldern argued that on the basis of similarities between weapons, tools, ornaments and decorative designs of

³⁹ *Abstracts of Papers Presented to the Eighth Pacific Science Conference and the Fourth Far Eastern Prehistory Congress, November 16-18, 1953*. (Quezon City, 1953).

⁴⁰ Groslier, *op. cit.*, p.160.

⁴¹ Olov Janse, *Archaeological Research in Indo-China*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1941 and 1947; Bruges, 1958).

⁴² Janse, *op. cit.* vol. 3, p.91.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Torbjörn Lodén. "Swedish China Studies on the Threshold of the 21st Century." Paper presented at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 28 September 1998.

⁴⁶ Bernhard Karlgren, "The Date of the Early Đông-sơn Culture," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* XIV (1942): 24-25.

the European bronze age culture of Hallstatt and Đông-sơn that the artistic motifs of the latter were brought to Vietnam by invaders bearing the culture of the former during the 8th century B.C.E.⁴⁷

Robert von Heine-Geldern was a member of the European *Kulturkreise*, or Culture Circle school of ethnography in Vienna, which had been inspired by Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904).⁴⁸ Members of the school held that formerly large complexes of cultural traits had lost their former geographical unity and were now dispersed throughout the world.⁴⁹ Ratzel maintained that possible migration or other contact phenomena ought to be considered first before similarities in different cultures be attributed to independent invention. On the basis of a study of similarities in the cross section of the bow shaft, the material and fastening of the bowstring, and the feathering of the arrow, Ratzel concluded that the bow and arrow of Indonesia and West Africa were related.⁵⁰

Heine-Geldern was at the University of Vienna at the same time as Father Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954), who founded the journal *Anthropos*, and developed his own theory of *Kulturkreise*.⁵¹ With Fritz Graebner (1877-1934), Schmidt developed two basic rules for identifying affinities and chronologies between cultures.⁵² The first rule states that similarities between two cultural elements, which do not automatically arise out of the nature, material, or purpose of the traits or objects, should be interpreted as resulting from diffusion, regardless of the distance that separates the two instances.⁵³ The second rule states that the probability of an historical relationship existing between two cultural artefacts increases as the number of additional items showing similarities increase.⁵⁴

It is clear from the accounts summarised here that scholars of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, and the European scholars who synthesised their work, saw the Vietnamese bronze age, as exemplified by the Đông-sơn culture, as the result of either migration or cultural diffusion from outside of Việt Nam, rather than local genesis. Colonial scholarship was made possible through the circulation of texts such as the *Bulletin* of the École, but also, it should be mentioned, through the expatriation and circulation of the artefacts themselves.⁵⁵ The historian of archaeology, Bruce Trigger, has written that “colonialist archaeology, wherever practiced, served to denigrate native societies and peoples by trying to demonstrate that they had been

⁴⁷ Heine-Geldern's conclusions were published in a number of articles in various journals, and principally in German. Perhaps his most controversial theory of diffusion and migration in South-east Asia is to be found in “Urheimat und früheste Wanderungen der Austronesier.” *Anthropos* 27 (1932): 543-916. Unable to read German, I have had to rely on the statement of his views in: Robert von Heine Geldern, ‘Prehistoric Research in the Netherlands Indies’ in *Science and Scientists in the Netherlands Indies*, Pieter Honig and Franz Verdoorn eds., (New York, 1945), 147.

⁴⁸ The most important English language statement of Ratzel's approach is his *The History of Mankind*, trans. A.J. Butler, (New York, 1896).

⁴⁹ Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. (New York, 1968), 373.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 384

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ South-east Asian bronzes formed parts of a number of European collections, notably in Stockholm and Vienna, which Karlgren and Heine-Geldern both had access to respectively. Regrettably, it has not been possible to trace the circulation of these artefacts, or their influence on scholarship for the purposes of writing this paper.

static in prehistoric times and lacked the initiative to develop on their own.”⁵⁶ This view is too categorical. It fails to take into account the specific textual relationships between scholarly works and the intellectual backgrounds of those who produced them. Moreover, it was not the case that diffusion necessarily involved the movement of traits from a superior Europe to an inferior Africa or Asia. As mentioned above, Friedrich Ratzel believed that aspects of Indonesian culture were derived from West Africa. Moreover, the English anatomist Grafton Eliot Smith (1871-1937) believed that all of the world’s culture had their origins in Egypt.⁵⁷

