

**VIETNAM ORIENTAL INSTITUTE  
DURING THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER 1945 – DECEMBER 1946  
THROUGH DOCUMENTS**

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**N**ot a full week after President Hồ Chí Minh solemnly announced to the world the historical Declaration of Independence at Ba Đình Square on September 8, 1945, Decree No. 13 on “Merging Vietnam Oriental Institute, Museums, Public Libraries (except for Ancillary Libraries of Offices), Academies (Oceanographic Library) into Ministry of National Education under the control of Minister of Education” was enacted by the President of the Provisional Government of the Vietnam Democratic Republic. This Decree, which was signed by Minister of Home Affairs Võ Nguyên Giáp on behalf of President of the Provisional Government, was published on the Vietnam Nationalist Official Gazette, first year, first volume, September 29, 1945.

Subsequently, pursuant to Decree No. 35-ND dated September 21, 1945, signed by Minister of National Education, the Vietnam Oriental Institute was put “under the control of Director of University”.

On November 2, 1945, Decree No. 146 ND was issued by Minister of National Education Vũ Đình Hoè, setting up an Advisers’ Council at Vietnam Oriental Institute. This Council’s meetings, convened “under the chairmanship of the Director of the Institute, in order to seek for guidelines on developing Oriental studies”. Involved in this Council were:

- Mr. Nguyễn Đỗ Cung,
- Mr. Lê Dư,
- Mr. Trần Văn Giáp,
- Mr. Hoàng Xuân Hãn,
- Mr. Cao Xuân Huy,
- Mr. Nguyễn Văn Huyền,
- Mr. Nguyễn Văn Khoan,
- Mr. Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu,
- Mr. Đặng Thái Mai,
- Mr. Nguyễn Đức Nguyên,
- Mr. Hồ Đạt Thắng,
- Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tố,

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Institute of Social Sciences Information

- Mr. Công Văn Trung.

Mr. Nguyễn Trọng Phần was appointed Secretary of the Council.

The members of this Council might “be awarded grants in order to carry out researches as for the Institute’s purposes”.

By then, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Huyền was Director of University Bureau cum Director of Vietnam Oriental Institute.

Later on, under the Decree dated January 5, 1946 issued by Minister of National Education, some additional members of the Advisors’ Council of Vietnam Oriental Institute were

appointed, including:

- Mr. Vĩnh Thụy, Government advisor,
- Mr. Đào Duy Anh,
- Mr. Ngô Đình Nhu,
- Mr. Nguyễn Vạn Thọ, also known as Nam Sơn.

Among the above-named members, Nguyễn Văn Huyền (1908-1975) was a historian, ethnographer, educator of Vietnam; Đào Duy Anh (1904-1988): researcher of culture, history of Vietnam and dictionary compiler; Trần Văn Giáp (1902-1973): ancient bibliographer of Vietnam; Nguyễn Văn



#### **President Ho Chi Minh visits Vietnam Oriental Institute**

The photo was taken at the main entrance of the Library – 26 Lý Thường Kiệt, Hanoi, in 1945 (the present-day Head Office of Institute of Social Sciences Information). The man wearing suit standing on the second row is Prof. Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Director of Vietnam Oriental Institute.

Tố (1889-1947): social sciences researcher, by then Minister of Social Relief; Nguyễn Đỗ Cung (1912-1977): painter, researcher of Vietnam ancient times fine-arts; Đặng Thai Mai (1902-1984): writer, literature critic; Hoàng Xuân Hãn (1908-1996): scholar, professor of mathematics, engineer; Nguyễn Đức Nguyên, also known as Hoài Thanh, (1909-1982): literature critic; Cao Xuân Huy (1900-1983): researcher on history of Oriental philosophical ideas; Nguyễn Văn Thọ, or Nam Sơn, (1890-1973): painter, co-founder of the Indochinese Fine-Arts School; Lê Du, nicknamed Sở Cuồng, (1885-1957), writer, researcher of Chinese-Vietnamese scripts; Công Văn Trung (1907-2003): painter, graduate of the 1<sup>st</sup> course of Indochinese Fine-Arts School; Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu (1916-1967): researcher of literature, geography, by then, Director of Vietnam Statistics Service; Nguyễn Văn Khoan: researcher of Vietnamese customs and culture; Ngô Đình Nhu (1910-1963), by then, Director of Nationwide Official Document Archives and Library Service. Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Đặng Thai Mai, Đào Duy Anh, Nguyễn Đỗ Cung, Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Trần Văn Giáp, Cao Xuân Huy, Nguyễn Đức Nguyên (or Hoài Thanh) were subsequently awarded Hồ Chí Minh Prize by the State.

