

# Hanoi identity and the influence of French culture and civilization

**Ho Si Quy**

Prof. Dr., the Central Theoretical Council; Institute of Social Sciences Information, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences

Email: hosiquy.thongtin@gmail.com

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**Abstract:** *The historical values of Hanoi since the founding of the capital by Ly Cong Uan are deeply embedded in the minds of each and everyone of us, which we often evoke whenever interacting with relics and cultural heritage. But many of Hanoi's monuments and heritages have now become almost symbols, like physical shells that store the consciousness of many generations. Compared with cultural heritages worldwide and in neighboring countries, heritage sites such as Hoan Kiem Lake, Temple of Literature - Quoc Tu Giam, Nung Mountain, Co Loa Temple and Quan Chuong Gate are mostly "value carrier" of the history with few visual traces of tangible values. Meanwhile, the heritage associated with the French colonial period are majestic constructions that still retain a lot of tangible values. These include Hanoi's famous tourist attractions, namely the Trumpet House, Opera House, Hoa Lo Prison, Hang Co Station, Long Bien Bridge, Hanoi Cathedral, Dong Xuan Market, where one can find both tangible and intangible values. Thus, it will be hard to understand Hanoi's identities without connecting to the French culture and civilization that still remain in the urban life therein.*

**Keywords:** Hanoi's Identities, French Traces in Hanoi, Indochina Style, Hanoi Urban and Culture

## 1. Context

Ha Noi has a history of over a thousand years of civilization, dating back to when it became the capital under Emperor Ly Cong Uan, who relocated the capital to Thang Long. However, as a central urban area of the country, the "soul" and appearance of Ha Noi, compared to other cities, are defined by material and spiritual values that have shaped the distinctive character and development orientation of the capital city, which for more than half

a century had received strong influence from French culture and civilization. Thus, Ha Noi's identity could be considered a harmonious blend, a seamless integration, and a seemingly forced amalgamation that has become appropriate over time. This harmony exists between the "classic and magnificent" features of Europe and the historical values preserved over the years by the people and culture of Ha Noi. For some, there is a sense of nostalgia regarding a Ha Noi that was once a colonial

territory under the domination of French colonialists - and this nostalgia intertwines in a complex way with the city's pride in its familiarity with Paris and its glamorous vibe resembling that of European cities. The European imprint in the heart of Ha Noi compared to other cities in the region has made Ha Noi a destination for many tourists. Today, Ha Noi is much larger than it was in the previous century, yet few consider Ha Noi's identity to feature any cultural features of its surround suburbs. Instead, it predominantly reflects what Ha Noi has constructed throughout its history and in the previous century.

This poses a challenge when defining Ha Noi's identity.

## **2. The history of Ha Noi**

Hoa Lu served as the capital for two dynasties: Dinh (968-980) and Tien Le (980-1009). Just one year after ascending to the throne in Hoa Lu, in 1010, Ly Thai To relocated the capital to Dai La and named it Thang Long. In just over a century, Thang Long became a dynamic and bustling political center, adorned with numerous monumental structures, such as the construction of Dien Huu Temple in 1049, Bao Thien Pagoda in 1057, the Temple of Literature in 1070, Quoc Tu Giam in 1076, and others (See: Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, 1998a, Vol. I, Ly Dynasty Era).

During the Tran Dynasty, Thang Long expanded with the addition of 61 districts, and many palaces were constructed within the Imperial Citadel. The economy, trade, and commerce flourished, attracting residents from diverse backgrounds, including ethnic Chinese, Javanese, and Indians, who engaged in trading activities. A middle-class urban population began to emerge during this period. Prominent

scholars of the era included Han Thuyen, Le Van HUU, and Chu Van An. During the resistance against the Mongols, Thang Long faced threats of occupation by the Mongol Yuan forces for three occasions (in January 1258, February-May 1285, and February-March 1288), but in the end Dai Viet achieved the final victory (Refer from: Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, 1998b, Vol. II, Tran Dynasty period).

