

I Our Fathers' House

An old family, in the old abode of its fathers, still covered with traditional respect and surrounded by memories dear to it and to the surrounding population, these are the debris of a society that is falling to dust and which soon will leave no traces. Happy are those who can tie together in their thoughts the past, the present, and the future.

Alexis de Tocqueville, letter to his wife, 4 May 1858

LUNAR New Year 1920, in a Cochinchinese village. Bedecked in his mandarin's finery, a magistrate lay sprawled on the floor of his old teacher's front room, being caned like a naughty schoolboy.¹ The day had begun conventionally enough for the hapless magistrate. After offering New Year's wishes to his father, he had walked over to the house of his former teacher to repeat the performance. But his greetings were no sooner over than his teacher scolded him: "Peasants from your prefecture who were passing through here recently complained of maladministration. The duty of every mandarin is to care for the welfare of the people. What have you to say for yourself?" Before he could defend himself, the magistrate was ordered to lie down to receive his punishment.

Even in the precolonial era, which such a scene evokes, it was probably rare for a grown man to be so chastised. It must have been even rarer in Cochinchina, whose newly settled population, concerned with wresting a living from the land, showed only lukewarm enthusiasm for classical learning and Confucian values. But foreign conquest had generated a powerful nativism which led southerners to glorify a past made all the more luminous by the moral quicksands of colonial life.²

Dao Duy Chung, the teacher in this story, was emblematic of this patriotic nativism. He was an immigrant, like many southerners, having come from central Vietnam in the 1880s with the intention of mobilizing local peasants against the French. He soon found his cause hopeless, the French having become well entrenched after nearly twenty years of colonial rule. He stayed on, nevertheless, married into

a local family, and opened an academy. That southerners were no longer allowed to sit for the civil service examinations was apparently no obstacle to its success; Dao Duy Chung continued to groom students in the traditional curriculum and prepare them for the duties of public office. A carefully protected enclave of classical studies and old-fashioned principles, his academy helped maintain the illusion that the past was still alive.³ The same nativistic impulse kept the magistrate from pointing out that his was a purely honorific title; he preferred instead to accept his teacher's chastisement as a way of reaffirming his commitment to the values of earlier days, when mandarins had truly held sway over the lives of common people.

But younger Vietnamese, whose entire life had been spent under colonial rule, could not hide from present unpleasantness by retreating into the past. By the 1920s, colonialism had wrought massive changes in Vietnamese politics, society, and culture, eroding both the cohesiveness of the elite and its faith in the ideology that had sustained it over the centuries. The formerly uniform system of education was replaced between 1917 and 1919 by a hodgepodge of French schools, Franco-Annamite schools, and, in Tonkin and Annam, reformed "traditional" academies, each with its own curriculum and constituency. The first intimation of trouble among the new generation of students came soon afterward. Two hundred students went on strike at the Collège Chasseloup-Laubat in December 1920; unrest broke out a few days later at the Collège de My Tho.⁴ The press paid little attention to these brief and unconnected shows of discontent. But the demonstrations that erupted in 1926 were more sustained and spread rapidly through the elite schools of the country. The students' unruliness came as a shock to their elders. It seemed all the more incomprehensible because educational opportunities were limited and those who could attend school were universally considered highly fortunate.

As the magistrate could attest, old-style instruction had formerly been accompanied by the liberal application of the cane; in the 1920s corporal punishment had not disappeared from colonial schools, but it was no longer deemed a natural aid to the acquisition of knowledge. Yet, although poor conditions or harsh discipline triggered some instances of rebellion, they were not the fundamental cause of student unrest. The cause was a profound crisis of authority, in which teachers were the first, but by no means the only, targets. Unable to restore discipline in the classroom, teachers turned for help to their

charges' parents. In the imperial capital of Hue, court mandarins were even brought in to preach obedience to their sons and daughters. But this only crystallized youthful suspicions that parents, teachers, and officials worked in collusion to repress students' generous instincts and idealistic aspirations. Why and how did young Vietnamese become alienated from both old values and new teachings and rise up to defy a once hallowed triad of authority figures?

The Scholar's World

Dao Duy Chung's success in operating an academy long after civil service examinations were abolished in the South is testimony to the selective nature of nativism. When Vietnamese waxed nostalgic, it was seldom about the examination system, even though it was the culmination of classical education and the entry into the world of officialdom.

Students generally progressed from village or subprefectural schools to academies such as the one Dao Duy Chung ran. A typical school was usually no more than the teacher's private home and could accommodate only a half-dozen students.⁵ Academies, which prepared students for the grueling triennial regional examinations, were just as modest in size. The examinations themselves usually attracted several thousand candidates.⁶ Those who won a coveted *cu nhon* (Ch. *chu jen*) degree in the regional contests could go on to the imperial capital to be examined for the *tien si* (Ch. *chin shih*) degree, with hopes of a brilliant career in the mandarinat. Those who failed, or obtained only the lower degree of *tu tai* (Ch. *hsiu tsai*), returned home to become village teachers; the more talented and respected opened subprefectural schools or academies.

The most eloquent memorial to the vanished world of the scholar came from the pen of Ngo Tat To, a northern scholar who had failed the regional examinations of 1915, the last to be held in Tonkin. In 1941, Ngo Tat To published a novel entitled *Tents and Bamboo Beds* (*Leu chong*), in which he described the harrowing ordeal of being a degree candidate. The novel's hero was a brilliant young scholar who, in the later stages of the examinations, fell afoul of a taboo prohibiting the use of imperial names and was nearly executed for lèse-majesté. Providing a counterpoint was his less original classmate, who won the prestigious degree and then was appointed to a post for which his book learning had ill prepared him. When he proved unable

to quell a local uprising, the court punished him by sending him to an even more conflict-ridden district in the highlands. This allowed the novel's hero to reflect on the pleasures of pure scholarship as contrasted to the dangers of political office.

Ngo Tat To did not despise politics, but only bureaucratic careerism. He was also ambivalent about the intellectual legacy of Confucianism. Not long before he began work on his novel, To declared: "It is Confucianism which in the past elevated Vietnam to the rank of civilized nations. It is also Confucianism which has brought Vietnam to the brink of perdition."⁷ Yet he went on to make important contributions to classical scholarship, his ire being reserved for the brand of Confucianism which the Nguyen emperors had been promoting since the nineteenth century.

The Nguyen dynasty had come to power in 1802 after decades of civil war and nearly two centuries of national division. To bring back stability to the nepotism-ridden political system they had inherited, the dynasty's emperors made the Confucian civil service examinations the sole avenue to official appointment. Reacting also to the populist cultural policies of their Tay Son predecessors, they banned the demotic script used to transcribe the Vietnamese vernacular. The demotic script was looked upon by rulers and officials as a tool used by the devious to undermine Confucian orthodoxy, and with it, their legitimacy.⁸ Instead of the Vietnamese vernacular, scholars considered Chinese characters to be their own language. Students were taught to read and write Chinese; they learned the Confucian classics, T'ang-style poetry, and Ch'ing-style eight-legged essays. Their ideal was to approximate as closely as possible the learning and the life of their Chinese counterparts. But because of the vagaries of cultural exchanges and their own emphasis on examination-centered learning, Vietnamese literati had only a limited exposure to the range of ideas circulating in China. Furthermore, the generally small size of the academies did not allow for the lively scholarly exchanges that went on in Chinese institutions. What Vietnamese students absorbed, therefore, was often a formalistic kind of knowledge (*van hoc tu chuong*) that sacrificed originality to the goal of passing exams. Required to concentrate on Sung neo-Confucianism, they overlooked the contributions of philosophers whose ideas did not form part of the Nguyen examination curriculum.⁹

His distaste for the examination system did not prevent Ngo Tat To from entertaining a deep nostalgia for the world of the Confucian

scholar away from the hurly-burly of mandarin politics. Both his father and grandfather, failed degree candidates like himself, had eked out a living as village teachers. Making a virtue of their necessity, Ngo Tat To paid homage to the relationship that had once existed between his rural scholar forebears and their charges. In that idealized world, teachers and students were bound by a tie as strong and enduring as the tie that bound fathers and sons. As the saying went, teachers ranked second only to fathers.¹⁰ This idea was vividly illustrated on New Year's Day when students, after extending greetings to their fathers, immediately went to their teachers' home to do likewise before paying their respects to their mothers. In Tonkin, where the Confucian ethos was far stronger than in Cochinchina, the same word *thay* applied to both father and teacher, emphasizing their overlapping duties in promoting the material and moral welfare of the young men in their care. Just as fathers performed tutorial duties, so did teachers act as surrogate fathers. They cooperated together in transmitting the accumulated wisdom and values of past generations. In return, they expected lifelong respect and obedience.¹¹

The avowed goal of traditional education was to turn a scholar into a "superior man" (*quan tu*; Ch. *chun tzu*) through self-cultivation. But self-perfection was only a first step toward political office. The motto of the superior man was: "Cultivate thyself, set thy house in order, govern thy country, pacify All-Under-Heaven."¹² Underlying this motto was the assumption that individual self-cultivation led naturally to family management and thence to political rule. An official was regarded as the "father and mother of the people" (*dan chi phu mau*). It was his responsibility to look after their welfare and, like any father, he expected to be obeyed and respected by them. Teachers, therefore, were supposed to prepare their students not only for the examinations but also for their future role as "fathers and mothers of the people." Vietnamese officials clung to this self-image long after French administrators, having usurped the mandarins' power, assumed the rhetorical role of fathers of the immature and wayward Vietnamese population.

Familial relationships did not remain immune from such rhetorical shifts or from the effects of change in politics and education. Few parents, however, realized how deep was their children's frustration over being given an inferior education that led to menial positions in the colonial administration. Their titles conveyed a glamour at odds with the workaday reality of their jobs. Thus were interpreters and

clerks allowed to sit at the highest table at village feasts, side by side with traditional degree-holders.¹³ Paradoxically, it was the more prestigious schools that turned out the most alienated students, for the presence of French administrative and teaching staff usually led to tense race relations.¹⁴ But unhappy experiences in school and blighted career prospects do not explain the emergence of radical politics, or the rebellion by young Vietnamese against parents, teachers, and mandarins. The seeds of crisis lay in Confucian social theory itself, in the tension between piety and patriotism. This tension was largely unacknowledged in normal times; the experience of foreign conquest, and more directly, the educational reforms of 1917–1919 brought it to the fore, albeit with a long delay.

Piety and Patriotism

Because Confucian social theory conceived of the country as a family writ large, filial piety and family harmony were the twin bases of social and political stability. The various relationships that existed within the family and society were articulated by the Three Bonds: loyalty (*trung*; Ch. *chung*), which a subject owed to his ruler; piety (*hieu*; Ch. *hsiao*), which governed the behavior of a son toward his father; and fidelity (*nghia*; Ch. *i*), which bound husband and wife together. Ideally, each of the Bonds reinforced the other two. The relationship between ruler and ruled was patterned after the unequal but reciprocal relationship between father and son; the rapport between the emperor and his officials was likened to conjugal fidelity. A husband might repudiate his wife if she proved unsatisfactory (there were seven legitimate grounds for such a move), but a wife owed her husband total fidelity, even after his death. Similarly, the emperor could dismiss his mandarins, though not entirely without cause; but, just as "a chaste woman may not serve two husbands, a loyal official may not serve two rulers."¹⁵ Piety was the bedrock upon which the lives of ordinary peasants were built, loyalty the cornerstone of a mandarin's career.

In normal times, public service and family interest neatly dovetailed: a mandarin could at the same time show loyalty to the reigning monarch and promote his family's fortunes, while acting as the father and mother of the common people in his jurisdiction. History, however, often tested the relative strength of the Three Bonds and forced men to choose between them. Plenty of mandarins chose to collabo-

rate with the French and were predictably likened to unchaste women by their detractors.¹⁶ French conquest, however, highlighted the conflict that could erupt between the demands of dynastic loyalty and filial piety.

