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**Resistance and Collaboration: Pham Quynh  
and the Development of the Vietnamese  
National Language.**

**Micheline Lessard**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
History**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

**October 1987**

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ISBN 0-315-41603-3

## ABSTRACT

### Resistance and Collaboration: Pham Quynh and the Development of the Vietnamese National Language

Micheline Lessard

Western historians have traditionally interpreted the role played by Pham Quynh in the development of the Vietnamese national language in political terms. This essay proposes that such an approach is not only inappropriate but also ignores Pham's contribution to the development of an indigenous Vietnamese language and literature. Western approaches have also assumed that Pham Quynh, because he refused to espouse Vietnamese revolutionary movements was not a nationalist. This thesis maintains that Pham Quynh was indeed a nationalist and that his nationalism was cultural in form. Pham Quynh also approached the nationalist question strictly in Confucian terms.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis marks the beginning of what I trust will be a long and fruitful commitment to the study of Vietnamese history. Embarking on this journey has brought me many rewards both personally and professionally. I therefore wish to express my gratitude to those who have guided and encouraged me as this project took shape.

I would especially like to thank Professor John Hill, my thesis advisor and friend, who inspired me to study Vietnamese history and culture. I am grateful to him for his patience and kindness as I struggled to understand and grasp a culture so fascinating yet so far removed from my own. I wish to thank him also for never doubting that this was an endeavour I could successfully undertake.

I am particularly grateful also to Professor Karen Ray, whose presence and whose comments have been a constant source of encouragement. I wish to thank Professors Frank

Chalk and Mary Vipond for their patience and their most useful comments and criticism.

I wish to express special thanks to Philippe Langlet of the Université de Paris VII for allowing me to use his office while I was doing my research in Paris and also for entrusting me with some of the materials I needed to conduct my research.

I am grateful to Professor Gérard Diffloth of the Southeast Asian languages section of the Modern Languages and Linguistics Department at Cornell University for the information he provided on the debates over the origins of the Vietnamese language.

Finally, I wish to thank Bà Pham Thi Ngoan for entrusting me with primary documents necessary for the writing of this thesis.

## INTRODUCTION

Pham Quynh was abducted and executed by the Viet Minh in 1945. The accusation levelled against Pham was that he had been a collaborator to the French colonial regime. Pham had occupied the position of Ministre de l'Education from 1932 to 1933 and had been Ministre de l'Interieur from 1942 until the time of his death. Pham had often used the term "collaborateur" to describe himself and other Vietnamese intellectuals who shared his ideals. The term collaborator, however, did not bear at the beginning of the twentieth century the same pejorative connotations it had come to develop after the Second World War. For Pham Quynh the term collaborator was synonymous with cooperation and reciprocity. In Pham Quynh's mind collaboration did not represent an alternative, it was the only proper course of action.

Historiographically, Western interpretations of Pham Quynh's role in the course of Vietnamese history have been no kinder to him than had been the Viet Minh. There are a number of reasons for this and there are also consequences



of this. One of the most obvious reasons for Pham's demise at the hand of Western historians lies in the fact that for the most part their interpretations of nationalism are founded on political bases. Alexander Woodside, David Marr and Huynh Kim Khanh have written histories of Vietnamese revolutionary movements during the period of French colonial rule. Analyses of Pham Quynh's role in this period of Vietnam's history have been included in each of their studies. Because of the nature of the subject matter all three historians have chosen, however, Pham Quynh is perceived uniquely in terms of his relationship with Vietnam's revolutionary groups. That relationship, of course, had not been a happy one.

The problem with these analyses is that concentration on the revolutionaries results in a study which places events, people and changes in relation to those groups. There is very little room for independent analysis. In the case of Pham Quynh, the focus is on his lack of involvement in revolutionary movements rather than on the contributions he made on the development of the Vietnamese language. The result is that Pham is seen as reactionary. In terms of politics it may be true that Pham Quynh was somewhat of a conservative, but that is but one facet of Pham's personality. In terms of language and in terms of contributing to the rise of the literacy ratio, Pham was much more progressive than many of his Northern

Vietnamese contemporaries. Pham's disdain for armed rebellion has also been interpreted as being anti-nationalist. Such an approach carries the tacit yet strong suggestion that only those willing to partake in armed revolution were true nationalists. It leaves those Vietnamese who chose not to risk their lives and to attempt reforms with very little recognition. If anything, it reduces their role in Vietnamese history. Although Pham Quynh did not partake actively in politics, he was nonetheless a nationalist. His definition of nationalism, however, was cultural rather than political. Pham's Confucian background was responsible for his placing culture ahead of politics in his priorities. More specifically, Pham's nationalism embraced the idea that Guoc Ngu, the romanized version of the Vietnamese language, should become Vietnam's official, national language.