In 1398, Ho Quy Ly relocated the capital from Thang Long to Thanh Hoa. Between 1400 and 1407, Thang Long was renamed Dong Do. During the Ming invasion (1407-1427), Thang Long was renamed Dong Quan. In 1426, Le Loi led an expedition to Dong Quan, subsequently liberating the city in January 1428. In April 1428, Le Loi moved from Bo De Palace (Gia Lam) to Dong Do, where he ascended to the throne as the Emperor, reinstating the nation's name as Dai Viet. In 1430, Dong Do was renamed Dong Kinh. Over the next century, the Le Dynasty made significant contributions to the construction and development of Ha Noi (Refer from: Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, 1998b, Vol. II, Late Tran Dynasty period). During the period of power struggles between the Le Dynasty, the Mac Dynasty, and the Trinh Lords (1527-1789), Thang Long remained the capital city. In addition to the Royal Citadel of the Le Kings, the Trinh Lord's palace was constructed and became the new center of political power. Despite the complex political landscape and numerous internal conflicts between the Le-Mac and Trinh-Nguyen factions, the economy of Thang Long and Dai Viet continued to thrive. The designation "Thăng Long (Thang Long Citadel) and Kê Chợ (Ke Cho town)", along with the verse "Nhất

Kinh kỳ, nhì Phố Hiến” (The Capital is the most bustling, followed by Pho Hien) reflected the foreign trade development of that era. The intellectual class held a relatively prominent position, with enduring figures such as Doan Thi Diem, Dang Tran Con, Ngo Thi Si, Bui Huy Bich, Le Quy Don, among others. In 1786, the Tay Son forces marched north to overthrow the Trinh Lords, ending the two-century division between Dang Trong and Dang Ngoai. In 1788, China’s Qing Dynasty invaded, and Nguyen Hue ascended to power, leading the northern campaign that resulted in the victory at Ngoc Hoi - Dong Da, defeating the Qing forces. The Tay Son Dynasty ruled with a new capital in Phu Xuan, renaming Thang Long as “Bắc Thành“.

When Gia Long ascended to the throne in 1802, the capital was still in Phu Xuan. In 1805, Gia Long downsized Thang Long and constructed according to the French Vauban architectural style, and some of its traces remain evident today (Phan Dinh Phung, Hung Vuong, Tran Phu, and Phung Hung streets). In 1831, Minh Mang initiated administrative reforms, restructuring the country into 29 provinces, with Thang Long falling under Ha Noi Province, consisting of 4 prefectures and 15 districts. The name Ha Noi originated from this point. Agriculture was still a part of the capital’s economy, but actually commerce and craftsmanship were the primary drivers of urban development in Ha Noi. Several city gates were reconstructed, and various religious and spiritual edifices, such as the Ngoc Son Temple (1841) and the Bao An Pagoda (1846), were constructed (See: Dao Thi Dien, 2022; Masson, 1929).

On September 1, 1858, the French initiated an armed attack on Da Nang, invading

Vietnam and subsequently capturing three provinces in the Southeast region. On June 5, 1862, the Hue court signed the Nham Tuat Treaty, recognizing French sovereignty in Gia Tuong, Bien Hoa, and Con Dao. In November 1873, French forces, led by Francis Garnier, launched an offensive on Ha Noi. This marked the first French attack on Ha Noi, when Nguyen Tri Phuong displayed steadfast resistance. On November 20, 1873, Ha Noi fell into French hands, and Garnier expanded the conquest by capturing Hung Yen on November 23, 1873, Phu Ly on November 26, 1873, Hai Duong on December 3, 1873, Ninh Binh on December 5, 1873, and Nam Dinh on December 12, 1873. On December 21, 1873, Garnier was killed near Ngoc Khanh Lake. Right after, in 1874, when the Treaty of Giap Tuat was signed with the Hue court, the French were compelled to withdraw from Ha Noi. On August 31, 1875, the Nguyen dynasty signed a land concession treaty with the French for the area where they established their garrison and constructed the embassy near Thuy Don (present-day Huu Nghi Hospital). Several of the earliest French architectural structures in Ha Noi can still be found within the compound of the 108 Hospital. By 1884, when the Nguyen dynasty signed the Treaty of Giap Than and officially enforced French protection over the entire territory of Vietnam, Ha Noi entered the colonial era. On April 24, 1882, the French launched the second attack on Ha Noi, and Governor-General Hoang Dieu committed suicide in the failure to protect the city (See: Bourrin, 1941).