Each principle was eloquently defended by two men who came from the same village of Dong Thai in Ha Tinh province (Annam) and were even distantly related through marriage: Phan Dinh Phung and Hoang Cao Khai.¹⁷ Both had risen to high positions and enjoyed the respect of their fellow officials. Hoang Cao Khai won a *cu nhon* degree at an early age, then proceeded to gamble away most of his patrimony.¹⁸ Phan Dinh Phung, less brilliant, did not obtain his degree until he was thirty-nine (he became a *tien si* the following year). But he was less erratic than Hoang Cao Khai and was admired for his rigorous, even rigid, adherence to Confucian principles.

This principled inflexibility led to Phan's ouster from the Regency Council in 1883, when he refused to go along with his fellow regents and depose Emperor Tu Duc's chosen heir in favor of another. Phan was too widely admired for the other regents to have him executed, so he was merely confined to his native village. Two years later, the crisis of succession was temporarily over, the regents having installed the twelve-year-old Ham Nghi on the throne and wielding power in his name. By then, the whole of the country had passed into French hands; protectorates had been created in Annam and Tonkin. Belatedly, the regents whisked the young emperor away from the capital and issued a decree ordering a general uprising in his name. In the hills of his native Ha Tinh, Phan Dinh Phung responded by launching the Aid the King Movement (Can Vuong). This was essentially a movement led by scholars and officials like himself and directed at other literati (the French called it the Scholars' Revolt). Hoping to put an end to the Aid the King Movement, the French tried to win Phan Dinh Phung over to their side by playing on his family feelings. They captured his brother and used him as a bait to draw Phan into submission. If Phan agreed to collaborate, he would be rewarded with a high office; if he did not, death awaited his brother and his many relatives in Dong Thai village. This was the message which an old friend, who had surrendered to the French, relayed to Phan in 1886: "I have to tell you that I passed through Dong Thai recently and saw your ancestral temple and your ancestral tombs all in ruin through neglect; I was so overwhelmed that I cried. Brother Phan, the safety

of your relations and your neighbors depends entirely upon you; whether your brother lives or dies also depends entirely upon you."¹⁹

In reply, Phan is said to have explained to his comrades-in-arms that he considered the whole nation his family: "From the time I joined with you in the Aid the King movement, I determined to forget questions of family and village. Now I have but one tomb, a very large one, that must be defended: the land of Vietnam. I have only one brother, very important, who is in danger: more than twenty million countrymen. If I worried about my own tombs, who would worry about defending the tombs of the rest of the country? If I saved my own brother, who would save all the other brothers of our country? There is only one way for me to die now."²⁰

Phan may have been unwilling to put piety before loyalty, but not everyone agreed with his interpretation of the primary duty of a Confucian official. Phan was rare, if not unique, among his contemporaries in speaking of his compatriots as his brothers, and in suggesting that love of country (*ai quoc*; Ch. *ai kuo*) rather than dynastic loyalty (*trung*; Ch. *chung*) was the wellspring of his struggle. There had always been officials who knew how to bow with the prevailing wind in order to protect their families, their tombs, their villages and who believed that Confucian ideology sanctified their priorities. Many were those who looked upon colonial conquest as merely another case of dynastic struggle which could be used to win merit for themselves (*cong*; Ch. *kung*) and safety for their kin by serving the new ruling house. They had an articulate spokesman in Phan's fellow villager, Hoang Cao Khai. In 1894, Khai, who was by then viceroy of Tonkin, wrote to Phan:

When the capital fell and the emperor had to flee, you rose up in his support. In the context of that time, you did what was right, no one gainsays you. But the situation has changed now; can things go on as before? Even unintelligent and uneducated people have concluded that they cannot. With your superior understanding, is it possible that you do not realize this? I think I perceive your train of thought. You are determined to do whatever you deem right, to devote to it all your efforts and talents. It lies within man's power to do what must be done, though whether it succeeds or not depends on Heaven; one can only give of oneself to one's country, unto death. Therefore, it is up to you to persist in your endeavor, and no one may deter you from your goal.

And yet, when I see the misery our country is plunged in, I am filled with sorrow . . . I have always been taught that mandarins should consider the care of the people as fundamental; there has never been anyone who did not love the people and yet was considered loyal to the emperor . . . What you have done so far is truly loyal, but what sin have the common people committed that they should be caught in such suffering? It is fine to say that since you are working for the benefit of all, you no longer care for your own family; but how can you also abandon the hundreds of families of your region? I am not concerned only with the green grass of our village of Dong Thai: I am afraid that if you fight on, the whole region around Lam River and Mount Hong will turn into a lake.²¹

Phan Dinh Phung died of hunger and dysentery in the hills one year after that exchange. When a collaborating mandarin discovered where his body was buried, he had it exhumed and burned. Phan's ashes were then shot into the river out of the mouth of a cannon, as was done to the ashes of common criminals.²² His name and his deeds were proscribed. Hoang Cao Khai, in contrast, died covered with riches and honors, held up by the colonial authorities as an example of true patriotism. Two of his sons became provincial governors; one of them married a royal princess and was a prominent figure in political and cultural circles in the 1920s. Who would not recoil at the cost to himself and his kin that Phan Dinh Phung paid for his interpretation of duty, or be tempted to emulate Hoang Cao Khai's brilliant career? Realizing that Phan was impervious to appeals to his family feelings, Hoang Cao Khai tried in vain to play on his regionalist sympathies. Other literati did not even bother to think in regional terms. Buttressed by unimpeachable Confucian logic, they found it more convenient and profitable to choose family piety over dynastic loyalty.

The exchange between Hoang Cao Khai and Phan Dinh Phung also illustrates competing interpretations of the causes of national defeat. Their differences, anchored in the same basic vision of human life, were a harbinger of future disagreements over the role of personal heroism and historical forces in revolution. According to popular wisdom, a person's life was determined by the interplay of two forces: talent (*tai*; Ch. *tsai*) and destiny (*mang*; Ch. *ming*). Women were popularly considered to be entirely at the mercy of fate, their happiness dependent on the men in their life. Men, however, had the power to exert control over their destiny by making use of whatever talents

they possessed and were therefore not supposed to "fold their arms and accept defeat" (*khoanh tay danh chiu thua*). Instead, they were expected to emulate King Hsia Yu, the mythical flood-tamer, or Yu Kung, who had moved mountains.

This belief in free will coexisted with the fatalistic orientation of much of Vietnamese culture, as evidenced in the poetry of even the most activist of Vietnamese statesmen. Fatalism informed the response of Emperor Tu Duc to French conquest. Having committed fratricide in his fight for the throne, he tended to interpret the loss of national independence as his personal punishment. For his part, Hoang Cao Khai claimed that in surrendering to the French he was bowing to the Will of Heaven, which had ordained the country's fall to alien rule. Others, however, believed that the history of the country did not condone defeatism. They saw resistance, rather than acceptance, as Vietnam's recurring theme. It was in the crucible of unceasing struggle against loss of national independence (*vong quoc*; Ch. *wang kuo*) that the meaning of Vietnam as a nation, a people, and a culture had been forged. Phan Dinh Phung refused to blame Heaven for the country's woes and hinted broadly that colonial conquest had been facilitated by the collective failure of the ruling elite to uphold traditional principles: "Over the millennia, our country has only used its civilization to survive from generation to generation. It does not have a large territory, its army is not powerful, it does not possess great wealth; the only thing it has to support it is the bond between ruler and subject, the bond between father and son, and the five cardinal virtues . . . This is why, though China is our neighbor and is vastly more powerful than our country, yet, in the end, it has never been able to swallow it up."²³

Phan Dinh Phung seemed to suggest that, if only the correct principles were upheld, then virtue would prevail, and the enemy would be driven out. Hoang Cao Khai conceded that belief in a preordained fate did not relieve men of the duty to uphold righteousness. But he was right in pointing out that Phan was more concerned with acting morally than with pursuing success.

As time went on, success indeed became increasingly elusive. Phan Dinh Phung's dogged resistance in the face of almost certain defeat was of a piece with his earlier refusal to follow the lead of his fellow regents: it was imbued by a very traditional concept of duty. Inspirational as they would be to future generations, his feats of heroism were performed in the service of a purely restorationist cause. Phan

and other participants in the Aid the King Movement did not contemplate the reform of Vietnamese society or of its ruling ideology; they sought only to restore the old order by clinging to traditional values. The death of Phan Dinh Phung in 1895 signaled not only the end of his movement but also the beginning of a reappraisal of these values.

The Social Darwinian Critique of Culture

In the bitter aftermath of failure, patriotic literati had to come to terms with the fact that nostalgia for a lost independence was no longer sufficient to sustain the spirit of resistance. They must be willing to learn from a new enemy, just as they had once learned from the Middle Kingdom. Out of this painful process of cultural reorientation was born the Reform Movement. Like Phan's guerrilla war, it was led by scholars and aimed mainly at other scholars.

This reorientation came about largely as a result of the Social Darwinian critique of Vietnamese culture. Once this critique was internalized, it was never stated as explicitly as in early reformist writings. From the beginning, Social Darwinism was used to discuss inequality between nations; only later was it applied to individuals as well. But survival of the nation remained the underlying theme of political discourse.

To the Vietnamese, Social Darwinism was a revelation. It provided an explanation of their country's downfall which was both familiar and startlingly new: Vietnam had indeed fallen prey to a mightier country, but its conqueror's might lay in its cultural superiority. Accustomed to using cultural criteria to gauge a country's health, Vietnamese literati easily accepted the thrust of this argument. At the same time, much of the suasive power of Social Darwinism lay in its unfamiliar worldview which, instead of celebrating equilibrium and harmony, exalted the notion of unceasing competition for supremacy and survival among actors endowed with unequal gifts and resources.

Vietnamese reformers were first exposed to the ideas of Herbert Spencer, the father of Social Darwinism, by K'ang Yu-wei and his disciple Liang Ch'i-ch'ao. But it was K'ang's contemporary, the scholar and translator Yen Fu, who introduced Herbert Spencer to the Chinese reading public. In Vietnam, the first mention of Herbert Spencer came in an anonymous pamphlet written in 1904 to launch the Reform Movement, *The Civilization of New Learning* (*Van minh tan hoc sach*).²⁴ Its preamble could have been written by Yen Fu him-

self, so closely did it follow his logic. It argued that ideas alone were insufficient for the maintenance of civilization; competition, too, was required. In fact, the more ideas, the more competition; and the more competition, the more ideas were generated. Vietnam, however, had a passive rather than a dynamic civilization, which venerated the old and native and despised the new and foreign, thus inhibiting the generation of new ideas. It undervalued the importance of self-strengthening. The West exalted the people; the Vietnamese revered the ruler and paid no attention to rural conditions. All this, argued the anonymous author, should be changed.

Whereas for its Western and Chinese advocates, Social Darwinism seemed an essentially optimistic vision, to the Vietnamese it offered a bleaker scenario for the future.²⁵ If only the fittest prevailed, would the country, whose weak state had already led to foreign conquest, be able to survive? Was the annihilation of the Vietnamese nation, people, and culture already determined or would human effort succeed in reversing course? Yen Fu had tempered the determinism inherent in Social Darwinism with a voluntarist dimension; so did the Vietnamese literati who embraced it. The proposals contained in *The Civilization of New Learning* were close kin to Chinese self-strengthening programs. But Vietnamese reformers dared not hope, as their Chinese counterparts did, that the reforms they advocated would enable their country to compete with the West on more equal terms and emerge victorious. All they dared hope for was survival. Their pleas thus had a more urgent and desperate ring than the pronouncements of the Chinese writers who inspired them.

The difference in outlook between Chinese and Vietnamese reformers is illustrated in an exchange that took place in Tokyo between the Vietnamese scholar Phan Boi Chau and the Chinese scholar-statesman Liang Ch'i-ch'ao in 1905. Liang, reports Phan, had been moved to tears by his description of Vietnam's loss of independence and urged him to publicize it.²⁶ Vietnam's loss of independence could serve as a warning to Chinese people of the danger they themselves were facing. He advised Phan to produce "a serious literary presentation to the world of the plight of Vietnam in the face of France's policy of extermination." Such a work would also encourage "Vietnamese youth to study overseas as a start to awakening popular consciousness and improving the general level of education." Heeding this advice, Phan wrote his *History of the Loss of Vietnam* (*Viet Nam vong quoc su*). Liang provided a preface and arranged to have the

book published in his journal *Renovation of the People* (*Hsin-min ts'ung-pao*) in 1905.²⁷

What for Liang Ch'i-ch'ao was a cautionary tale was for Phan a national tragedy. "For a human being, the greatest suffering comes from losing his country." Thus began the *History of the Loss of Vietnam*. It was this sense of loss that spurred Phan and others to reform.