If various scholars had a less than charitable view of the local origins of the Vietnamese bronze age, Henri Maspéro (1883-1945), the French sinologist and member of the *École*, had distinct doubts about accounts of the pre-Chinese periods in Vietnamese texts – the period that as coincidence would have it corresponded chronologically with the dating of the bronze age finds. In 1918 he published “Études d’histoire d’Annam: IV, Le royaume de Văn-lang,” in the *École’s Bulletin*. The earliest Vietnamese chronicles maintained that a king styled Hùng founded the kingdom of Văn-lang, the first Việt polity, and that his descendants ruled it for a further seventeen generations. Maspéro argued however that *Hùng* in Vietnamese texts was a scribal error for *Lạc* and that the name *Văn-lang* was an error for the old Chinese name *Yeh-lang*, an ancient kingdom in Guizhou.⁵⁸ He concluded that there had never been any Hùng kings and they had never ruled a kingdom called Văn-lang.⁵⁹ This critical view of Vietnamese historical texts ought not however be viewed as derogatory or as a simple example of French racism or the denial of Vietnamese autonomy. By the early nineteenth century, the Vietnamese scholars who produced *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục* [Imperially Ordered Mirror and Commentary on the History of the Việt] and the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Tiền Biên* [Writing of the History of Great Viet] had discounted as myths many of the episodes set during the period of the Hùng kings in the fifteenth century *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* [Comprehensive Writing of the History of Great Viet].⁶⁰ French textual scholarship needs to be viewed, at least in part, as a descendant of this critical genealogy.

Archaeology and the Emerging Colonial Public Sphere

In the post-independence period Maspéro’s conclusions have been thoroughly contested by Vietnamese scholars. However, they were not unchallenged by intellectuals while under colonial rule. In 1941, its first year of publication, the magazine *Tri Tân* [To Know the New] carried the article “Lạc Vương, chứ không phải Hùng Vương” [The Lạc king is not the Hùng king] by Nguyễn Văn Tố (1889-1947), in which the latter, himself a member of the *École Française d’Extrême-Orient*, vigorously disputed the conclusions of Maspéro, arguing for the independent

⁵⁶ Bruce Trigger, “Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist,” *Man*, 19 (1984): 363.

⁵⁷ Glyn Daniel, *The Idea of Prehistory*, (London, 1962), 82-91.

⁵⁸ Henri Maspéro, “Études d’histoire d’Annam. IV. Le Royaume de Văn-lang,” *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 18(1918), 1-10.

⁵⁹ Maspéro’s assessment is not entirely implausible since the Chinese character for *Hùng* and the character for *Lạc* differ only on the left hand side. A scribal error is at least possible.

⁶⁰ Yamamoto Tatsuro. “Myths Explaining the Vicissitudes of Political Power in Ancient Viet Nam.” *Acta Asiatica (Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture, Tokyo)* 18 (1970), 70-94.

existence of the Hùng king(s).⁶¹ The first edition of *Tri Tân* appeared on 3 June 1941.⁶² It was published weekly until 1945 and sold for 12 piasters.⁶³ Each issue contained 24 pages, of which approximately 1500-2000 copies were printed.⁶⁴ It carried general articles on Vietnamese history, culture, language, and literature. A wide range of contributors wrote for the magazine, from the conservative pedagogue Dương Quảng Hàm to the young university radical Nguyễn Đình Thi. Other contributors included Hoa Bằng, Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, Đào Duy Anh, Hoàng Thiếu Sơn, Lê Thuộc and Phan Văn Hùm.⁶⁵ As mentioned above, Nguyễn Văn Tố and Trần Văn Giáp, another regular contributor, were both employed by the École Française d'Extrême-Orient. For these two, *Tri Tân* was a vehicle for the dissemination and contestation in *quốc ngữ* (lit. 'national writing', here meaning 'romanised Vietnamese') of some of the scholarly historical findings of the École from the previous decade.⁶⁶

Phạm Quỳnh (1892-1945), the editor of *Nam Phong* [Southern Wind] also worked at the École Française d'Extrême-Orient. A member of a prestigious family, Phạm Quỳnh lost his parents before the age of ten and was sent by his grandmother to the School of Interpreters. Four years later, having learned French, *quốc ngữ* and some Chinese, and with a Certificate of Primary Education, he went to work at the École Française d'Extrême-Orient. In 1913, while still working there, he joined the staff of the *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* [Indochina Journal] edited by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936). In 1915, Phạm Quỳnh was made the editor of *Nam Phong* by Louis Marty. Published in three parts, French, Chinese and *quốc ngữ*, *Nam Phong* championed the use of the latter and was responsible for the early promotion and dissemination of Western scholarship and indigenous literature in romanised form.⁶⁷ *Nam Phong* carried articles on a range of subjects including politics, economics, geography, history and even archaeology. In 1928 it published an anonymous article explaining the recent discoveries on the prehistory of Tonkin by Henri Mansuy and Madeline Colani.⁶⁸ In addition to discussing the stone age excavations by Colani and Mansuy in the province of Hòa Bình, it mentioned in connection to their work the discoveries by Van Stein Callenfels in Penang and Robert von Heine-Geldern's theory about the distribution of stone-age technology from the Ganges in the east to Formosa in the west and from the Himalayas in the north to Malacca in the south. In 1934 *Nam Phong* carried an article on the history and archaeology of Annam and Champa publicising the recent work there by the scholars of the École.⁶⁹ What is important to the discussion here is the fact that archaeological scholarship was expounded and circulated by and among the Vietnamese and did not remain the sole preserve of

⁶¹ Ứng Hoè Nguyễn Văn Tố, "Lạc Vương, chứ không phải Hùng Vương," *Tri Tân*, *Tạp chí Văn hóa ra Hàng Tuần*. Số 9, (1 August 1941), 1-2.