The French dismantled the Bao Thien Pagoda, with a history dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, to construct the Grand Cathedral (in 1884). They also demolished

the Bao An Pagoda to erect the Northern Administrative Palace (Phủ Thống sứ Bắc kỳ) and the Postal Office (in 1889).

On July 19, 1888, French President Sadi Carnot issued a decree establishing the city of Ha Noi, comprising the two districts of Tho Xuong and Vinh Thuan under the jurisdiction of Hoai Duc province. The historical Ha Noi, the old capital of Thang Long, was transformed into a French colonial territory. On December 13, 1897, Paul Doumer assumed office in Ha Noi as the Governor-General of Dong Duong (1897-1902), and his tenure is acknowledged for significant contributions to the development of Ha Noi and Vietnam during that period. On May 3, 1902, the provincial capital of Ha Noi relocated to Cau Do, forming Cau Do province; in 1904, it was renamed Ha Dong province. In 1902, Ha Noi became the capital of the Indochinese Union. The French undertook urban planning in Ha Noi, giving it a new facelift. The city had suffered considerable damage in the past, with only landmarks like the Flagpole, the Northern Gate, the Doan Mon Gate, and stone dragon railings surviving within the old citadel walls (See: Bourrin, 1941).

According to Warren Smith, in his renowned book *European Settlements in the Far East* published in 1900, he provides a detailed description of Ha Noi at that time:

“Hanoi, the capital of Tonkin, and now the seat of Government for Indo - China, is situated on the Cai River, or Red River, 110 miles from its mouth. The city is built close to the river, here nearly a mile in width, and, owing to the lakes and trees interspersed, presents a rather picturesque appearance. The citadel occupies the highest site, and is surrounded by a brick wall twelve feet

high and a moat. It contains the barracks for the troops, arsenals, magazines, etc., and a royal pagoda stands within its enclosure. The ancient city is situated between the citadel and the river, and its streets present a novel appearance, owing to the singular architecture of the houses. Since the occupation by the French in 1882 great improvements have been effected in the laying out of the town and the formation of roads and streets. The district nearest the river is gradually assuming the appearance of a Franco-Oriental city. Long, wide new streets, planted with trees, and lighted by electricity, have been constructed, of which the Rue Paul Bert (present-day Trang Tien street) is the principal business thoroughfare, containing the chief European shops, hotels, etc. The Mairie, Post Office, Treasury, Club, and Band - stand are close to the Rue de Lac (present-day Hang Dau street). The Cathedral, a large but ugly edifice, with twin towers, is situated in a street at the back of the Rue Jules Ferry (present-day Hang Trong street), but being very lofty is a conspicuous object from most parts of the city. A fine bronze statue of Paul Bert was erected in the Place facing the Petit Lac (Hoan Kiem lake), and unveiled on the 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1890. The Petit Lac is a sheet of water in the middle of the new city, rendered picturesque by the quaint pagodas occupying the small islands which adorn it. There are fairly good hotels. In the native city the streets are well kept and very clean as compared with those of most Eastern cities. They are all lighted and drained. Some of the houses are very quaint and characteristic. Of the temples, that of the Grand Buddha (Quan Thanh temple) on the shore of the Grand Lac, is perhaps the most important, as it contains