Reform and Its Advocates

Phan Boi Chau's advocacy of foreign learning formed part of a larger program of self-strengthening measures. Its centerpiece was a call to jettison Chinese characters, upon which the whole edifice of classical learning reposed, in favor of the romanized script. First developed by traders and missionaries in the seventeenth century, the romanized script faithfully reproduced the sound and syntax of spoken Vietnamese; it thus had the potential for bridging the gap between elite and popular cultures, an objective whose importance to the anticolonial struggle was gaining recognition. But it was also associated with foreign rule. The colonial authorities promoted its use because it was easier to master than Chinese characters; furthermore, they hoped that abandoning Chinese characters would lead to the decline of classical learning and with it the legitimacy of the scholarly elite and the values that had nurtured resistance to French rule. It was therefore not without a great deal of agonized soul-searching that scholars in Tonkin and Annam allowed themselves to be persuaded of the need to learn the romanized script and new ways of looking at the world. In 1907 a group of scholars, inspired by Fukuzawa Yukichi's Keio University, opened the Tonkin Free School (Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc). There they taught the rudiments of the new script, expounded the ideas of Chinese reformist scholars, and introduced names associated with the Enlightenment or with European nationalism into the political discourse.

The men who participated in the Reform Movement were a mixed group. Some wanted cultural change for its own sake, others because they saw it as a prerequisite for the success of anticolonial action. Phan Boi Chau was the foremost representative of the instrumentalist perspective on linguistic and educational reforms. Born in Nghe An in 1867, Phan was already eighteen when Annam fell to the French. After he became involved in the Aid the King Movement, he soon found out that his lack of a degree was a handicap among status-

conscious literati. After his father became ill, he temporarily forsook political engagement for family affairs, all the while trying to succeed in the examination system. Finally, in 1900, Phan passed the regional exams with highest honors.²⁸ Around that time, calls for cultural reform, which had fallen on stony ground in the 1860s, began circulating again among Vietnamese literati in the wake of the Chinese Reform Movement of 1898. Phan Boi Chau was introduced to the ideas of Rousseau and Montesquieu and to the names of nineteenth-century nationalists such as Mazzini and Cavour through the writings of Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, K'ang Yu-wei, and other Chinese reformers.

Despite his own inability to master it, as well as lingering misgivings, Phan became an enthusiastic advocate of using the romanized script as the vehicle for the new Western-inspired learning which he deemed necessary for a modern nation. For him, as for Yen Fu, the recovery of independence rather than the preservation of culture was paramount, for without the nation, how could the people and culture survive? The transformation of culture was thus less a matter of intrinsic value than of strategic necessity. But Yen Fu had been a true scholar, whereas Phan was more action oriented. Knowledge, for him, was not so much the key to self-discovery as part of a panoply of anticolonial devices. When Phan launched the Eastern Travel Movement in 1905, it was to enable students to go to China and Japan to accumulate the knowledge necessary to eventually overthrow foreign rule. His first commitment remained to political struggle, including armed struggle.²⁹ In his *History of the Loss of Vietnam*, he interspersed veiled incitements to armed struggle with calls to study abroad. His basic lack of interest in cultural issues for their own sake resulted, however, in a lack of ideological sophistication, which was to vitiate his tireless efforts to create viable anticolonial movements.

A more truly culturalist approach was advocated by Phan Chu Trinh. Phan Chu Trinh, who also hailed from central Vietnam, received a degree in the metropolitan examinations of 1900, the year that Phan Boi Chau passed the regional exams. Unlike Phan Boi Chau, he had been too young to take part in the Aid the King Movement. His father, who had been involved, was assassinated during its dying days for reasons that remain obscure. Although his father died at the hands of fellow insurgents, Phan Chu Trinh blamed the monarchy for his death. Perhaps because of this event, which occurred when he was entering his teens, Phan Chu Trinh remained a lifelong

foe of violence. Believing that a gradualist path was the way to avoid bloodshed, he was willing to defer independence until such time as the Vietnamese had undergone a thorough cultural and social transformation. While critical of colonial rule, he reserved his undiluted hatred for the Vietnamese imperial court, which he held responsible for the sorry state of the nation. He spent fourteen years in exile in France and, although he never learned French, he found much in French culture and political institutions worth adopting. Phan Chu Trinh was at heart a true reformer; Phan Boi Chau, the pioneer of the Revolution.³⁰

Though the Reform Movement was dominated by classically trained scholars such as Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Boi Chau, it also attracted a considerable number of graduates of the School of Interpreters. The School had opened in Hanoi in 1886 to train staff for the lower ranks of the colonial administration in Tonkin. In embracing Western learning and becoming part of the apparatus of foreign domination, graduates of the School, who were known as scholars of New Learning to distinguish them from Confucian literati, laid themselves open to suspicions of disloyalty. But many of them sincerely believed that they were working for the betterment of their country. They took part in the Reform Movement out of conviction that Vietnamese culture and society had reached a dead end.³¹ Their enthusiasm for linguistic and educational reform also derived in no small measure from the fact that, at one stroke, it vindicated their own training and careers and transformed them from cultural brokers of uncertain social standing and suspect loyalties into members of the intellectual and patriotic avant-garde.

The most prominent of these scholars of New Learning within the Reform Movement was Nguyen van Vinh. A 1898 graduate of the School of Interpreters, he had worked for several years as a secretary to the Résident of Lao Kay. After attending the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition in 1906, he resigned his job to go into journalism. The next year, together with Pham Duy Ton, another graduate of the School of Interpreters, Vinh drafted an application to the Résident Supérieur on behalf of fellow reformers for permission to open the Tonkin Free School and acted as its official sponsor.³²

In Cochinchina, the Reform Movement took on distinctive characteristics.³³ After four decades of colonial rule, most educated southerners were already conversant with the romanized script. There was thus no need to fight a battle that had already been won. Southern

patriots even succeeded in using Vietnamese-language newspapers such as *Agrarian Tribune* (*Nong Co Min Dam*) and *News from the Six Provinces* (*Luc Tinh Tan Van*) to spread reformist propaganda discreetly. Instead of emphasizing the need for new ideas and a new educational system, southern reformers concentrated on launching business ventures in competition with Chinese traders (and less overtly, with French settlers). They opened rice mills, fish sauce plants, hotels, restaurants, servicing shops, grocery stores. Revenues from such ventures went into supporting various anticolonial activities, in particular the sending of students to Japan and China.

Similar attempts to overcome elitist disdain for trade and business met with indifferent results in Annam and Tonkin, where the mandarin mentality was more entrenched. Literati were willing enough to swallow their prejudices, but they had no experience in heading businesses or managing stores, a task that was usually left to women. They also lacked the common touch. Potential shoppers were intimidated when, expecting to see a woman behind the counter, they saw instead a man dressed in the flowing robes of a scholar, with a servant standing by to fan him and serve him tea. Some literati could not bring themselves to demand that their female customers settle their accounts promptly, and ran up huge debts instead of making money for the cause.³⁴ The Tonkin Free School stayed afloat only because the wife of its principal sold a store she owned in Hanoi to provide the necessary funds: "My hand shook as I held the sales contract. From childhood, I had never dreamed of selling off a piece of my patrimony. The school was closed down a month after I sold that store; if it had not, I don't know where money would have been found to sustain it."³⁵

Getting scholars involved in the grubby world of commercial endeavor was only one component in a wide-ranging attempt to update Confucian values. Trade was made palatable by being presented as a patriotic endeavor. But it was filial piety, the bedrock of Vietnamese society, which attracted the most discussion. The redefinition of filial piety was occasioned by the recognition that the rift between filiality and loyalty must be healed so that piety could serve the cause of patriotism. The first efforts were quite modest. In the past, it had been argued that it was unfilial to cut one's hair or nails: like the rest of the body, they were gifts from one's parents. Now, reformers claimed it was more hygienic, and thus a higher form of piety, to keep them trimmed and clean. The demands of family duty remained unques-

tioned; what had changed was their concrete expression. In retrospect, therefore, the redefinition of filial piety was much less revolutionary than it appeared at the time, despite the anguish and controversy it provoked.

These attempts to reconcile piety and loyalty occurred as the institution of the monarchy was becoming increasingly hollow. Ever since Ham Nghi had fled the capital in 1885, the French had controlled the imperial succession. In 1907 they deposed Thanh Thai, whom they had installed on the throne two decades earlier, and replaced him with his son, the child emperor Duy Tan. In the absence of a strong imperial presence, an imperceptible shift from dynastic loyalty to a less narrow patriotism was taking place. This shift had already begun during the Aid the King Movement. Despite Hoang Cao Khai's aspersions, Phan Dinh Phung had been motivated not by blind loyalty to the emperor but by love of country. Patriotic literati could draw strength from his example, but they could not agree on the concrete meaning of patriotism, and hence on the ultimate goal of cultural innovation. This lack of consensus ultimately unraveled the fragile unity of the Reform Movement.

The End of the Reform Movement

The introduction in 1908 of a new and unpopular iron currency triggered a wave of antitax protests in Annam, where the Reform Movement had been particularly active. Reformist scholars produced inflammatory poems and songs, which the authorities held responsible for the peasant riots that took place in Quang Nam. The demonstrators were swiftly crushed. The Tonkin Free School and other make-shift schools patterned after it were closed down.³⁶ The University of Hanoi, which had been opened in 1902 in response to Vietnamese demands for better education, was also a casualty of the backlash. Scores of literati were jailed. The colonial authorities arrested the father of Duong Ba Trac, a minor figure in the Reform Movement, to lure Trac into surrendering. At first, Trac defiantly tried to live up to the new notion of filiality and patriotism and wrote to his own son: "If the nation has no father, that is not important; but what it must not lack is sons."³⁷ But, as the authorities expected, he was too filial to leave his father to their tender mercies and soon surrendered. Phan Chu Trinh was sent to the penal island of Con Son. Phan Boi Chau, who was in Japan with a party of students, escaped arrest. But in

1909, the French Sûreté was able to infiltrate the network of his southern supporters and halt the movement of students to Japan and China. That same year, at the request of the French authorities, Phan was ordered out of Japan.³⁸ The Reform Movement was over as a political force, but the cultural reorientation it had launched continued.

French settlers, who regarded concessions to the natives as signs of failure of colonial will, fully supported the repression; but in Paris, the unrest reinforced the government's conviction that sweeping changes were needed in Indochina. Such changes, moreover, though ultimately aimed at curbing Vietnamese unrest, would also greatly curtail the power of the settlers. The man chosen for the task was Albert Sarraut, a popular Deputy with a liberal reputation. He arrived in Indochina in 1911, armed with a mandate for wide-ranging reforms.³⁹ In particular, he was to streamline the relationship between the Government-General of Indochina and its five constituent states as a precondition for giving more autonomy to Indochina in its dealings with the French metropolitan government. The target of this effort was the powerful Cochinchinese Colonial Council, whose stranglehold over the Indochinese budget undermined attempts to achieve fiscal stability. Sarraut was also to enlarge native representation in various legislative and advisory bodies, revise procedures for naturalization, and introduce educational reforms. But by the time ill-health forced him to return home two years later, Sarraut could point to very few accomplishments. He had created new advisory bodies in Tonkin and Cochinchina on which Vietnamese were allowed to sit, he had bullied the imperial cabinet into accepting the creation of provincial assemblies, he had reduced somewhat the numerical difference between French and Vietnamese members of the Cochinchinese Colonial Council, he had revised rules for naturalization, and he had set in motion the abolition of the Confucian examinations.⁴⁰ More fundamental problems, however, had been left untackled.

