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Social Communication and Colonial Archaeology in Vietnam

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This paper is about archaeology and social communication in colonial Vietnam. 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. In a recent article, C.A. Bayly has suggested two complementary ways in which these links and networks might be studied. 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. 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...
as they evolve over time.\textsuperscript{6} Benedict Anderson’s \textit{Imagined Communities} is perhaps the best example of such a study.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{9} Lombard urges scholars to pay attention to three major networks: Chinese, Muslim and Christian.\textsuperscript{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.

\textbf{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.\textsuperscript{11} In 1865, the Société des Études Indochinoises was formed in Saïgon to co-ordinate the study of France’s newly acquired territories in the Far East.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Saïgon in 1898.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{16} In 1902 it was transferred to Hà Nội along with the capital of the Indochinese Federation.

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


\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 14-15.

\textsuperscript{11} Henri Mouhot, \textit{Travels in Siam, Cambodia and Laos 1858-1860}, (Singapore, 1989).


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Groslier, \textit{op. cit.}, 157.

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. Each room of the museum honoured a French military hero, government official, or scholar who had served in Indochina. 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. 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 Collège 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. 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. 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. 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.

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. In 1902, Franz Heger published *Alte Metallstrommeln aus Südestasien* [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.
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 Huệ, Trần Bành Hanh and Sơn Diệp. The paper by Nguyễn Khắc Huệ, 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 Bhaijnath, 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 Hợp 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

27 Ibid., 2.
28 Ibid., 2-3.
29 Ibid., 119-121.
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’Extrème-Orient, (Sàigòn, 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-son 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-son 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’age 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-son 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

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\(^{34}\) Glover and Syme, op. cit., 43.


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 o quell criticisms that the French investigations into the bronze age
at Ðông-son 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'Extrème-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 Ðông-son culture was the result of Chinese
influences in the third or fourth century B.C.E. Before that time Ðông-son 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 Ðông-son Culture,” in the *Bulletin of the Museum of Far
Eastern Antiquities*. For Karlgrén too, the Ðông-son culture was fundamentally
Chinese. Bernhard Karlgrén 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.\(^{45}\) Karlgrén was
familiar with the scholarship on Ðông-son 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. Karlgrén argued that the Ðông-son bronze artefacts were
related to the pre-Han central Chinese bronze culture of Huai, and dated them to the
4\(^{th}\) –3\(^{rd}\) century B.C.E.\(^{46}\) Karlgrén 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*.
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 28 September 1998.
\(^{46}\) Bernhard Karlgrén, “The Date of the Early Ðông-son Culture,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far
the European bronze age culture of Hallstatt and Đông-son that the artistic motifs of the latter were brought to Vietnam by invaders baring 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-son 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

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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).
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."\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Viêt 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.\textsuperscript{58} He concluded that there had never been any Hùng kings and they had never ruled a kingdom called Vănlang.\textsuperscript{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 Tộan Thư [Comprehensive Writing of the History of Great Viet].\textsuperscript{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 Maspero’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 Trí Tấn [To Know the New] carried the article “Lạc Vương, chư 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 Maspero, arguing for the independent

\textsuperscript{59} Maspero’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.
existence of the Hùng king(s). The first edition of Tri Tân appeared on 3 June 1941. It was published weekly until 1945 and sold for 12 piasters. Each issue contained 24 pages, of which approximately 1500-2000 copies were printed. 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 Hâm to the young university radical Nguyễn Đình Thi. Other contributors included Hoa Bằng, Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, Đào Duy Anh, Hoàng Thiệu Sơn, Lê Thúc and Phan Văn Hùng. 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 quộc ngữ (lit. ‘national writing’, here meaning ‘romanised Vietnamese’) of some of the scholarly historical findings of the École from the previous decade.

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, quộc 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 quộc 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. 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. 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. 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

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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.
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.

\(^{71}\) Marr, *op. cit.* , 34.
\(^{73}\) 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 Burgur with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, 1989); and Elisabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, 1979).
\(^{78}\) *Annuaire Statistique de l’Indochine, Onzième Volume, 1943-1946.* (Saigon, 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 Tạp san Nghịen cümle Văn Sử Địa [The Journal of Literary, Historical and Geographical Research], published by the Ban Nghịen cümle 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. Tạp san Nghịen cümle 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 Tạp chí Khảo cổ học [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-son 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

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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).
82 Maspero, op. cit.
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.

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Bibliography