This essay begins with the premise that Pham was indeed a nationalist. It attempts, through his writings, to define that nationalism. It seeks also to refute claims that Pham Quynh did not understand Confucianism. Pham's writings attest that he had a profound knowledge and understanding of Confucian philosophy.

Finally, this essay attempts to examine Pham's contributions. The tacit suggestion here is that colonialism creates numerous complex problems and that Pham Quynh indeed did try to resolve some of these problems.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Confucian Legacy

Pham Quynh was born in Hanoi on December 17 1892. Pham's family was originally from Luong Ngoc village in the northern province of Hai Duong, but moved to Hanoi shortly before his birth. Although he spent the last thirteen years of his life in various administrative posts in Hue, it was in Hanoi that Pham Quynh was raised, educated and chose to live throughout most of his life. That Pham Quynh spent most of his years in the area then designated as Tonkin is not without consequence. The milieu from which he originated and in which he operated exerted much influence in the development of Pham's ideas and Beliefs.

One of the major philosophical influences on Pham's life was that of Confucianism. Pham Quynh's family had a long history of Confucian scholarship, and his father, Pham Huu Dien, held a degree in the traditional, Chinese-style educational system. Certain aspects of the Chinese-style educational system adopted in Vietnam will be

examined more closely in the chapters to follow, but for now it is sufficient to mention that one thousand years of Chinese dominion over Vietnam had resulted in degrees of sinicization which were felt in Vietnamese culture and in Vietnamese social structures. In broad terms the structure of the educational system borrowed from China was essentially based on the teaching of the Chinese classics. In terms of purpose, the traditional Chinese perception of education implied the Confucian notion of self-improvement.

In addition, despite the fact that Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina were geographical and political divisions created by the French colonial government, it is nonetheless true that due to their closer proximity to China, Tonkin and Annam had much more deeply ingrained Confucian traditions than the southern regions called Cochinchina. One thousand years of Chinese rule, from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D., had resulted in the creation of a classical and traditional examination system based on the Chinese model. It was this examination system which, until the arrival of the French in the mid-nineteenth century, had defined the intellectual training ground and provided the vehicle of selection of Vietnamese officials and scholars.

The Confucian legacy constituted the framework of Pham Quynh's ideas. In his writings Pham consistently advocated the preservation of certain aspects of Confucianism. Moral goals and moral education, according to him, took precedence over

purely utilitarian aims. It was this philosophy which in 1919 led Pham to co-found and become the Secrétaire-Général of l'Association pour la Formation Intellectuelle et Morale des Annamites (A.F.I.M.A.). A.F.I.M.A., along with his newspaper Nam Phong, as will be shown in the chapters to follow, was to become one of the major vehicles for the promotion of a truly "Vietnamese" culture, a culture with its roots in Confucianism.

Pham also maintained that peace and social order, which seemed to be threatened by internal political corruption and the pressures of colonialism, could be preserved, (or perhaps restored) through the application of certain selected Confucian principles. In addition, Pham Quynh believed the very Confucian notion that it was the Vietnamese elite's moral duty to guide the process of preservation:

Mais l'idée qui en est la base est aussi vraie aujourd'hui qu'il y a deux mille ans: partout où les hommes vivent en société, cette vie commune doit reposer sur un ordre établi et se développer dans la paix. Sauvegarder cet ordre, assurer cette paix, voilà le devoir essentiel de l'homme, principalement de celui que ses vertus naturelles, ses talents et son éducation rendent apte à gouverner les autres hommes.<sup>1</sup>

In Pham's eyes, the political and ideological confrontation between East and West would have been greatly resolved if the elites of both Vietnam and France had been the only actors in

the process:

Cette rencontre eut pu être plus féconde pour l'humanité, si elle avait eu lieu dans des conditions moins brutales, par le canal des élites et sur le plan d'une communion des idéaux et des doctrines.<sup>2</sup>

In this particular quotation Pham may be alluding to the "brutal" and self-interested French merchants. It was Pham's belief that a more desirable outcome would have ensued had the exchange between France and Vietnam been conducted through the medium of each country's leaders. This may be, on the part of Pham, an expression of Confucian disdain for materialism and the merchant class, for Pham adds that the West "multiplie les moyens, crée les besoins, excite les appétits, et portant le degré de puissance à son plus haut degré, fait déborder l'homme d'Occident de son milieu et le lance à la conquête du monde."<sup>3</sup>

Pham Quynh expressed his ideas of social leadership particularly in terms of a duty to teach and to inculcate Confucian principles to those Vietnamese who had little or no formal education. Pham's appointment as the president of the Société d'Enseignement Mutuel du Tonkin, from 1925 to 1928, and as Ministre de l'Education Nationale in 1933, allowed him to attempt to fulfill what he felt were his duties to educate and to "lead" the Vietnamese people to a peaceful, and

2

Ibid., p. 70.