⁶² David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945*, (Berkeley, 1981), 279.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, n.88.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ The preceding discussion of Phạm Quỳnh is based on Tai, *op. cit.*, 46-49; and Marr, *op. cit.*, 153-154.

⁶⁸ Anonyme, "Les Découvertes Préhistoriques au Tonkin," *Tạp chí Nam Phong*, XXIII, 133 (1928): 28-30.

⁶⁹ Ứng Hoè, "Histoire et Archéologie de l'Annam-Champa: À propos d'un livre récent," *Tạp chí Nam Phong*, XXIV, 201-202 (1934): 33-37. Ứng Hoè was a pseudonym of Nguyễn Văn Tố, see n. 54 above, and also Phạm Thị Ngoạn, "Introduction au Nam Phong (1917-1934)," *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, Nouvelle-Série XLVIII (2-3), 380.

European colonial scholars or elites. It was publicised, explained and contested in a public sphere structured by emergent print capitalism.

While Vietnam has long possessed a literate intellectual class, large numbers of newspapers, magazines, books and other printed works began to circulate on a large scale only in the 1920s.⁷⁰ Evidence suggests that the number of people able to read a *quốc ngữ* newspaper doubled between 1925 and 1945, reaching approximately 10% of the total population.⁷¹ During those two decades, at least thirty million bound publications were printed in Vietnam.⁷² Some Vietnamese newspapers achieved circulation rates of 10,000 copies or more, although most only printed 2,000-3,000 copies.⁷³ A public sphere defined by the transmission of printed knowledge thus developed. Reading newspapers, books, and tracts took people beyond the world of face-to-face contact and linked them to a wider community of readers.⁷⁴

This public sphere reached beyond large city centres through the development of the rail and postal systems. Before the French occupation, waterways were the chief transportation routes. However, by the end of 1939, 3,372 kilometres of railway line connected the territories of Indochina.⁷⁵ Mail, newspapers and books written in *quốc ngữ* circulated by rail throughout Indochina, stimulating the growth and influence of a large public sphere whose members, in the words of David Del Testa, “were literate in the precepts and culture of modernity.”⁷⁶ In 1920 there were 347 post-offices in Indochina.⁷⁷ In 1944, 584,000 items were sent through the 380 post-offices in Indochina, carried chiefly by rail, many of these items books, periodicals and tracts.⁷⁸ Benedict Anderson has written of the role of the museum as a technology of power, established during the colonial period, which went on to engender nationalism. If we consider the museum a metonymy for the production and dissemination of archaeological scholarship, it is clear that in the colonial period archaeological ideas, images and icons dovetailed with the development of print capitalism and the expansion of the public sphere.

⁷⁰ Shawn McHale, “Printing and Power: Vietnamese Debates over Women’s Place in Society, 1918-1934,” in *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*, K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore eds., (Ithaca, New York, 1995), 232-245.

⁷¹ Marr, *op. cit.*, 34.

⁷² Nguyễn Văn Ký, *La Société Vietnamienne face à la Modernité: Le Tonkin de la fin du XIXe siècle à la second guerre mondiale*. (Paris, 1995), 56-57.

⁷³ Marr, *op. cit.*, 46-51.

⁷⁴ Classic statements about the development of the public sphere and the social consequences of printing in Western Europe are to be found in Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, 1989); and Elisabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, 1979).

⁷⁵ Charles Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indochina*. Isabel A. Ward trans. (London, 1944), 94.

⁷⁶ David Del Testa, “‘Imperial Corridor’: Association, Transportation and Power in French Colonial Indochina,” *Science, Technology & Society* 4:2 (1999), 321.

⁷⁷ Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris, Commissariat Général. *Indochine: Documents Officiels*. (Paris, 1931), 62.

⁷⁸ *Annuaire Statistique de l’Indochine, Onzieme Volume, 1943-1946*. (Sàigòn, 1948), 131.

