

GUSTAVE DUMOUTIER WITH VIETNAMESE HISTORY AND CULTURE

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G. Dumoutier
(1850-1904)

Gustave Dumoutier is a French expert in Vietnamese studies in the first generation, a gifted scholar, a man who was fond of and loved Vietnamese history and culture. As an enthusiastic Orientalist, he advocated cooperation with Vietnamese Confucian scholars, respect and preservation of Vietnamese traditional culture, maintenance of Nho script and encouragement of national language. He produced many research works on archeology, history and culture of Vietnam in general and Hanoi in particular. He was a rather special case: because of his personal interests, he gave up the big business which his father wanted him to succeed. In the late 19th century, there were not so many French people who were interested in Vietnamese history and culture. He was the pioneer and his "fate" was also a tragedy.

Gustave Dumoutier was born on June 3, 1850 in Courpalay, near Coulommier. His father was a major industrialist who had ambition to see his son succeed. However, his father's big business could not attract him. G. Dumoutier's personal interests had led him to prehistoric archaeology study and come to Vietnam.

G. Dumoutier became member of the Seine-et-Marne Society of Archaeology and wrote 2 books: *Discovery - prehistoric archeology. Prehistoric Briards* (Coulommier, 1877) and *Fairy tales of Montapeine and Beauthheil*

(Coulommier, 1878). From archeology, he moved to study anthropology, ethnology and religion sciences. In 1882, he published an illustrated work *Locations of prehistoric men on Grand-Morin highland (Seine et Marne): workshops, camps, centers, residences, monuments, tombs of primitive men.* However, the studies published in this period could not feed him, he had to work in a printing workshop and intended to strive to become a director but this workshop got involve in many bad cases.

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Dumoutier also studied museum history which led him to meet Paul Bert, a person who later had major influence on his career and fate.

In 1883, Dumoutier had an idea of going to French colonies, of which Tonkin was mentioned a lot and got his special attention. He began attending Vietnamese and Hán character classes at Oriental Language School, began to believe in a new science. In 1885, he wrote “Vạn (ten thousand) and sun wheel in the Hán sign and character system” which was published in the *Journal of Ethnology*. He had ambition to self-resolve such a big topic, but at the end, it was only mentioned in the context of a simple essay in the new category.

In 1886, after the political happening in Lạng Sơn, Paul Bert was ordained Resident General of Annam-Tonkin. At this time, Paul Bert remembered his old friend and suggested Dumoutier to go to Vietnam with him as Vietnamese and Hán translator.

Dumoutier came to Hanoi on 8/4/1886. In Tonkin and Annam at this time, this major field of study was less concerned and organized. There were only few French - Vietnamese schools in Hanoi and Lạng Sơn, there was no local translator, most of translators were recruited from Cochinchina. Dumoutier was trusted by Paul Bert and assigned as “organizer and inspector of French-Vietnamese schools” in Tonkin, where later he became the School Director.

Shortly after arriving at Tonkin (only from April to November 11, 1886 - Paul Bert's date of death), Dumoutier had strived to help Paul Bert to propose programs and organize 1 translator training school in Tonkin; 9 French-Vietnamese schools for boys; 4 French-Vietnamese schools for girls; 117 native private schools and French classes for primary school teachers; 1 vocational training school, 1 college of arts and decoration, Vietnamese and Hán classes for officials, encouraging those who passed. In Huế, 1 school was opened for the children of the royal family and mandarins.

Especially, in Hanoi, 1 Tonkin Academy was established with quite broad unique program as follows:

To research and collect everything which can be studied, in all aspects of Tonkin; To pay attention to the conservation of works of art, monuments, temples; To teach people knowledge of modern science and the advancement of civilizations; To translate and publish publications in Vietnamese and summarize in European language books.

- To translate and publish in French important historiography extracts in dynasties as well as works of research groups. To open training courses on community library in cities and national library in Hanoi.

- To investigate to find ways to preserve important epitaphs, inscriptions, works of art in the field, to find, notify, move them to sturdy, stable places when

communal houses, temples were damaged, or to preserve the external effectively.

- To compile and issue monthly journal in which published research results and solutions for issues of science, literature, economics and engineering.

- To establish relationships with societies of Oriental research from Europe to constantly get special scholar researches of these regions.

Being assigned by Paul Bert to undertake the translation and interpreters, Dumoutier intended to adjust the teaching, making the importance of studying national language, Hán characters and French the same. He always thought that study of Vietnamese and Hán as a source of a language would help to understand both Vietnamese and French societies, Thus, he drafted many bilingual books on Vietnamese grammar and reading.