Sarraut's term had not been without incident, duly seized upon by those who opposed reforms. In 1911, the Manchu dynasty had been overthrown in China and a Republican government installed in power. Inspired by the success of the 1911 Revolution, Phan Boi Chau created the League for the Restoration of Vietnam (Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi) in 1912 among Vietnamese expatriates in southern China. Phan had originally wanted to lead a movement dedicated to

the overthrow of French rule and the creation of a Vietnamese republic. But he had to yield to the preference of his southern supporters (who provided most of his funds) for a monarchical government. The League was therefore headed by a descendant of the Nguyen dynastic founder, Prince Cuong De; Phan himself assumed the role of Prime Minister of its provisional revolutionary government-in-exile.⁴¹

To give visibility to his newly formed League, Phan Boi Chau masterminded a series of terrorist incidents and distributed funds to his adherents to purchase bombs for use inside Vietnam.⁴² Two French army officers were killed in Hanoi in early 1913; another victim was the Vietnamese governor of Thai Binh province.⁴³ Meanwhile, acting under the influence of Phan's emissaries, members of secret societies and religious sects in Cochinchina staged attacks on the French police headquarters in Saigon.⁴⁴

The violent activities of the Restoration League provoked a split among veterans of the Reform Movement, dividing those who espoused cultural reform as a weapon against foreign domination and the scholars of New Learning who had made their peace with colonialism. The latter had already been rudely awakened from their rosy images of themselves as fearless cultural warriors when the colonial authorities cracked down on the Reform Movement in 1908. Nguyen van Vinh and Pham Duy Ton, the two official sponsors of the Tonkin Free School, were brought back to Ha Dong to face its governor, Hoang Trong Phu. Phu, a son of Hoang Cao Khai, was well aware of their disinclination toward political activism and ordered them released after a brief detention.⁴⁵ Indeed, the experience had been enough to chasten them.

Nguyen van Vinh subsequently made clear his distaste for political violence when he became editor-in-chief of a new weekly, *Indochina Review* (*Dong Duong Tap Chi*). The *Indochina Review* was hastily launched on 15 May 1913, soon after the bombing incidents. In a prefatory note, Vinh explained that, although preparations for the first issue had not been finalized, it had been decided to bring forward the date of its publication in order "to use literature and art, to use the cultural benefits of France to shut out seditious noises, so that the explosions caused by the rebels will not drown out the drums of civilization."⁴⁶ Phan Boi Chau, Vinh thundered, was a "mean and foolish man who has fled abroad and incites others to violence so as to sow disorder and bring trouble to the people."

Having thus paid his political dues, Nguyen van Vinh was free to

concentrate on the cultural pursuits which had originally led him into the Reform Movement. His journal was a landmark in the history of Vietnamese-language publishing.⁴⁷ A prolific translator of French literature ranging from La Fontaine's Fables to Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Vinh was an early champion of the vernacular script. He advocated education in Vietnamese and was the first to think of using the national classic *Tale of Kieu* as a basic text in Franco-Annamite schools. He was thus no assimilationist. But he had internalized the Social Darwinian (and hence Western-derived) critique of Vietnamese culture and used *Indochina Review* to launch a sustained assault against it. For twenty-three issues the journal ran a series of articles entitled "Examining Our Defects," in which Vinh attacked nearly everything Vietnamese.⁴⁸ This included the bankruptcy of village institutions in the hands of corrupt notables (no. 10); the tendency of the Vietnamese toward indiscriminate superstition, which undermined sincere faith so that no spiritual strength was left to undertake great enterprises (no. 13); the shallow and wrong-headed kind of learning which created intellectuals "who know only two or three characters but sit from morn till night shaking their thighs, well fed, warmly clothed . . . , despising all those who toil, mud up to their knees, hands covered in dirt," and dismissing them as so many "uncouth and brutish peasants" (no. 11). There were many other faults to criticize: the Vietnamese lust for gaming, gossip, cynicism, and so forth (no. 12). In another column entitled "Women's Words," which he wrote under the feminine pen name of Dao thi Loan, Vinh gave full vent to his mysogyny. He decried what he considered the silly habits of Vietnamese women, from their child-bearing and child-rearing customs to the way they treated their husbands and their friends, the funny way they liked to lie down in their kitchens (no. 9); their obsession with mediums, which he interpreted as disguised female libidinousness (no. 20); their fondness for betel-chewing, which some thought the height of elegance, but was "still a rather barbaric custom" (no. 49);⁴⁹ and "their liking for dirty talk, for which, surely, they must be unsurpassed" (no. 50).⁵⁰ Few areas of Vietnamese learning and few customs or social institutions escaped his barbs.

Like other cultural progressives of the post-Reform decade, Nguyen van Vinh had been won over by Sarraut's justification for continued colonial rule and his scheme for preparing the Vietnamese for eventual independence. Sarraut readily conceded that French dominion over the Vietnamese had been established against their will, and

through much violence. But that was past history. What was now at issue was whether the Vietnamese were ready for self-rule; and his answer was a categorical no. Their customs, their institutions, their level of education, their mentality put them in the category of backward people who would profit from the firm guidance of a Western nation. Sarraut stressed that he condemned a "colonial pact" in which the natives were considered as something less than human, or were kept in a state of perpetual childhood. He took pride, instead, in advocating a period of tutelage. During such a period, political concessions would be gradually granted as natives proved themselves capable of profiting by them and of using their newly acquired rights wisely. Only when they had finally reached cultural and political maturity would this tutelage no longer be justified.⁵¹ Its civilizing mission accomplished, France would then graciously bestow independence. If Sarraut's argument was carried to its logical conclusion, the Vietnamese would not be fully mature until they had become exactly like the French in their thinking, their customs, their institutions. In other words, they would deserve independence from French rule only when they no longer desired to be Vietnamese, but Frenchmen in yellow skin.

Nguyen van Vinh, however, never confronted the logic of Sarraut's reasoning. The French colonial presence continued to work changes in Vietnamese culture; other Vietnamese reformers emerged, who had been totally, instead of partially, educated in French. As they did, Nguyen van Vinh turned effortlessly from innovator to preservationist. His retreat from innovation began just before Sarraut launched his far-reaching educational reforms.⁵² It is unclear whether his backtracking was motivated by political considerations, as was later the case for his close associate, Pham Quynh. The best explanation perhaps is that Nguyen van Vinh was essentially a transitional figure who, after two decades of introducing Western learning to the Vietnamese public, was ready to return to his cultural roots just as a new generation of students with a more thorough understanding of French culture was coming of age.

By and large, graduates of the School of Interpreters in Tonkin and of the Franco-Annamite establishments in Cochinchina were still not sufficiently numerous and had not yet risen high enough in colonial society to counter their lack of traditional scholarly credentials. But events that occurred during and immediately after World War I wrought a real transformation of Vietnam's political elite and educa-

tional system, which in turn brought into the open further schisms in the Reform Movement. Advocates of violent opposition to French rule were temporarily marginalized by either imprisonment or exile. In the North, scholars of New Learning who had once championed cultural innovation became advocates of the cultural and political status quo; in the South, interest in business and trade, already apparent during the Reform Movement, became even more noticeable with the emergence of the bourgeoisie.

Wartime Unrest

When Indochina was put on a war footing in 1915, local authorities began drafting "volunteers" for the European front. The forcible recruitment of thousands of peasants and workers provoked riots throughout Cochinchina, led by members of religious sects and secret societies. Three months later, a plot against the French garrison in Annam was discovered. Implicated in the plot, the sixteen-year-old emperor Duy Tan was dethroned and replaced by the more amenable Khai Dinh.⁵³ It was claimed that the mastermind of both sets of events was Phan Boi Chau, then operating out of South China and Siam. French public opinion became hysterical. The settlers, invoking the state of war, clamored for blood. Military tribunals were convened to dispense summary justice to the rioters in Cochinchina. Thirty-eight men were publicly executed, over a thousand more were detained; the southern countryside was turned upside down in search of adherents of sects and secret societies.⁵⁴

Worse soon followed. The French Résident of Thai Nguyen province in central Tonkin, Darles, was an unsavory character whose sadism provoked a rebellion which united the prisoners and the colonial troops located in the garrison under his command. In the first eight months of 1917, 670 prisoners held at the Thai Nguyen garrison had died, some because of unsanitary conditions, others killed by Darles himself or by their own hand.⁵⁵ Luong Ngoc Quyen, the leader of the uprising, had been part of the Reform Movement since its inception and had been one of the first recruits into the Eastern Travel Movement.⁵⁶ Since going to Japan in 1905, he had remained in exile, mostly in South China. Captured there in 1915, he spent two years in a tiny and dank prison cell whose size did not allow him to stand or to lie down. By the time of the uprising, he had lost the use of his legs.

The uprising began in August 1917 and was not quelled until De-

ember, at a cost of five hundred lives.⁵⁷ Although a military commission of investigation put the blame squarely on Darles for provoking the uprising and the subsequent carnage, he escaped with no more than a fine of one hundred piasters—enough to buy a couple of coffins—and was dismissed from office only after he was photographed torturing a Vietnamese.⁵⁸

French settlers, however, were not interested in the commission's findings. What little tolerance for reform they had previously harbored had vanished. Sarraut, who had arrived back in January 1917 for a second term as Governor-General, thus suffered a decisive setback in his ability to carry out the rest of his program. Already unpopular among the settlers, he had little choice but to set aside his planned overhaul of the governmental structure of Indochina: in their current mood, the settlers were likely to provoke administrative paralysis in order to thwart him.

Sarraut tackled instead the less explosive question of educational reform. He attempted to introduce uniform standards throughout the country in order to address two problems. First was the growing clamor for more educational opportunities, which came not only from anticolonial reformers but also from those segments of the population most supportive of his policies, the emerging urban and land-owning middle class. Second was the need to recruit more natives into the colonial civil service. Until 1914, French-educated Vietnamese had been given only clerical assignments. But by 1917, it was clear to Sarraut that, once the war was over, there would be a severe shortage of personnel in France. The colonies would therefore have to rely on locals to fill administrative slots.⁵⁹ This meant that natives would have to be given greater responsibilities. But first, they must receive a proper education. Educational reform, long a rallying cry of the Vietnamese elite, became an initiative of the colonial regime.

Educational Turmoil

Western learning had been introduced to the three regions of Vietnam in the haphazard fashion that characterized the whole colonial enterprise.

Traditional schools and academies had largely disappeared from Cochinchina by the 1890s. But for a long time, there was only one French *lycée*, Chasseloup-Laubat, which was located in Saigon. Modeled after metropolitan schools, it was designed primarily for the sons

of European residents but also admitted a few Vietnamese, sons of large landowners or members of the colonial service. Under Vietnamese pressure, the colonial authorities established a Franco-indigenous system where both French and the romanized script were taught. Whereas traditional schools and academies had been spread throughout the countryside, the new Franco-indigenous schools were concentrated largely in urban centers, out of the range of rural children. At first, the new schools were intended to offer instruction only in the first three grades; subsequent decrees later added another three years of schooling.⁶⁰ After 1910, secondary education began to be provided at a few select institutions such as the Collège Chasseloup-Laubat (which occupied the same premises as the *lycée*) and the Collège de My Tho.⁶¹

The situation was even bleaker in the two protectorates. Owing to imperial inertia, the traditional examination system was maintained in Tonkin until 1915 and in Annam until 1918. In Tonkin, the Collège du Protectorat, a Franco-indigenous school similar to those of Cochinchina, had been established prior to 1918 as a result of pressure from Vietnamese who wanted a nontraditional education but whose entry into the local *lycée* (renamed Lycée Albert Sarraut after 1919) was barred by local settlers. But in Annam, imperial mandarins, clinging to the tattered remnants of their authority, refused to allow the creation of either French *lycées* or Franco-Annamite schools. The imperial court argued that the curriculum of such schools ran against the spirit of the treaties signed between the two countries, for it demanded that students pledge loyalty to France.⁶² Until 1919, the only institution where Franco-Annamite education was allowed was the Imperial College, which had been created in 1896 to fill the personnel needs of the colonial regime. Education in French was slowly introduced between 1914 and 1917, but it began only in the third year of schooling.⁶³

After Confucian examinations were abolished, Sarraut tried to bring coherence into the educational system, using the Franco-Annamite schools of Cochinchina as a model. At every educational level, the curriculum was to be adapted to local circumstances; this meant in practice that Indochinese education was far inferior to that dispensed in French schools. Only with the decree of 12 October 1930 did the *baccalauréat indochinois* become valid for entry into French universities.⁶⁴ To cap the new system, the University of Hanoi was reopened in 1917. When it was founded in 1902, it had consisted

only of a medical school designed to train natives to become paramedics rather than qualified medical doctors. The reopened University added a School of Law to train native civil servants and a Normal School to turn out staff for the Franco-Annamite schools.