a colossal bronze figure of the saint. A new Race Course, opened for use in 1890, has been formed just outside the new town. The residences of the Governor - General and Commander of the Troops, the Government Offices, the Hospital, and some other public buildings are situated on what was formerly "the Concession", near to the river bank. The population in 1897 was 102,700, of whom 950 were Europeans, 100,000 Annamites, 1697 Chinese, and 42 Indians. There are several French papers published in the town. Steamers run on the Songkoi as far as Laokai, near the Yunnan frontier, and a considerable transit trade is developing. A railway is now being made from Hanoi to Phu lang - thuong (Phu Lang Thuong), whence a line runs to Langson (Lang Son) and the Chinese frontier. A concession has been granted for the extension of the line to Lungchow, in Kwangsi" (Smith, 1900: 225-226).

According to Philippe Papin, in 1921, Ha Noi has about 4,000 Europeans and 100,000 local residents<sup>1</sup> (See: Papin, 2001:

<sup>1</sup> According to Warren Smith, "The population consists of at least 17,500,000, most of whom are Annamites, the Cambodians and Laotians coming next in about equal numbers. The Chinese number 150,000, and Europeans amount to a little over 6000. The Tonkinese are larger and more robust than the Cochin - Chinese, and more intelligent and active. The Chinese have immigrated in large numbers to the south of Cochin - China, where they have obtained almost the exclusive possession of industries and commerce. The Cambodians are naturally apathetic, and have given way to the Chinese and Annamites. The Laotians and Mois, oppressed by their neighbours and by their mandarin system, are lazy, timid, and suspicious. The Muongs, who occupy all the basins of the River Noire (Da river) and Song - ma (Ma river), are more handsome and robust than the Annamites, The Nuns (Nung) resemble the Chinese and the Thos (Tho) belong to the Kmer race (See: Smith, 1900: 222).

381). Together with French domination, Western culture and civilization made their way to Ha Noi, bringing significant transformations to the capital. More than just a medieval citadel, Ha Noi started to adopt the appearance of a European city. In the social aspect, in addition to foreign capitalists, a Vietnamese bourgeoisie emerged. The city increasingly became a center of national intellectual and spiritual life. Scientific research, higher education, journalism, music, painting, literature, sculpture, and various forms of European-style creative arts emerged. The number of intellectuals, scholars, and media professionals proficient in the French language grew steadily. Poets following the new poetry movement, composers, artists, and more, following European styles, gained prominence and many became famous in the intellectual and social life of Ha Noi and Vietnam as a whole.

### **3. The legacy of French culture and civilization in urban planning and architecture**

The French constructed Ha Noi according to three distinct phases of urban expansion: from 1875 to 1888, from 1888 to 1920, and from 1920 to 1942. Since the initial phase, alongside the development of concession areas, significant attention had been given to the planning and construction of Hoan Kiem Lake and the surrounding architectural structures. The 10-meter wide road encircling the lake and the restoration and construction of the northern ancient quarter were undertaken during this period (See: Pham Xanh, 2010).

However, based on the existing architectural landmarks, it is possible to categorize Ha Noi's urban planning and development into two main phases: before and after 1920.

Before 1920, the architectural landscape was characterized by a blend of European Neoclassical styles. In the early phase, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to pre-1920, especially during the tenure of Paul Doumer in Ha Noi (1897-1902), and as more French capitalists arrived, a series of major constructions were carried out by the French in Ha Noi: Dong Xuan Market (1889), St. Joseph's Cathedral (1884-1888), Long Bien bridge (1889-1902), Ha Noi Post Office (1893-1899), Hang Dau Water Tower (1894), Hoa Lo Prison (1895-1899, 1898-1901), Hang Co Railway Station (1899-1902), Metropole Hotel (1901), Godard Building on Trang Tien Street (1901), Ha Noi Opera House (1901-1911), Bank of Ha Noi (1918-1831), École Francaise d'Extreme-Orient (with multiple construction phases starting from 1905, now the Institute of Social Sciences Library), and more (See: Tran Quoc Bao, 2012; Dang Thai Hoang, 1995).