Dumoutier advocated cooperation with Vietnamese Confucian scholar, respect of existing customs and traditions, conservation of Vietnamese traditional culture, respect of institutions, maintenance of Nho script and encouragement of national language. He also expressed publicly that "old education in Chinese style should not be abolished," and noted that "if Vietnamese children are unable to read and write the most commonly used Hán characters when graduating, these children will become foreigners in their own country". In this regard, Dumoutier also stated opinion and Paul Bert's

evaluation which was "The abolition of teaching Hán characters is like the abolition of ethics training here and we have nothing to compensate what will be lost". Dumoutier noticed a shortage of Confucian scholars to teach Hán characters and insufficiency of books and teachers to teach the works of Chinese moralists and philosophers, or religious works of the missionaries etc. Hence, Dumoutier increased number of teachers teaching Hán characters in French schools in Indochina only to teach national language. And, Dumoutier stated the compulsory of studying Hán characters in translator training schools because he drew from his experience. When translating an official document, the most annoying thing was the Sinologist did not know French and on the contrary, French translator did not know Hán characters. Of course, studying French should not be distracted. Dumoutier also tried to widely spread in the Vietnamese elite society by gradually make French to be compulsory examination subject in local examinations.

Through the proposed policies and implemented program, we see that both Dumoutier and Paul Bert wanted to avoid repeating the mistake of Cochinchina. The mistake was "Frenchization" of all natives.

Unfortunately, Paul Bert died on November 11, 1886. Since then, Dumoutier endeavored to pursue and implement their outlined programs himself alone. However, this great

program gradually dissipated due to ignorance of succeeding government, first was “Tonkin Academy”, then were Hué High School, classes of student teachers, vocational training schools, college of arts and decoration, Vietnamese and Hán character classes for officials. They blamed Dumoutier and even drew cartoonist of him for his unscientific method, being too uptight on the cooperation with Confucian scholars.

Before the blame and ignorance of the succeeding government, Dumoutier constantly fought, tried to clarify his views, and opposed other solutions. Gradually, his effort and perseverance were paid off: In 1894, it was decided to re-open Vietnamese and Hán character classes for officials. In 1897, Governor Paul Doumer re-established Hué High School under the new name of National School, re-organized College of Industrial Arts. In 1898, French was included into exam program in Nam Định exam school...

Along with helping Paul Bert to set out policies, direction and implement effectively programs to serve political duties, Dumoutier was very interested in the main field of study, he wrote many textbooks which were taught in schools such as: *Spelling and reading exercise book for French-Vietnamese schools* (Hanoi, 1886); *Vietnamese practical exercises - Exercices pratiques de langue annamite* (Hanoi, 1889); *French-Tonkin military curriculum* (Hanoi, 1888); *Annam history lessons*

(printed in manuscript, 1899); *Vietnamese and Hán lessons taught in Hanoi from 1886 - 1889* (printed in manuscript). Besides, Dumoutier was also very passionate about scientific research, study of archeology, ethnography, religion, folklore, history and culture of Vietnam in general and of Hanoi in particular which he had published significantly:

- From 1887-1889, he had published a series of monographs on architecture, customs, legends, history of Tonkin. They were: *Legend and history of Annam and Tonkin; Temples in Hanoi and Tonkin through archaeological research; Temples in Hanoi through archaeological research and Nom inscriptions; Great Buddha statue in Hanoi through research of history, archeology, inscriptions and archaeology in Trần Vũ temple; Văn Miếu, the temple of Confucius in Hanoi; Try to learn about Eastern medicine: Identification of 300 plants and products with the names in Vietnamese, French, Latin, Hán and instruction for treatment through medicines prepared by Vietnamese and Chinese.*

These abovementioned publications made a huge buzz in France and were selected to exhibit in Paris in 1889. In here, they organized a separate booth for research center of Vietnamese ethnic and religion. Especially, “a precious wooden pagoda containing a Buddha shrine area, where devotees came to hold ceremonies” could be found there.

- From 1890 to 1903, Dumoutier published a number of valuable research about Vietnam such as: *Songs and folk traditions of Vietnamese*; *Symbols and worshipping objects of Vietnamese*; *Witchcraft and divination of Vietnamese*; *Fengshui of Vietnamese*; *History of medicine for immortality of Taoism*; *Vietnamese legends about Buddha and Buddhism*; *Introduction of Buddhism in China*; *Book of bereavements*; *Practicing book of Vietnamese monks*; *Guardians of temple gates in Vietnam*; *Research on Tonkin* (one of the most popular works); *Hai Bà Temple*; *Commercial shops of Portuguese on Hiến Street*; *Research through historical and archeological documents about Hoa Lu, the first capital of the independent Vietnam (968-1010)*; *Research through historical and archeological documents about Cổ Loa, ancient capital of Âu Lạc Kingdom*; *City Wall of Mạc Dynasty*; *Research on waterways, coastal roads, estuaries, harbors in Vietnam in 15th century* (This works was highly appreciated and the author was awarded the “Prix Jomard” award of Geographical Association in 1897); *Notes on Đà River and Ba Vì Mountain...*

In addition, he also wrote many articles published on *Journal of Hải Phòng*

(*Courrier d'Hai-phong*), *The future of Tonkin newspaper (l'Avenir du Tonkin)*.

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After many times being disgraced, victimized, in 1903, Dumoutier applied for temporary leave but his application was rejected and he was forced to retire on April 23, 1904. He said that the ratification was not justifiable. Due to pressing, thinking too much, his health was affected seriously, he was seriously ill. On August 2, 1904, Dumoutier passed away in solitude in Đồ Sơn, where he retreated to convalesce. He was buried in the cemetery of Hanoi, next to his wife's grave □

References

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