The new educational policies were not universally welcomed and implemented. The mandarins of Annam continued to resist the introduction of Franco-Annamite education. They preferred to overhaul the traditional curriculum to provide for the teaching of the romanized script alongside Chinese characters. All academies and schools established earlier to prepare students for the Confucian exams were ordered closed down by imperial decree on 14 July 1919.⁶⁵ This made it possible for the court to bring traditional education under greater control and to eradicate a source of continued hostility toward "all innovation of Western origin."⁶⁶ The reformed indigenous schools became the sole avenue for recruitment into the mandarinates after 1919. At the apex of this system were two institutions, the Imperial College for boys and Dong Khanh School for girls, which opened in 1919. Both were located in Hue and were reserved primarily for the sons and daughters of the imperial clan and of high mandarins; other students were admitted in limited numbers and under more stringent entry requirements. In Tonkin, the number of Franco-Annamite schools increased after 1919, mainly in urban centers, and especially in the two French concessions of Hanoi and Haiphong. By and large, however, reformed traditional schools were more numerous, for the local elite continued to be attracted to careers as mandarins.

Another feature of Sarraut's educational reforms was numerical expansion. Each village was to build a new school at its own expense. Villagers proceeded to build schools only to close them down almost immediately, lacking funds for maintenance, supplies, equipment, or staff salaries.⁶⁷ The expansion of Franco-Annamite schools did little to fulfill the educational needs of the population. Official figures put at 144,300 the total number of students who were enrolled in primary schools in 1921.⁶⁸ A negligible number received post-primary education. Things improved only marginally over the next ten years. In 1924–1925, 187,000 children attended school, of which only 17,000 were in secondary schools.⁶⁹ Statistics produced for the Colonial Exhibition of 1930 showed that, out of a total population of slightly over seventeen million, 323,759 children of all ages were attending public school.⁷⁰ Another 60,000 were enrolled in private establishments founded with Sarraut's blessing, and which, like the

public schools, were concentrated in urban centers.⁷¹ Finally, there were also about 3,000 Vietnamese enrolled in French *lycées* (Albert Sarraut in Hanoi, Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon, and the Dalat *lycée* for residents of Annam). Assuming the school-age population to be one-fourth of the total population, the totals suggest that only 10 percent of school-age children actually went to school. Most villages continued to lack schools, or were able to offer education only in the first grade. Rural children who wanted to continue beyond the first grade had to go to township schools, many miles away from home.⁷² Despite these problems, owing to popular respect for knowledge, literacy was somewhat higher than the levels of school attendance would suggest.⁷³

Many of the reforms launched by Sarraut were nullified by Governor-General Martial Merlin, who arrived in Vietnam in July 1923. Under the guise of maintaining standards, Merlin severely reduced the level of secondary and post-secondary education. On 14 May 1924, he issued stringent regulations for the opening of new secondary schools, declaring that the secondary school sector was "overdeveloped."⁷⁴ He also closed the School of Law, which, with an enrollment of six hundred students, was the largest of the schools of the University of Hanoi. When Vietnamese protested, he retorted that, whereas they were interested only in vertical education for the few, he was interested in horizontal education for the many.⁷⁵ In actuality, Merlin's move was largely aimed at rooting out teachers in both traditional and independent Franco-Annamite schools whose loyalty to the colonial state was suspect, a problem that was more acute at the secondary and college levels than at the primary level. Besides issuing restrictive standards for private Franco-Annamite schools, he also cracked down on traditional schools which had failed to close in 1919. In 1924, 1,800 traditional schools were forcibly shut down in Annam and Tonkin.⁷⁶ Despite Merlin's strictures about the overdevelopment of secondary education, only a few secondary Franco-Annamite schools actually provided instruction at all levels.⁷⁷

Though he continued to be accused of pursuing a policy of obscurantism, Merlin won praise in some quarters for his efforts to expand primary education in Vietnamese.⁷⁸ These efforts were designed to cope with the acute scarcity of French-speaking teaching personnel in the two protectorates, particularly in Annam. In 1924, Merlin allowed three-year schools, with teaching in Vietnamese, to be established. Teachers in these schools were required to have only five years

of schooling themselves. To save money, only a handful were put on the regular government payroll; others were hired as auxiliaries by villages, which could only afford to pay them by the day. Only nine teachers were on the regular payroll in Annam; there, the rate for village auxiliaries in 1931 ranged from twelve to twenty-eight piasters per month.⁷⁹ Educational cleavages between rural and urban areas that resulted from the uneven distribution of schools were deepened by these curricular differences. In villages, students were taught in their own language by poorly trained, poorly paid teachers; in the cities, students learned from better qualified and better remunerated teachers, but in an alien language.

The elite that emerged from the conflation of scholars of Old and New Learning, graduates of reformed traditional academies, and French and Franco-Annamite schools was inevitably fragmented. It was divided by differences not only in what had been learned but also in how it had been learned. In precolonial times, students had spent endless hours learning by rote long passages in what was, after all, a foreign language, and had been beaten for every peccadillo and failure of memory. But they and their teachers had been united by a shared ethos and a common purpose. In the French and Franco-Annamite schools, no longer was a single mentor responsible for the intellectual and moral growth of a group of disciples bound to him for life by ties of quasi-kinship; instead, students were taught by a variety of instructors, none of whom was responsible for the welfare or behavior of his students outside school. Teachers, and in particular French teachers, were no mere transmitters of a new kind of learning: they represented the colonial state, just as once Confucian teachers had been a link to the world of officialdom. But though the colonial administration inspired fear, its moral authority was low. And low as well, by this time, was the moral authority of the monarchy and of the traditional mandarin.

Crises of Authority

Constant French meddling in the imperial succession and in the day-to-day running of the imperial cabinet had fatally undermined the prestige of the monarchy. When Emperor Khai Dinh went to France in 1922 to visit the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition, the exiled Phan Chu Trinh issued a savage Seven Point Indictment (That Dieu Thu) against him, holding him, in traditional fashion, personally account-

able for the sorry state of his subjects.⁸⁰ Nguyen Ai Quoc (alias Ho Chi Minh) ridiculed Khai Dinh in his one-act play, *The Bamboo Dragon*, whose message was that the Dragon of Annam had no more substance than a piece of twisted bamboo.⁸¹ When Khai Dinh died in November 1925, he left as his heir the twelve-year-old Bao Dai, whom he had taken to France in 1922 to be raised in a manner befitting the future ruler of a colonized country. Bao Dai was whisked back to France immediately after the funeral, leaving the throne empty for the next seven years and the French Résident Supérieur in total command.

The monarchical state was moribund, but the traditional equation of nation with family proved useful to the shrewd Sarraut, who appropriated it to propound his vision of colonial Vietnam as one big family ruled by a firm but benevolent paterfamilias promoting the welfare of his children. Eager to be perceived as a bringer of enlightenment, he stressed the uplifting dimension of France's *mission civilisatrice*. It was not easy to sustain this vision in the face of settler callousness. In 1914 Sarraut had felt it necessary to remind Indochina's highest officials that "the natives are human beings just like us, and should be treated like human beings."⁸² But he managed to convince an impressive number of Vietnamese of the sincerity of his sentiments. Before leaving for France in the spring of 1919, Sarraut made one last rousing speech. Standing on the steps of the Temple of Confucius, he told his delighted supporters that he would go on fighting for their interests in his new position in the "mother country" (he was Minister of Colonies between 1920 and 1924). He intoned: "A father does not abandon his children."⁸³

The choice of venue was full of ironies. Sarraut, who had dismantled the traditional system of education, was using as his platform the place where the names of generations of laureates of the civil service examinations were engraved; the foremost representative of foreign domination stood in front of the most sacred shrine of Confucianism, addressing the fathers and mothers of the people as if they were mere children. Despite this jumble of contradictory symbols and meanings, Sarraut's grand gesture worked. His language appealed to tradition-minded scholars willing to make peace with the French for the sake of preserving a semblance of order. As for the more Westernized advocates of Franco-Annamite collaboration, they saw nothing objectionable in being considered as immature children in need of paternal guidance. It was, after all, the premise upon which the policy

of collaboration was based. Both groups remained dazzled by the unfulfilled promises of Sarraut's rhetoric for the next decade and beyond. But under the weight of so many discordant claims and interpretations, the symbols of family and country became debased.

The legitimacy of the mandarinat eroded even more quickly than the moral authority of teachers. Although it was preserved in Annam, Tonkin, and even in Cochinchina in an atavistic form, the mandarinat had little real power. The standard of living of the mandarins was inferior to that of even the lowliest French colonial employees, increasing the mandarins' appetite for corruption. Popular hostility toward officials was nothing new, but in the changed circumstances, it took on added substance. It had been no part of Sarraut's program to destroy the Vietnamese elite, though this was an unintended effect. The public buildings of Indochina might display the slogans of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. But for Sarraut, "The existence of an elite is the absolute prerequisite for normal life in any country . . . Therefore, in firmly supporting a policy of ever closer collaboration with native elements duly qualified through their knowledge, their past, their services, their social situation, the 'French Protector' remains faithful to itself."⁸⁴

But who among the Vietnamese could lay claim to being the elite? The Vietnamese intelligentsia represented an infinitesimal proportion of the population, and by 1920, the different educational trajectories available to it had left it deeply divided in its outlook. On the surface, the elite of Annam was least affected by cultural shock, since French education and ideas made fewer inroads there. Even so, Annam's intelligentsia was divided between those who sought success in traditional fashion through a career in the mandarinat and those who, following in the footsteps of Phan Dinh Phung and Phan Boi Chau, eschewed officialdom in favor of anticolonial engagement. The elite was also seriously handicapped in its ability to participate in the intellectual life of the country, for, backed to the hilt by the French Résidents Supérieurs, the imperial court and its mandarins were able to stifle most discourse through censorship and accusations of lèse-majesté. Natives of Annam had to move to Hanoi or Saigon in order to become involved in journalism, the preferred vehicle for discussing cultural or political matters. Only in 1927 did Annam gain a newspaper in the Vietnamese language. In Cochinchina, the prestige of the French lycées, higher than that of the Franco-Annamite schools, contributed to the rise of a strongly assimilationist party which, though

numerically small, largely preempted the debate on cultural renewal. Southerners tended not to discuss the content of education, except to claim that it was inferior to that available in France; mostly, they demanded more of it. Southern debates were largely political, focusing on issues such as electoral reform and native participation in decision-making bodies. But Tonkin, Vietnam's traditional center of intellectual life, where illicit traditional schools, court-sanctioned "reformed" indigenous schools, and Franco-Annamite schools now co-existed uneasily, became a cultural battleground.

Judging by the rules for naturalization passed in 1915, there is no doubt that Sarraut's ideal elite was a thoroughly Westernized one. Among the information required of applicants was whether they ate bread or rice, sat on chairs, slept on mattresses, and so forth.⁸⁵ Such an elite did exist in Cochinchina. But Sarraut was realistic enough to recognize the need to win over the Confucian literati of Tonkin and Annam, whose prestige and influence had not yet been irreversibly undermined by graduates of Franco-Annamite schools. When he returned to Vietnam in 1917, Sarraut immediately cast about for suitable men to publish newspapers that would serve as his unofficial platform. The newspapers would help counter the relentless hostility of the settlers by winning the Vietnamese elite, old and new, over to his program of reforms. With the help of Louis Marty, an erudite scholar fluent in both Chinese and Vietnamese whom he named Director of the Indochinese Sûreté, Sarraut identified two men to run two papers, one in Hanoi and one in Saigon. Both papers were launched with funds provided by Sarraut's office and began publication almost simultaneously in July and August 1917, but they were aimed at very different audiences. The journal that appeared in Hanoi was called *Southern Wind* (*Nam Phong*) and was designed to win over northern neo-traditionalists; the newspaper published in Saigon was called *Tribune Indigène* and was meant to mobilize the opinion of southern, French-educated assimilationists.