All of these structures are located within the Central Administrative Area I (present-day Hoan Kiem District), forming a complex of immense value, not only in terms of architecture but also in history, culture, and landscape. The distinctive architectural feature of these buildings in this area is their Neoclassical style. Another central area known as the Central Administrative Area II (present-day Ba Dinh) includes the Governor-General's Palace (1902-1906, now the Presidential Palace), the Indochina Financial Department (1924-1928, currently the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters), connected to Center I and Hoan Kiem Lake by the Paul Bert - Borgnis Desbordes - Puginier axis (now Trang Tien Street - Hang Khay - Trang Thi - Dien Bien Phu Street).

The second phase of Hanoi's urban planning and French architectural influence (from 1920 to 1954) is closely associated with the role of Ernest Hébrard (1875-1933), an architect who came to Vietnam in 1921 and served as the Director of the Indochina Architectural Planning Department (1921-1931) (See: Nguyen Thuan, 2016). The prominent feature of this period is the buildings that combine European and Asian styles, known as the Indochinese architectural style, which Hébrard is considered to have pioneered. Notable constructions of this era include the Vietnam History Museum (1926-1932), the Pasteur Institute (1927), the University of Indochina (1923-1926), the Louis Finot EFEO Museum (1925-1932, now the History Museum), the Indochina Financial Department (1924-1928), and Cua Bac Church (1925-1930), among others. Over time, these structures have been recognized as successful adaptations of architectural spaces that harmonize with Oriental culture (See: Tran Quoc Bao, 2012).

In addition to these iconic architectural constructions, the French also emphasized the creation of botanical gardens, squares, parks, flower gardens, and memorials that, to this day, continue to be effectively used and appreciated.

#### **4. The legacy of French culture and civilization in science and education**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the French colonial government in Vietnam planned to expand its dominion and explore further into the Orient, the distinctiveness of Vietnamese culture and its people became subjects of intensive research both by French and Vietnamese scholars.

There was an inherent sense of hubris in the belief that "Western culture and civilization

set the golden standard for the rest of the world” and that “superior nations have the mission of civilizing weaker nations“. The French could not completely dominate the indigenous peoples if the local governing apparatus remained uneducated and inferior. Moreover, as an integral part of “Mother France”, the social and cultural environment of the ruling class also needed to reach a certain level of civilization. In fact, French officials in Indochina sometimes even aspired to make Indochina a progressive society in the French way, meaning having qualities sufficient to captivate the attention of the mother land. In this regard, it is necessary to understand the socio-political context that the Western world began its quest for new lands since the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. Over the course of approximately three centuries, nearly the entire world, with its vastly different cultures, had been explored. There were many reasons cited to explain the expansion of European capitalism during this period, including both humanitarian and altruistic motives alongside the more ruthless ambitions of colonialism. It is not by chance that renowned scholars of extensive works on the history of human cultural development pointed out to readers worldwide that, “The expansionists had complex motives not unlike the Crusaders of old; and, like the Crusaders, they believed in some measure that they were doing the work of the Almighty” (Brinton et al., 1994: 337). In our view, this is a crucial point to understand why many large and seemingly powerful nations and peoples ultimately capitulated, submitted, and became subjects of Western colonialism. Furthermore, when the rulers were also scientists or cultural figures, the culture and

science in the colonized region operated under its own unique principles. The exploration of the distinctive characteristics of distant peoples has always been a fervent aspiration for all French and European scientists, especially in the fields of ethnology, archaeology, religious studies, linguistics, and more.

During that time, social scientists and humanists from France, particularly those specializing in fields like ethnology, archaeology, religious studies, and linguistics, were considered some of Europe’s foremost scholars.