The Beginnings of Post-Independence Archaeology

In June of 1954, one month after the final surrender of the French at Điện Biên Phủ, Vietnamese scholars began to assess critically the findings of colonial archaeological scholarship in the new journal *Tập san Nghiên cứu Văn Sử Địa* [The Journal of Literary, Historical and Geographical Research], published by the Ban Nghiên cứu Lịch sử, Địa lý, Văn học [Committee for Research in History, Literature and Geography]. The Committee had been formally established by a decree issued by the Central Committee of the *Đảng Lao động Việt Nam* – the Vietnamese Labour Party.⁷⁹ There were three separate groups within the Committee, one for each of the disciplinary divisions. *Tập san Nghiên cứu Văn Sử Địa* appeared every month or every other month until 1959, when the committee was reorganised to form the Viện Sử Học [Institute of History], which began to publish *Tập san Nghiên cứu Lịch sử* [The Journal of Historical Research].⁸⁰ Archaeological research was published in the journals of the Committee and the Institute until 1969, when *Tạp chí Khảo cổ học* [The Journal of Archaeology] appeared, produced by the Viện Khảo cổ học [Institute of Archaeology], which had been formed the previous year.⁸¹ Archaeological scholarship during the colonial period had been generated from multiple sites and in multiple contexts. Its critical assessment and appropriation would be one of the major tasks of scholars in the post-independence period.

Post-independence archaeologists in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam inherited a body of scholarship and a collection of artefacts that required critical attention. According to colonial scholarship, the Hùng kings and their kingdom of Văn-lang did not exist; these words were attributed to scribal errors.⁸² The bronze age material culture that corresponded to the same time period was not Vietnamese, but the product of Chinese or European influence. Post-independence archaeologists denied both of these propositions, and argued their contraries: the Hùng kings and their kingdom of Văn-lang *did* exist and these names were *not* based upon error, but upon an independent oral tradition.⁸³ The Đông-sơn material culture was *not* the product of Chinese or European influence, but the result of local genius.⁸⁴ These facts would later form the keystone of the post-independence narrative of Vietnamese history.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Contrary to convention, “Đảng Lao động” is translated here as “Labour Party”, rather than “Workers’ Party” since *lao động* refers to labour rather than workers (*công nhân*).

⁸⁰ “Kỷ niệm năm thứ 20 quyết định của Trung ương Đảng thành lập Ban Nghiên cứu Lịch sử, Địa lý, Văn học,” *Tập san Nghiên cứu Lịch Sử* 152 (October 1973):1-4.

⁸¹ Hà Văn Tấn, “30 năm Viện Khảo cổ học,” *Tạp chí Khảo Cổ Học* (September 1998), pp.3-7, and Hà Văn Tấn, “Tạp chí Khảo cổ học tròn 30 tuổi,” *Tạp chí Khảo Cổ Học* (December 1999): 3-4.

⁸² Maspero, *op. cit.*

⁸³ Trần Quốc Vượng. “Về danh hiệu ‘Hùng Vương.’” In *Hùng Vương Dựng Nước*. Tập 3, edited by Ủy ban khoa học xã hội, 353-355. Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1973.

⁸⁴ Đào Duy Anh. “Văn hóa Đông Sơn hay văn hóa Lạc Việt,” *Tập san Văn Sử Địa* 1 (June 1954): 14-29.

⁸⁵ For a more complete discussion of this and related points, see Patricia Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past*. (Durham and London, 2002), 147-157; and particularly relating to archaeology, see Haydon L. Cherry, *Excavating the Foundations of Identity: Archaeology and Nationalism in Vietnam*. Unpublished B.A.(Hons) thesis. South-east Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore, 2002.

Conclusion

The most important insight of Edward Said's *Orientalism* is that “orientalism” was a system of circulation.⁸⁶ The establishment of European empires enabled not only the movement of objects and people, commodities and colonists, but also, print, texts and ideas. This paper has been concerned with archaeology and archaeological ideas. Rather than focusing on the rhetorical construction or ideological features of archaeological texts, it has attempted to indicate some of the contacts that allowed the transmission or circulation of ideas and the communicative contexts in which those ideas were produced. Scholarship in the colonial period was not the sole preserve of European scholars. Nor was the work of indigenous scholars derivative of thought exported from the metropole. Rather, archaeological thought in both the metropole and the colony was being worked out in a global context. Contributors from diverse backgrounds, both within and outside of the French empire, were involved in the constitution of knowledge about the Vietnamese past. It is a mistake to think of colonial scholarship as homogenous or undifferentiated. Within Vietnam, archaeological knowledge was not confined to European scholars or elites, but was circulated in an emergent public sphere through print, carried by mail and rail, informing colony, empire and nation. A more complex and complete investigation of the issues of communication and the transmission of information may restore a sense of both historical context and historical change to imperial and colonial history.

⁸⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York, 1979). Tony Ballantyne makes this point forcefully in *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire*. (Basingstoke, 2002), 14;

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