Tame Heretics: The Southern Bourgeoisie

Tribune Indigène was aimed at both the French-educated Vietnamese elite and the French settlers of Cochinchina. Because its publisher and its editor-in-chief both enjoyed French citizenship, it was permitted to discuss politics (a rubric very broadly interpreted by the authorities to mean anything that might arouse the slightest controversy). The

publisher of *Tribune Indigène*, Nguyen Phu Khai, was a wealthy landowner who had once been a protégé of the writer Pierre Loti and had studied in France.⁸⁶ But the real soul of *Tribune Indigène* was its editor-in-chief, Bui Quang Chieu. Only five years separated Bui Quang Chieu from Phan Boi Chau; like Phan, Chieu was born in a scholarly family, possibly of higher status.⁸⁷ But a gulf of experience lay between them, for, by 1872, the year of Chieu's birth, all of the South had passed under French rule. Chieu was given a thoroughly French education. He went to France in 1893 to attend the Ecole Coloniale and later to Algeria for further studies. Upon his return in 1897, he entered the colonial bureaucracy as an agronomic engineer. He acquired French citizenship and became involved in cultural endeavors, contributing to the expansion of the Société d'Enseignement Mutuel (Hoi Tri Tri), of which he eventually became president. His efforts to rise above the herd paid off in 1917 when Sarraut, casting for Vietnamese allies, selected him to be the editor of *Tribune Indigène*.

Bui Quang Chieu believed himself to be working for the good of his country in advancing the interests of members of his own class: the French-educated businessmen, landowners, and civil servants who formed the emerging Cochinchinese bourgeoisie. The composition of the bourgeoisie was fairly diverse in terms of social origins, wealth, and occupation. A small number enjoyed French citizenship. Some, though not all, owed their wealth to collaboration with the French during the early phase of conquest; they or their parents had been rewarded with high positions and the opportunity to acquire land cheaply. Others had been quick to make the most of new economic opportunities. Still others were civil servants of far more modest means. They were, however, united in their pride in their Western education and contemptuous of old-style village officials and mandarins. When France, having accomplished its *mission civilisatrice*, granted independence to the Vietnamese, the bourgeoisie would be the class best suited to become the new ruling elite. In the meantime, it was happy to shelter in the protective shade of the French mother country. With its newly acquired wealth and Western education, the bourgeoisie considered itself the enlightened class par excellence as well as the motive force of progress. Its members wanted political power and social recognition with all the fervor of most *nouveaux riches* and were obsessed with the goal of replacing the mandarin class as the native elite. They shared Sarraut's conviction that the elite, by

which they meant those empowered to vote and sit on legislative bodies, should be made up of people who, like themselves, possessed a solid French education, were devoted to French ideals and culture, and had achieved wealth and social position.

The emergence of the Cochinchinese bourgeoisie since the turn of the century had already become discernible in the mercantile orientation of the southern Reform Movement, although it had been overshadowed by the Movement's political agenda. The repression which was visited upon opponents of colonial rule from north to south in 1917 allowed the bourgeoisie to become more visible. It also became more vocal in its demands. In April 1919, just as Sarraut was preparing to leave for France, *Tribune Indigène* began printing on its masthead the announcement that it was the "Organ of the Indochinese Constitutionalist Party," thus serving notice that while Sarraut would carry on the fight for an Indochinese Constitution in France, the paper would do likewise in Vietnam. The combative tone was not simply a journalistic flourish. The bourgeoisie believed itself to be an embattled minority surrounded by enemies intent on undermining its economic and political interests: French settlers who tried to prevent the Vietnamese bourgeoisie from gaining more economic power and political rights as French citizens, Chinese businessmen who exercised disproportionate control over the economy, mandarins who refused to yield to the bourgeoisie their position of preeminence, and finally, the masses of workers and peasants who were showing signs of increasing restlessness.

Francophile by both education and self-interest, members of the bourgeoisie were ideal advocates of the kind of reforms Sarraut envisaged. But, though their interests and those of Albert Sarraut converged on many points, they were not always identical. Sarraut's aim in bolstering native elites was merely to provide the social stability needed for economic prosperity. As Minister of Colonies, Sarraut, who had not been able to balance the Indochinese budget, became concerned with making the colonies profitable. In 1921 he launched a program of colonial development which inaugurated a period of unbridled economic exploitation in Vietnam, fueled by the inflation that had set in as a result of heavy financial contributions to the war effort. Reflecting on his program ten years later, Sarraut justified it on the ground that "the time of 'hermit nations' has passed. No country has the right to exist in hostile isolation, leaving in incompetent hands the empty ownership of unutilized riches."⁸⁸ Although members of

the Vietnamese bourgeoisie agreed on the need to develop the riches of Vietnam (and Laos), they much preferred that the task be left to them rather than to the get-rich-quick entrepreneurs who were attracted to Indochina by Sarraut's economic policies.

The basic ideas underlying the political program of the Constitutionalists were set forth in a speech given by Diep van Cuong on 21 September 1917.⁸⁹ Cuong, who sat on the Cochinchinese Colonial Council, proposed that local government be restructured along French lines, so that the Westernized elite could play a bigger role in running the country. His reformist zeal was directed against the policy of selecting Vietnamese representatives to the legislative and advisory bodies of Cochinchina from among members of what he called the *ancien régime*, products of the traditional educational system. A few weeks later, he called for suffrage for men who held a business license, for property owners, and for (French) educated elements.⁹⁰

The new assertiveness of the bourgeoisie evidenced in these proposals rested on a sense of accomplishment and self-righteousness engendered by its successful wartime fund-raising campaign and its awareness of having shown due devotion to France in its hour of need. After Indochina formally became involved in the war effort in 1915, approximately six hundred million francs were raised in outright donations, treasury bonds, and loans. In addition to aiding the French war effort, the campaign highlighted the financial clout of native landowners and businessmen.⁹¹

But there were also the ninety-four thousand natives of Indochina who had been sent to serve as "volunteers" in Europe, ostensibly as a token of their gratitude for the benefits showered on them by the colonial regime.⁹² Although a small minority of better-educated men went to Europe as interpreters, most of the so-called volunteers were poor peasants and workers.⁹³ The draftees were expected to return home by 1919, raising the problem of how to reward them for their war service. The possibility of granting them the time-honored reward of full French citizenship, which included suffrage, was raised,⁹⁴ a thought that brought to the fore all the more elitist traits of the bourgeois politicians. Bui Quang Chieu was a strong advocate of easing rules of accession to the rights of French citizenship for members of the bourgeoisie (natives of Cochinchina already being French subjects).⁹⁵ At the time, enfranchised Vietnamese numbered about one thousand.⁹⁶ If granted full citizenship, returned veterans would have swamped the few members of the Vietnamese bourgeoisie who so

prized their own right to vote. This caused Chieu to "shudder at the thought of admitting undesirables into the great French family: people without means of livelihood or without culture."⁹⁷ Chieu was vociferous in his opposition to an enlargement of the electorate which would have altered the balance of power not only between the races—something he desired—but more important, between the classes, which he considered catastrophic. "Mass Naturalization? Never," ran the editorial of *Tribune Indigène* on 31 January 1918: "I cannot help being seriously disturbed when I think that if, by some extraordinary measures, mass naturalization was decreed in Cochinchina, the result of a legislative election could depend on the vote of our rickshaw boys and our cooks." Inequality was a fact of life. It was the ordering principle among individuals as it was among nations and races. To the vast mass of peasants and workers Chieu conceded only "the right to exist": "How can there be equality in life? Let me give an example: thanks to his efforts to educate himself, thanks to chance and circumstances, thanks to his wealth and achievements, a man rises into the elite or the bourgeoisie; naturally he has the right to enjoy more privileges than a street sweeper. The latter is ignorant, he cannot do anything else. All he has a right to is to exist, that is as it should be."⁹⁸

Chieu's invincible elitism, personal vanity, and horror of disorder were so many weapons in the hands of the authorities, severely limiting his effectiveness as a reformer, even on behalf of his own class. One way for the colonial authorities and the settlers to check Chieu's ambitions was to charge him with sympathy for Phan Boi Chau, who was accused of inspiring all the violent attempts to overthrow colonial rule that had occurred over the last fifteen years. Unfailingly, Chieu hastened to refute such accusations. In an unmistakable, if oblique, swipe at Phan Boi Chau, Chieu declared in 1923: "Some people advocate obtaining independence through the gun, I advocate obtaining it through culture."⁹⁹

Bui Quang Chieu's personal experience had turned him into an ardent assimilationist who lost few opportunities to proclaim his loyalty to France. In his view, the French had the right to rule over the Vietnamese by virtue of their white skin and their inherent moral superiority. Even when faced with blatant miscarriages of justice caused by the settlers' insistence on preserving French prestige, Bui Quang Chieu could only reiterate his love of order and his faith in the rule of law. To the end, Chieu could not sympathize with efforts to make the

romanized script the official written language of Vietnam. He saw it as an unnecessary delay on the road to complete fluency in French, the language of the ruling class and therefore the only one worth knowing. He even admitted that he very seldom read the Vietnamese-language press.¹⁰⁰ His detractors claimed that he seldom spoke his native tongue, either. Having opted for total assimilation, Chieu was utterly uninterested in cultural matters. For all his pride in his education, he was not an intellectual and cared little about what children were learning, as long as they attended school. He was an ardent supporter of educational expansion: "Schools, more schools, always more schools!" was the motto of the Constitutionalists.¹⁰¹ In the wake of Sarraut's educational reforms, Chieu had opened a private Franco-Annamite school of his own. However, for him, the goal of education was not political empowerment for the masses, but the ascendancy of the Western-educated bourgeoisie over the remnants of the Confucian elite. Others, like Pham Quynh in Tonkin, might wish for a more "judicious blending of East and West." Such questions do not seem to have bothered Chieu; on that issue, his perceived adversaries were the settlers. He had enough trouble already fending off their warnings that mass education would merely teach the natives to rebel against their masters. On the contrary, he argued, spreading French ideas among the Vietnamese could only bind the latter closer to France. Recognizing the "moral superiority of the French," Chieu editorialized:

By inculcating French ideas in the minds of the Indochinese peoples, there need be no fear that we will see a reawakening of Annamite nationalism, for it can be satisfied with the present regime which suits our collective aspirations much better than the *ancien régime* could have . . . Now that we have shown France our deep attachment to her, now that we have brought her irrefutable proofs of our loyalty, we come to respectfully but firmly ask of the protector nation: "Educate us, as you educate your own children . . . Tell us what we must pay so that the Annamites do not remain the least educated people in East Asia despite French protection. Our rice fields are rich, our plains are fertile; we want to have schools that are worthy of you and of us. Then our happiness will be complete."¹⁰²

Though Bui Quang Chieu's detractors dismissed him as nothing more than a French puppet, he was above all an articulate advocate

of the interests of his class. As the mouthpiece for this assimilationist, but also increasingly assertive, bourgeoisie, *Tribune Indigène* was perceived as such a thorn in the side of the colonial regime that in 1919, acting Governor-General Georges Maspéro, a less liberal administrator than Sarraut, decided to fund another newspaper with the hope that its publisher would prove less cantankerous.¹⁰³ The man chosen for the job was Nguyen Phan Long, a self-taught employee of the Customs service, who was an occasional contributor to *Tribune Indigène*. Despite its beginning, Long's journal, *Echo Annamite*, quickly became more critical than *Tribune Indigène* had ever been, for it reflected more closely the concerns and experiences of Long's fellow civil servants. Though resentful of their subordinate status and often demeaning jobs, these colonial clerks were nonetheless afraid of losing what status and jobs they had. Their ambivalence was fully reflected in Long's personality. Although less elitist than Bui Quang Chieu, he was only mildly effective as a reformist editor. He had the pompous manner of the autodidact, yet at the same time lacked Chieu's abundant self-assurance.