The French School of the Far East (*École française d’Extreme-Orient*, EFEO) was established in Saigon in 1900, later moved to Hanoi in 1902, and was the precursor to all 18 EFEO centers in 13 countries around the world today. The building of the EFEO Library at 26 Ly Thuong Kiet street (Ha Noi) was constructed from 1905 and underwent several additional expansions. The Louis Finot Museum, a part of EFEO (now the Museum of History), started construction in 1925 and completed in 1932. In designing and constructing these unique projects, Ernest Hebrard undoubtedly sought not only to showcase his talents as an architect or an arts professor, but also to leave Hanoi with an impressive architectural foundation and build the foundation for French and local scientists to explore the Orient more deeply. EFEO conducted extensive research into Vietnamese culture and people, leaving behind invaluable scientific and cultural research results that have profound implications for future generations, so much that even Vietnamese experts in the social sciences and humanities today have not been able to build much more evidence on top of their existing work. Examples of

their work include studies on cultures like Hoa Binh, Bac Son, Dong Son, Sa Huynh, Oc Eo, Champa, and more, as well as research on the Tay Nguyen Highlands and discoveries related to the sacred site of My Son, the ancient stones of Sa Pa, and many others.

For almost a hundred years, the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* (B'EFEO) has become an indispensable source of reference for published work on the history and culture of Vietnam as well as Asia. Hanoi Medical University was founded in 1902. The University of Indochina (Université Indochinoise) was established in 1905 with a series of specialized schools subsequently established from 1905 to 1941, serving as the precursor to the later National University of Vietnam. Dong Duong School of Fine Arts was founded in 1924 and became the first center for fine arts in the region to follow Western models and standards for creativity. The Indochina Institute of Oceanography (Institut Océanographique de l'Indochine) was established in 1922 in Nha Trang. It is one of the earliest oceanographic research centers, boasting the largest marine specimen collection in Southeast Asia. The Dong Duong Institute of Oceanography in Nha Trang is also the site of early archaeological, geological, and marine studies in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, making significant contributions to Vietnam's sovereignty assertion over these island chains.

When studying the impact of French culture and civilization on Hanoi's identity from a scientific perspective, it is important to acknowledge that these scientific institutions provided Vietnamese intellectuals with a sense of scientific

inquiry, research methodology, a devotion to truth, a creative style, and an attitude towards society and authority. These are the fundamental and universal qualities of intellectuals (Adapted from: *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*).

Alongside research outputs, there are valuable scientific and cultural legacies, research institutes, universities, museums, architectural works, and works of art, resulting from late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam studies. These endeavors left significant names and, for various reasons, should be included as a part of the history of social sciences and humanities in Vietnam (not the history of French or global social sciences and humanities).

Their contributions are significant to the fields of French and Vietnamese social sciences and humanities, even though some among them may have been colonial figures responsible for causing catastrophes or inflicting inhumane treatment towards the native population. An undeniable fact is that when embarking on scientific exploration in distant lands like Vietnam and Indochina, French scientists might have had to sacrifice or alter their entire lives for science. Individuals such as Alexandre Yersin (1863-1943), Ernest Hébrard (1875-1933), Louis Finot (1864-1935), Madeleine Colani (1866-1943), Henri Parmentier (1871-1949), Georges Condominas (1921-2011), Victor Tardieu (1870-1937), Armand Krempf (?-?), Henri Cucherousset (1879-1934), and others fall into this category. This even includes Henri Maitre (1883-1914) and Paul Doumer (1857-1932).

Many French scholars from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century produced pioneering scientific and cultural works, paving the way

for Vietnamese scientific development (Adapted from: *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*).