Decree No. 65 dated November 23, 1945, issued by President of the Provisional Government of the Vietnam Democratic Republic, stipulated the mission of Vietnam Oriental Institute. The full text of the

Decree published on the Vietnam Nationalist Official Gazette, first year, vol. 12, December 1, 1945 was as follows:

“The President of the Vietnam Democratic Republic

- Whereas preserving historical vestiges is a very necessary task for the construction of Vietnam;

- Whereas Vietnam Oriental Institute is responsible for preserving all antique vestiges in the entire territory of Vietnam,

- Therefore issues this Decree:

**Article 1:** - Vietnam Oriental Institute is responsible for preserving all antique vestiges in the entire territory of Vietnam.

**Article 2:** - Vietnam Oriental Institute shall from now on replace École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

**Article 3:** - All rules and regulations on preserving antique vestiges still remain unchanged.

**Article 4:** - Forbids from destroying communal houses, pagodas, temples, shrines or other worshipping places, palaces, citadels along with tombs that are not under preservation yet.

Forbids from destroying inscriptions, objects, edicts, diplomas, documents, books, whether in religious nature or not, but beneficial to history that are not under preservation yet.

**Article 5:** - The rules, the annual grants from the entire country, from each region or province to Vietnam Oriental Institute are still being recognized by the Government. While

drafting budget for the entire country, for each region or province, Minister of Finance, Minister of National Education, Finance Commissioner of each region or province must take grants to Vietnam Oriental Institute into account.

**Article 6:** - Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, Finance, Public Works and Transport, National Education have responsibility to implement this Decree.

*Hanoi, November 23, 1945*

Hồ Chí Minh

Also signed by:

Minister of National Education

Vũ Đình Hoè” (\*)

It is noteworthy that, during this time French was still widely used, however, in the decree, the transaction name of the institute was in English (Vietnam Oriental Institute).

Until July 9, 1946, when Decree No. 119 was signed by the President of the Government, on the organization of Ministry of National Education, Vietnam Oriental Institute – together with universities, Official Document Archives and Library Service, Hanoi Nationwide Library, Hanoi Vietnam Hostel and Thuận Hoá Central Region Culture Institute – were under the control of General Director of University Service.

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\* On February 24, 2005, Prime Minister Phan Văn Khải signed Decision No. 36/2005/QĐ-TTĐ, taking November 23 every year, the day on which President Ho Chi Minh signed Decree No. 65 – the first legal document of the State of Vietnam on national cultural heritage, as Vietnamese Cultural Heritage Day.

During this period, budget was allocated to Vietnam Oriental Institute so as to support its operation, for example:

- Decree issued by Minister of Finance on January 2, 1946: “Aiding Vietnam Oriental Institute with an amount of five hundred dong (VND500) to buy books for the Institute”.

- Decree issued by Minister of Finance on February 23, 1946: “Raising at Vietnam Oriental Institute a reserve fund with an amount of five hundred dong (VND500) for petty expenses”.

- Decree issued by Minister of Finance on June 5, 1946: “Aiding the self-governing fund of Vietnam Oriental Institute for spending in the academic year of 1946”. (Meanwhile, under another decree of the same date, the amount of budget for similar purposes for Universities was just one million dong.)

For the time being, in the book stock of the Social Sciences Library, some books, newspapers, magazines, which might possibly be sent to the Library during that period, are still being stored, for instance, “Social Men of Letters” by Hải Triều, published by National Salvation Culture Association in 1945 (stock code: Q8<sup>0</sup> 301), “A New Culture” by Nguyễn Hữu Đàng and Nguyễn Đình Thi, published in 1945 (stock code: Q8<sup>0</sup> 302), “Bắc Sơn”, a five-act play by Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, published in 1946 (stock code: Q8<sup>0</sup> 295), etc. especially the book entitled “Experiences from the anti-Japanese High Tide for National Salvation in Vietnam”, published in

1946 (stock code: Q8<sup>0</sup> 284), on a lining cover page there still exist the words *With Respect to the Director of Vietnam Oriental Institute* and the stamp of Association for Researching Karl Marxism in Indochina. The stock codes of these books still succeeded the previous ones (QTO, OCTO, etc.).

Attention should be paid to the fact that during the glorious 60-day-and-night fight of the army and people of Hanoi Capital in late 1946 and early 1947, damages were inflicted on many parts of the capital city, nevertheless, the head office of the Vietnam Oriental Institute, particularly, the book stock of the Library as well as the exhibits of Louis Finot were still intact under protection.

It should be further added that at the website <http://www.efeo.fr>, the EFEO

list indicates that Mr. George Coedès (1886-1996) was Director between September 2, 1929 and March 18, 1947, meanwhile, the profiles of EFEO members involves Mr. Nguyễn Văn Huyền, but only referring to Mr. Huyền acting as directeur du service de l'enseignement universitaire of Hồ Chí Minh's Government, without mentioning anything about Vietnam Oriental Institute during this period.

#### REFERENCES

1. Vietnam Nationalist Official Gazette in 1945 and 1946.
2. <http://dictionary.bachkhoatoanthu.gov.vn>
3. <http://www.efeo.fr>
4. Other websites.