Thus neither Bui Quang Chieu nor Nguyen Phan Long was an assertive presence. Caught between the intransigence of the settlers, the pressure of the colonial administration, and their own dislike for "mob rule and anarchy," which made them unwilling to mobilize popular opinion in support of even the most modest demands for reforms, both men were forced to walk a political tightrope. As far as the authorities were concerned, they were meant to perform a necessary function as counterweights against the sometimes unbearable pressure exerted by the settlers. The head of the Cochinchinese Sûreté observed to the incoming Governor in 1921: "In a certain sense, an opposition is a desirable thing. It is good for a democratic government to face an opposition in order to balance it, stimulate it, and control it. The Apostle has already uttered these profound words: 'there is a need for heretics.' The evil does not lie in the existence of an opposition; it lies in the absence of a counterweight to this opposition so that it is allowed to become strong enough to impede, paralyze or distort the actions of the government. We need heretics, but not too many."¹⁰⁴

Tame heretics: this was the role allotted Bui Quang Chieu, Nguyen Phan Long, and the bourgeois politicians who rallied around them under the banner of Constitutionalism. Bui Quang Chieu regularly sought reassurances from the Cochinchinese Sûreté that his criticisms

did not trespass the bounds of gubernatorial tolerance and invariably toned down his editorials when he was told they did.¹⁰⁵ For all of his much-prized French citizenship, Bui Quang Chieu's position was thus as precarious as that of any other Vietnamese, all the more so since he was still employed in the Indochinese bureaucracy as an agronomist. In January 1925, he was transferred against his will to Phnom Penh in retaliation for having headed a successful campaign to defeat a scheme by Maurice Cognacq, the Governor of Cochinchina, to grant monopoly rights to a French consortium to develop new facilities in the port of Saigon. Chieu agonized for a whole month, for he had just invested a considerable fortune so that *Tribune Indigène* could appear five days a week instead of three; but, in the end, loath to be dismissed from office so close to the date of his retirement, he meekly went to Phnom Penh.¹⁰⁶ The newly expanded *Tribune Indigène* folded almost immediately.

Tradition and Innovation: The Northern Literati

For Sarraut, French settlers posed fewer problems in the North than in the South. They were less numerous in the North, and could be fended off with the intricacies of the protectorate system. Nor, in 1917, were there yet enough graduates of Franco-Annamite schools to sustain a French-language publication similar to *Tribune Indigène* or *Echo Annamite*. At any rate, the Vietnamese whose opinion Sarraut and Marty sought to court were not the few who were already won over to the cause of French rule, but the far more influential classical scholars whose hopes of appointment to the imperial mandarinat had disappeared along with the examination system, and whose erudition was becoming obsolete. There was a risk that, out of a sense of intellectual disaffection and blighted career prospects, formerly quiescent scholars would unite with their anticolonial, antimonarchical brethren to spearhead a backlash against the reforms instituted by Sarraut. *Southern Wind* was meant to serve as a haven for these disoriented scholars, as well as a means of rallying local public opinion behind the idea of Franco-Annamite collaboration.

Pham Quynh, who was selected as publisher of *Southern Wind*, had first caught the eye of Louis Marty when he was writing for Nguyen van Vinh's *Indochina Review*. Pham Quynh, who was born in Tonkin in 1892, came from a prestigious lineage that went back to the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁷ His great-grandfather, an educational officer during

the reign of Emperor Minh Mang (1820–1840), was included in the “Twenty-Four Exemplars of Filial Piety” (*Nhi thap tu hieu*) by Hoang Thai Xuyen.¹⁰⁸ Pham Quynh might have followed in his ancestors' footsteps and become a mandarin had he not lost both his parents before he was ten. Instead of providing him with a classical education, his paternal grandmother enrolled him at the age of twelve in the School of Interpreters. Four years later, he had acquired a good command of French and of the romanized script, and a basic knowledge of Chinese. A Certificate of Primary Education in hand, he went to work at the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient. In 1913, while still working at the Ecole Française, he joined the editorial staff of *Indochina Review*.

In 1915, Pham Quynh and Nguyen Ba Trac, another contributor to *Indochina Review*, were selected by Marty to publish a Chinese-language “History of the War in Europe.” It was designed to counter German influence in China, where France had a number of concessions, and among the Chinese-reading public of Tonkin. When Sarraut decided to look for means of both sustaining Indochinese support for the war and publicizing his program of reforms, Pham Quynh was chosen, at Marty's suggestion, to receive funds. He proceeded to launch *Southern Wind*. The first issue of the journal, which appeared monthly, bore the phrase “The Annamite Dragon spits out silver to overthrow the German bandits,” which had been adopted as the slogan of the fund-raising campaign for the war.¹⁰⁹ In the second issue, Duong Ba Trac, one of the journal's early contributors, piously wrote: “Pray that God protect our adoptive mother so that she may destroy all the demons and restore our nation.”¹¹⁰ Only nine years earlier, the same Duong Ba Trac had declared that it did not matter if the country had no father.

Unlike *Tribune Indigène*, which was written entirely in French, *Southern Wind* came in three parts: one French, one Vietnamese, and one Chinese. The first, always the shortest, was the least interesting; often, it merely reiterated what was contained in the Vietnamese section. At the beginning, the Chinese section featured important scholarship, but once *Southern Wind* had fulfilled its mission of wooing the Confucian literati, it became what Pham Quynh had always wanted it to be: a journal written primarily in the Vietnamese vernacular of which he was an ardent champion. Since it was essentially a Vietnamese-language paper, it was subject to prior censorship and was theoretically not allowed to discuss political matters. In fact,

Southern Wind was meant to represent official French views on matters of domestic and international politics.¹¹¹ Within the limited compass in which Pham Quynh operated, *Southern Wind* seems to have changed direction with each successive Governor-General. One critic charged in 1930: "Following only the wind causes the ship to change ideology as often as people change shirts."¹¹² Yet, if Pham Quynh was effective in carrying out a program mapped out by the colonial authorities, it was because his political shifts were fairly trivial, and because he sincerely believed in the cultural line he propounded.

Unlike *Tribune Indigène*, which sought to engage the authorities and the French settlers in dialogue, *Southern Wind* was directed exclusively at the Vietnamese themselves. Pham Quynh was not concerned with political representation, which was unavailable to natives of the protectorates, but with finding solutions to the acute cultural malaise from which, everyone now realized, the nation suffered. He wrote, "the nation is like a ship in the middle of a wide river; it has long ago left one shore, but it is still far from the other."¹¹³ It was Pham Quynh's self-imposed duty to guide it through the perilous journey from the shore of tradition to the shore of modernity. Pham Quynh shared with Nguyen van Vinh and Bui Quang Chieu the belief that Vietnamese society was backward, and that many of its customs and mores bordered on the barbaric. Before they could be considered mature enough for self-rule, the Vietnamese would have to undergo a thoroughgoing cultural transformation. Indeed, he argued that without that transformation, it would be useless for the Vietnamese to win political concessions from the French, for these would not take hold.¹¹⁴ But he did not believe that assimilation was the solution to Vietnam's cultural backwardness.

What Pham Quynh wanted was to strike a proper balance between native tradition and Western modernity, for those were the terms in which he conceived Vietnam's cultural dilemma. Like so many others, he had been influenced by Social Darwinism. Phan Boi Chau had opted to work for the survival of the Vietnamese nation. Pham Quynh worried over the survival of Vietnamese culture and the preservation of what he considered to be its national essence (*quoc tuy*).

Pham Quynh had been deeply affected by Tagore's call for a new culture based on a synthesis of what was best in East and West. A disseminator of Western learning of fairly catholic tastes (because he accepted the inherent superiority of all things Western), he was particularly concerned with isolating what was best in Eastern culture.

In this he followed the traditional (and elitist) habit of thinking in East Asian rather than purely Vietnamese terms. From his copious delving into contemporary Chinese writings, but without acknowledging his intellectual debts, Pham Quynh had absorbed the idea of preserving the national essence.

But it was national essence with a major difference. The Vietnamese national essence movement was, like much of 1920s politics, a purely elite phenomenon. Its interpretation of tradition was more narrow than in China. Leaders of the Chinese National Essence Movement such as Liang Shu-ming were receptive to Western intellectual influences, but they were also classically trained scholars, for whom Confucian learning was still a living and diverse tradition. Furthermore, their interpretation of national essence was not limited to Confucianism, but was broad and inclusive. It contained a strong agrarian and democratic component which manifested itself variously in the campaign for the vernacular and in other efforts to bridge the gap between elite and popular cultures, between intellectuals and peasants.¹¹⁵ The 1904 manifesto of the Reform Movement, *The Civilization of New Learning*, had criticized the Vietnamese for neglecting rural conditions; since then, the countryside had become a target for reform but was not viewed as a source of knowledge. Had Vietnamese neo-traditionalists valued rural mores and institutions more, they might have come up with a different understanding of national essence. But Pham Quynh and other neo-traditionalists had no interest in returning to Vietnam's agrarian roots. They shared their contemporaries' almost unanimous conviction that the village was the repository of antiquated and downright harmful customs and usages. Though Pham Quynh did not advocate turning the village into an approximation of a French municipality as did Bui Quang Chieu and his southern supporters, his journal published numerous proposals for reforming village institutions, and these invariably began with a catalogue of the evils of rural life.

For Vietnamese neo-traditionalists, the national essence of their country was synonymous with Confucianism. But even in the etiolated Vietnamese context, it was a pale echo of the more muscular Confucianism that had flourished in the nineteenth century. With the end of the civil service examinations, interest in classical scholarship was being kept alive by a dwindling band of Confucian literati. Waning interest in the study of the Chinese language and difficulties in obtaining Chinese-language materials caused by an overzealous cen-

sorship bureau cut off Vietnamese scholars from much of their literary and philosophical heritage and from ongoing Chinese cultural debates. As a result, the meaning of Confucianism became so impoverished that what came to be understood by that term was a certain type of morality which emphasized decorum, orderliness, family relationships, and reciprocity, and could be encapsulated in a few mottoes: the Three Bonds, the Five Cardinal Precepts, the Three Submissions, the Four Virtues. It had become a set of behavioral principles and had lost its potency as a personal philosophy or method of government. Its detractors called it "ossified Confucianism" (*hư nhô*). Yet, whether they defended tradition or attacked it, commentators from all sides believed that tradition began and ended with this particular brand of Confucianism.

Pham Quynh scorned the idea that the sum total of human knowledge could be found in the Four Classics and strove to define a new culture for a modernizing Vietnam. He interpreted national essence as a vaguely defined blend of Vietnamese literature, Confucian morality, family institutions, and modestly progressive education in the Vietnamese vernacular rather than in Chinese or French. His motto was: "As long as our language endures, our country will endure." His ardent advocacy of the romanized script as the language of choice in the school curriculum led him to seek to enrich the Vietnamese vernacular with neologisms borrowed from China (and ultimately Japan). He enthusiastically welcomed Merlin's establishment of Vietnamese-language education at the elementary level. When he became Imperial Minister of Education in 1932, he argued strenuously against the extension of French-language education to Annam. Pham Quynh liked to think of himself as a cultural innovator, but his obsession with protecting what he imagined to be the national essence and his advocacy of old-fashioned morality made him Vietnam's foremost neo-traditionalist. Although lacking classical credentials, he was closer in spirit to the conservatives he was supposed to woo than to the progressives among whom he imagined himself to be. At heart he belonged to the transitional generation of scholars of New Learning like Nguyen van Vinh, who, having once pioneered Western education, now saw salvation in the reaffirmation of traditional values.