In addition, one must also mention prominent figures like Pierre Dourisboure (1825-1890), one of the first four priests to venture to the Central Highlands in 1850. He drew meticulous map of the region and made detailed annotations about the customs of various ethnic groups in the Central Highlands region. Henri Maitre (1883-1914), an ethnologist and French official, explored the Central Highlands from 1909 to 1911. His explorations were captured in the renowned book *Rung nguoi Thuong* (the Forest of the Highlands Peoples). Leopond Cadiere (1869-1955), a priest from the Paris Foreign Missions Society in Hue and the central provinces, published 250 research works on Vietnamese culture, beliefs, ethnology, language, history, and religion. He laid the foundation for modern Vietnamese studies. Jacques Dournes (1922-1993), a missionary in the Paris Foreign Missions Society in the upper region of Dong Nai and the Central Highlands region, published over 250 studies about the Gia Rai people. Jean Boulbet (1926-2007), along with Henri Maitre, is among the most famous explorers who left valuable records about the primitive nature of Central Highlands society through his work *Xu nguoi Ma* (Land of the Ma).

Other notable figures include Loius Finot (1864-1935), the first director of EFEO; George Coedés (1886-1969), the EFEO director after L. Finot; Madeliene Colani (1866-1943), known for her contributions to the cultures of Bac Son, Hoa Binh, Ha Long; Olov Jansé (1892-1985), who discovered the Dong Son culture; Loius

Malleret (1901-1970), responsible for uncovering the Oc Eo culture; Henri Parmentier (1871-1949), with significant contributions to the study and preservation of Champa culture, Mý Son sanctuary, Champa towers in Nha Trang, the Danang Champa Museum, and the Hanoi Museum of History; Henri Maspéro (1883-1945), a pioneer with numerous contributions to Daoism research; Georges Condominas (1921-2011), a renowned ethnologist with extensive fieldwork on the Mngong Gar people in the Central Highlands. He discovered and published a prehistoric stone orchestra found in Dak Lak in 1949, situated in the cultural space of Tay Nguyen's gong culture; and many more.

Besides the French and European scholars of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was also a golden generation of Vietnamese intellectuals who reached maturity in science through close collaboration with EFEO. They had a strong grasp of Western theories and applied those research methods in academic studies on Vietnamese culture and people. It was the first time in history that Vietnamese culture and people were studied using Western methods and standards. These were thanks to the work of members of EFEO, such as Nguyen Van Huyen (1908-1975), Nguyen Van Khoan (1890-1975), Tran Ham Tan (1887-1957), Nguyen Van To (1889-1947), Tran Van Giap (1896-1973), Cong Van Trung (1907-2003), Nguyen Thieu Lau (1916-1967). Additionally, there were many other scholars who were not EFEO members, including Dao Duy Anh (1904-1988), Hoang Xuan Han (1908-1996), Cao Xuan Huy (1900-1983), Dang Thai Mai (1902-1984), Hoai Thanh (1909-1982), Nam Son (1890-1973), Nguyen Do

Cung (1912-1977), Le Du (1885-1957), and more (Refer to: Ngo The Long, Tran Thai Binh, 2009). Many of these scholars received the Ho Chi Minh Award from the Vietnamese government in recognition of their contributions, including Nguyen Van Huyen (2000), Dang Thai Mai (1996), Dao Duy Anh (2000), Nguyen Do Cung (1996), Hoang Xuan Han (2000), Tran Van Giap (2000), Cao Xuan Huy (1996), Hoai Thanh (2000), and more.,...

### **5. The legacy of French culture and civilization in the everyday life of Vietnamese society**

In addition to the fields of architecture, science, and education, as highlighted earlier, nearly all other aspects of Vietnamese society have also been influenced by French culture and civilization, thus resulting in significant transformation. Within the context of studies on the identity of Hanoi, these changes manifest in the emergence of the press and the newspaper industry, the introduction of Western philosophy and social ideas, and the birth of new literary and artistic forms, such as the novel, poetry, theater, painting, and music. It is important to note that it was not until the early 20th century that Western music, Western art, Western journalism, Western theater, Western medicine (which supplanted traditional Eastern medicine), and “Western studies” (overriding Confucian studies) made their presence known in Vietnam, as they are known today. Movements like the “Thơ mới (New Poetry) Movement of 1930-1945” and “Pre-war music” were born as the Vietnamese people embraced French culture. All these cultural imprints have laid the initial foundations that continue

to be of significance for the ongoing development of the spiritual and social life of Vietnam.

In reality nevertheless, the Frenchs’ main aim was still to exert colonial control over the native territory. Ha Noi could not escape its colonial status. Nevertheless, the “civilization torch” mission of the French was not merely a deception or an unethical ambition. In the course of human history, the logic of culture and civilization often takes diverging paths from the original intentions of colonialism. The French, perhaps unintentionally or due to necessity, left Ha Noi with certain significant, if not substantial, advancements in various aspects, ranging from material to spiritual dimensions. This encompassed lifestyle, living habits, and even culinary culture.

A reflection by Henri Cucherousset, the editor of *L’Eveil Économique de l’Indochine* (The Economic Awakening of Indochina), after living in Hanoi for several years, offers a perspective on this transformation. In the bilingual book titled *Dong duong xua va nay* (Ancient and Modern Indochina, translated into Vietnamese by Vu Cong Nghi, published in Ha Noi in 1926), Henri Cucherousset (1926: 92) wrote:

“Less than 50 years ago, progress had been quite remarkable in this land (...) The interaction of the people with Confucian scholars, the ruling class, had become more cordial and less distant than before. The rural population enjoyed more significant freedom. Between these two social classes, a new middle class emerged. Apart from the benefits of this newly-brought peace, France also brought many more blessings to this land, such as monumental construction, bridges,

railways, ports, irrigation canals for agriculture. These projects alleviated the hardships and improved the prosperity of the population. The efforts to counter diseases and contagious diseases enhanced the health and vitality of the population. Countless institutions, from elementary schools to vocational schools, art schools, colleges, and universities, enabled many to learn in various ways to leverage the benefits of science (...) The French not only introduced their specialized disciplines and sciences but also imparted the spirit of certain moral virtues to the local population. Although these virtues took a long time to accumulate, they were highly essential. Virtues like the sense of order, method, innovation, frugality; the sense of resolute action, patience, and a dedication to study without seeking personal gain as the ultimate goal”.

Henri Cucherousset’s assessment can be regarded as relatively objective. He had a profound love for Ha Noi, having lived in the city for several years (from 1916 until his passing in 1934). As the editor of *L’Eveil Économique de l’Indochine* newspaper, Cucherousset frequently opposed specific policies of the Indochina authorities, particularly during the tenure of High Commissioner Pierre Pasquier (1928-1934), who appeared to be less perceptive regarding sovereignty issues in the Paracel Islands. Cucherousset was vocal on multiple occasions about Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and the Spratlys and brought this issue before the French National Assembly (Cucherousset, 1929; Nguyen Duc Hiep, 2022).

## 6. Conclusion

Notwithstanding the legacy of French culture and civilization, Hue still retains

its identity as the ancient capital. However, if we were to disregard the impact of French culture and civilization on urban Ha Noi, meaning if we unintentionally or deliberately dismiss what the French had left on this land, it would be challenging to imagine Hanoi as the Ha Noi with a character deeply rooted in European culture.

People from Ha Noi, to some extent, take pride in their capital, a city resembling features of Paris, characterized by elegant and refined European-style features. Speaking of Ha Noi’s identity, it is necessary to emphasize the harmonious blend, the intertwined and inseparable nature, the seemingly resistant yet ultimately fitting integration over time between the “classic, splendid” elements of Europe and the historical values preserved through years of Ha Noi’s people and culture.

French culture and civilization constitute a significant part of Hanoi’s identity. To some extent, they even represent the soul of a city with a history spanning over half a century, a city that had been built and ‘lived’ through the influence of French culture and civilization □

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