Southern Wind was neatly complemented by the Hanoi-based Association for the Intellectual and Moral Formation of the Annamites (Hoi Khai Tri Tien Duc), also known by its French acronym, AFIMA. The creation of AFIMA in 1919 was the work of a group of high-

ranking mandarins, including Hoang Trong Phu and Than Trong Hue, an uncle of Emperor Khai Dinh. In 1922, Hoang Trong Phu served as its president, but the real decision-makers within the Association were its vice-president, Nguyen van Vinh, and its secretary-general, Pham Quynh, who represented AFIMA at the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition that year. Because culture was a form of politics in colonial Vietnam, it is no surprise that the guiding hand behind AFIMA belonged to the ubiquitous Marty, who had put the idea of creating AFIMA in the minds of its founders in the first place.¹¹⁶ Nguyen van Vinh thus explained AFIMA's mandate:

We must constantly react against the demoralization that could result from too rapid Westernization, which would destroy the framework of our national past without substituting a new discipline for the old one. We are abruptly introducing a sense of responsibility and a critical spirit among individuals who belong to a collectivity which, for centuries, practiced blind self-effacement before family, clan, village, ruler. We must not lose our balance when the notion of individual rights penetrates a world where everything was sacrificed to duties toward the collective, cleverly hierarchical, structures which formed the Annamite social edifice.¹¹⁷

Considering himself no less a patriot than Phan Boi Chau, Pham Quynh shared the southern collaborationists' abhorrence of violence and disorder. He was not opposed to change on principle. He understood that a certain amount of disarray was unavoidable, but if change was introduced gradually, disorder and anomie could be averted. In 1930, he explained his motto as follows: "We must ensure that in the process of constant progress, society remains stable and peaceful."¹¹⁸ His interpretation of order was anchored in traditional thinking: a state of equilibrium, of harmony, and above all an absence of disorder (*loạn*). *Disorder* in the Vietnamese language is a term that is almost protean in its range of meanings. It can mean simple untidiness; mental or emotional confusion; immorality, or amorality; disorderliness; lawlessness; political unrest and rebellion; cosmic disorder. In its most profound and broadest sense, it means total chaos, anarchy and anomie encompassing the individual, society, the world, the cosmos.

Despite the difference in their preferred language of expression, Pham Quynh and Bui Quang Chieu shared a static notion of order which boiled down to the absence of visible disorder. They did not

delve below this surface calm to look for deeper tensions. Notwithstanding their reservations about specific aspects of colonialism, they feared the disruptive effect of too rapid change even more, and thus were drawn to adopting a collaborationist stance. Both were reluctant to rock the colonial boat lest they find themselves engulfed in treacherous waters. They were unwilling to confront the possibility that colonial rule was inimical to true order. Paradoxically, they had married their static notion of order to the dynamism of the Social Darwinian vision of history to produce a rationale for prolonged colonial rule: by reason of their superiority, the French had earned the right to be in Vietnam. Their continued presence was needed to provide stability while the country was in the throes of cultural transformation. Through this theoretical sleight of hand, the collaborationists transformed the predatory conqueror into a nurturing father, setting aside the notion that the struggle for survival is a constant state of war and precarious equilibrium. In the process, order became as morally suspect as the other values and institutions they tried to uphold.

The Making of Prodigal Children

Although they occupied opposite ends of the cultural spectrum, Bui Quang Chieu and Pham Quynh set the burden of colonialism squarely on Vietnamese shoulders. Chieu urged total assimilation; Pham Quynh called for the preservation of tradition even while he blamed the backwardness of Vietnamese society and culture for colonial conquest. It was a burden that, increasingly, young Vietnamese refused to bear.

Concerned as he was with the survival of Vietnamese culture, Pham Quynh wanted to exert an influence over Vietnam's youth. But his chosen persona ill-fitted him to serve as their mentor. He was not much older than they—he was only thirty-one at the time he spoke about the moral malaise of Vietnamese youth, though with nearly a decade of involvement in journalism behind him. Yet he had turned himself into a pundit, honing an editorial style which seldom betrayed traces of youthful excess. Only occasionally, as in his account of his 1922 trip to France, did he become carried away by enthusiasm, leading later observers to marvel that he had ever been young.¹¹⁹ Usually he spoke in measured accents, as befitted his chosen mission as Vietnam's premier cultural arbiter and teacher, with *Southern Wind* as his pulpit and the whole country as his parish.

Pham Quynh underestimated the extent of Vietnam's cultural crisis. Baffled by the melancholy which seemed to hold Vietnam's youth in its grip, he attributed it to youthful self-centeredness. Such a conclusion left him unable to empathize with those caught in the maelstrom of change. Pham Quynh still thought in terms of obligations embedded in networks of relationships. Why should young people be despondent? He thought there were several possible reasons for their sadness: unfulfilled, unattainable ideals; a dull daily life; and unhealthy bodies which rendered them prone to vicarious sorrowing over fictional tragedies.¹²⁰ Were young people depressed because they had failed in their exams? Because they could not find employment? Because their lovers were faithless or their valued friends turned out to be cheats? Or because they had not yet found spouses? If so, Pham Quynh maintained that these were petty and unimportant reasons for apathy and sorrow. "Melancholy is justified when great enterprises that are undertaken remain unfinished. But what has today's youth done to justify its sadness?"¹²¹ Many youths, chafing under parental authority, pressured into suitable but loveless marriages, and pushed into demeaning bureaucratic jobs for the sake of providing for their families, found in their predicament cause enough for despondency. But Pham Quynh, proud of his past and orphaned at a young age, had never experienced the full weight of patriarchal authority and was unable to comprehend the demoralizing effects of familism coupled with colonial rule. Illogically for a man who fashioned his politics after those of whichever Governor-General happened to be in power, he trotted out heroes of Vietnam's tradition of resistance to foreign rule as examples of great men who had earned the right to feel despondent over their unfulfilled ambitions. Happy with his personal circumstances, he refused to see that, by his standards, the only great enterprise whose failure would have justified dejection was the overthrow of colonial rule.

The family had become the last bastion of traditional values and the repository of career ambitions that had remained intact despite the change of regime. The less parents understood what their children were learning at school, the more functionalist a view they took of education. Its content might have become inaccessible, but it still served as a path into the civil service and as a means of advancing the interests of one's family. This purely pragmatic view of education has found echoes in a number of interpretations of the origins of the Vietnamese Revolution. Thus, a strike that took place in 1927 has been

described as "a student assertion of elite status . . . Their vision of an elite was not one that bowed and scraped and allowed itself to be bullied. The strike was a clear and simple statement that students wanted to be a real elite, not minor fonctionnaires."¹²²

But there is a different interpretation for student unrest. Caught in the cross fire of old expectations and alien ideas, young Vietnamese were becoming aware of the pervasiveness of what the anarchist Kropotkin called "conventional lies." Although fathers no longer shared with teachers common ideas on how to promote the intellectual and moral development of their sons, at the least hint of unruliness, they were called in to bring their offspring into line. Students were appalled to see their fathers, including high-ranking mandarins, abase themselves in front of the school authorities, abusive and unjust though the latter had been. Few had the heart (or nerve) to confront their own fathers, but they had less compunction about lashing out at others'. Nguyen Thuong Huyen, a *cu nhon* degree-holder whose father was a magistrate in Ha Dong, wrote an anonymous letter to the provincial governor to castigate the mandarins of Vinh Yen for kowtowing to visiting French officials, thus forcing all other Vietnamese present to follow suit.¹²³ Perhaps the students who jeered when mandarins kowtowed in front of their teachers were less unsettled by the prospect of bleak futures devoid of power than by the discrepancy between Confucian ideals and colonial reality, the undisputed power of the paterfamilias at home and the abject servility of the mandarin abroad.

Many were consumed by guilt over their lives of idle privilege and were appalled to discover that their own fathers were oppressive and corrupt. Indeed, the ranks of the Vietnamese Revolution contained an unusual number of sons and daughters of the Confucian elite. Nguyen The Truyen is perhaps the prime example of this group of early participants in the Revolution. Truyen, named delegate for Indochina in the French Communist Party in 1923, was fifteen when his grandfather, the governor of Thai Binh province, was killed in 1913 by adherents of the Restoration League.¹²⁴ Truyen could not have failed to know that his grandfather was held in deepest contempt by his peers. As the *Sûreté* delicately put it, "the governor of Thai Binh was known among the natives for his devotion to the Protectorate and for the sternness with which he had suppressed the activities of instigators of disorder."¹²⁵

In order to account for this preponderance of children of Vietnam's

Confucian elite among the leadership of the Revolution, a number of scholars have eschewed the idea that it had its origins in their frustrated career ambitions, and have discerned instead continuities between Confucianism and communism which eased the transition from the one to the other. Chief among these was the Confucian preoccupation with moral action and collective welfare. This preoccupation, however, could take many guises. Piety and loyalty could lead to collaboration as easily as they did to rebellion. Those who argue for continuity tend to emphasize a linear progression from Phan Dinh Phung, through the Reform Movement, to the Vietnamese Youth League and eventually the Indochinese Communist Party. But Phan Dinh Phung, deeply conservative as a regent, was ahead of his time as an advocate of fatherland over family, an exception rather than the norm among his peers. Depending on circumstances, filial piety could lead to avoidance of political engagement in favor of personal advancement; it could mean following one's father into opposing foreign rule; or it could mean attempting to redeem a father's shameful acquiescence to that rule through rebellion. Indeed, rebellion and conformity coexisted within the same families—sometimes within the same individual. Fathers who deeply disapproved of their offsprings' activities seldom cut off their funds.¹²⁶

But there were also those for whom anticolonialism was a family tradition. They were often the sons and daughters of rural literati rather than of high-ranking mandarins. The prestige of rural scholars may have been reinforced by the disappearance of the examination system. Such scholars were typically described as lower degree-holders or men of high learning and probity who had failed to win a degree, the implication being that they were worthy of greater recognition. Sometimes, their marginal position within the new colonial order was due to their refusal to compromise their principles. Despite the disappearance of their schools and academies, they still managed to spread anticolonial, antimonarchical propaganda. They passed on their political values to their children, but not their cultural vocabulary, which had been publicly appropriated by conservative accommodationists. When it came time for their children to express their patriotic feelings, they did so, like the rest of their peers, in the language of iconoclasm. Nguyen Khac Vien, the Communist son of a Confucian scholar, tried to explain the success of Communist ideology in Vietnam by pointing out the ways in which it resonated with Confucian values; but he also recalled his early distaste for what

passed for tradition in the 1920s, a distaste he had shared with others of his generation and which their elders failed to comprehend.¹²⁷

In 1920, when the radicalization of Vietnamese youth was just beginning, an elderly scholar named Nguyen Ba Hoc wrote to *Southern Wind* to warn of the pitfalls of Westernization. Vietnam, declared Hoc, was like a grand old house bequeathed by parents to their children, who had allowed it to become dilapidated. The children had then cast covetous eyes on someone else's beautiful house, and decided to destroy their own and build a new one like it. But they did not know how to go about it, and the new house let in the wind and rain.¹²⁸ The real problem, however, was not that the house of Vietnam had become leaky, but that conservative scholars like Nguyen Ba Hoc had accepted the presence of the usurper for the long term. The older generation's obsequious gratitude toward the Mother Country (*Mau Quoc*) of Great France (*Dai Phap*) was the very reason that younger Vietnamese had lost interest in preserving the paternal house. Huynh Kim Khanh continues the metaphor: "Unlike his counterparts elsewhere, [the Vietnamese radical] had no home to return to. His inheritance was a home destroyed and a soil desecrated by bandits. His memory was haunted by the shameful resignation of his elders to colonialism. The Vietnamese radical of the 1920s had to face a task not borne by radicals elsewhere: he had to dislodge the bandits and construct a new home."¹²⁹

Furthermore, if the young were estranged from their roots, it was the result of a culturalist strategy of adaptation to French rule shared by accommodationists and anticolonialists alike. For, despite the upheavals that successive waves of reform had caused in the educational system, one theme remained constant: self-cultivation was the first step toward bringing order to All-Under-Heaven. This strategy of adaptation had created such a burden of conflicting values and expectations that it left the youth of Vietnam disoriented, not knowing what its beliefs ought to be or where its loyalties ought to lie: a youth with a divided self. Whatever qualms their evident crisis of faith might provoke, the students were universally deemed to represent the future of the country. Thus they easily persuaded themselves that their plight was the plight of the nation, that their efforts to emancipate themselves from all forms of authority would advance the cause of national independence, and that a new order would arise from their struggle toward self-realization. Out of this marriage of the personal and the political emerged the urban radicalism of the 1920s.