3

Ibid.

gradual, political independence based on moral principles. Pham obtained his formal education in the French-language schools of the Tonkin protectorate. He received his secondary education at the Collège des Interprètes in Hanoi and graduated from there first in his class. Pham nonetheless often stressed that "tout n'est pas démodé dans les enseignements de Confucius."<sup>4</sup> The internal and the external forces which appeared to be remodeling Vietnamese society, however, prompted Pham Quynh to re-examine those elements of Confucian doctrine which may no longer have been relevant or useful or which may simply have been misinterpreted:

Ce qui préoccupait surtout Confucius, la tendance essentielle de sa doctrine, c'est de préserver l'ordre social et de faire régner la paix parmi les hommes. Cette paix, il croyait la trouver dans une organisation patriarcale de la société et de l'état, calquée sur la monade familiale, organisation qui s'adaptait parfaitement au peuple auquel il s'adressait. ... toute cette partie de cette doctrine a certainement vieilli et ne répond plus à l'état actuel des sociétés modernes, même de celles qui sont à peine sorties du stade patriarcal comme la société Annamite.<sup>5</sup>

For Pham Quynh, the solution to Vietnam's dilemma did not depend solely on the reassessment or on the reinterpretation of Confucian ideas; it was dependent also on

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-101.

the assimilation and the application of certain Western concepts. Despite the fact that the Confucian legacy proved to be an enduring philosophical framework for Pham Quynh's ideas, it would be wrong to ignore the Western concepts which also influenced his thinking. Pham was particularly interested in the writings of the French philosophes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and he paid much attention to René Descartes' Discours de la Méthode. Descartes' notions of method and order in the process of thought were interpreted by Pham as being one of the major differences between "Eastern" and "Western" thinking. Pham concluded that Eastern sages were essentially intuitive thinkers who seldom sought to detract from the rules and the rites which they believed had been handed down through divine inspiration. Pham considered this to be a passive form of thinking which had led Vietnam to a state of stagnation. Method, Pham believed, was an active thinking process which had allowed the West to develop and to prosper. Yet Pham Quynh was insistent on one point: the Vietnamese should develop method in their process of thought, but not necessarily Western ideas:

Ce que nous devons emprunter à l'Occident  
ce n'est pas tant son esprit qui, s'il ne  
nous est pas tout à fait inassimilable,  
est assez différent de nous pour que nous  
puissions nous y adapter complètement; ce  
n'est pas tant sa pensée qui dérive d'autres  
sources que la nôtre; ce n'est pas tant sa  
mentalité, son âme, qui nous restera tou-  
jours sur bien des points inaccessible, ce  
ne sont pas tant ses mœurs, ses usages,  
ses habitudes de vie, son mode d'existence



qui ne s'accordent pas avec les nôtres et n'ont pas, par ailleurs, une valeur absolue, c'est sa méthode et son organisation, et dans des domaines particuliers les différentes techniques qu'il a créées pour le judicieux emploi des forces et la sage exploitation de la matière.<sup>6</sup>

In Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945, David Marr makes the excellent observation that the Western concepts which Pham Quynh preferred were those compatible with his notions of Confucianism.<sup>7</sup> Pham himself acknowledged that the "libertarian" and "individualist" ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu and Zola were potentially dangerous for "agissant seules, sans la base solide d'une bonne formation traditionnelle, elles risquent d'être dissolvantes et destructrices."<sup>8</sup> Efforts to combine Confucian ideology with Western ideas were not exclusive to Pham Quynh. A product of his time, Pham was following the road already taken by numerous other Vietnamese intellectuals and nationalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Attempts to build a bridge linking Vietnam's past to its present, and possibly also to its future, found many Vietnamese intellectuals with one foot on each cultural island.

6

Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam, p.229.

7

David G. Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.111.

8

Pham Quynh, Le Vietnam: Problèmes Culturels et Politiques (Essais 1922-1932) (Paris: Editions Y Viet, 1985), p.63.

8

It is significant, as David Marr has noted, that Vietnamese intellectuals of this period preferred to receive Western ideology by way of the translations and interpretations of Chinese scholars such as L'iang Ch'i-Ch'ao, Yen Fu and K'ang Yu-Wei.<sup>9</sup> In The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam, William Duiker suggests that "because of this second-hand knowledge," the Vietnamese intellectuals' and nationalists' "grasp of the new world beyond Vietnamese frontiers was superficial and their understanding of mass politics limited."<sup>10</sup> Duiker's analysis carries the tacit assumption that had Vietnamese intellectuals received Western ideas from the source, their understanding and their interpretations would be much more profound. Such a conclusion ignores two basic facts. First, it was difficult for Vietnamese thinkers to interpret Western concepts for their own philosophical antecedents were far removed from those of their European counterparts. Even if read in the language in which they were originally written, it is likely that Western concepts would not have been understood by the Vietnamese as they would have been in Europe. As Ralph Smith has noted:

Political concepts cannot be set entirely apart from the cultural milieu of the men who use them. One may ask how far the Vietnamese really understood Western modes of

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9

David G. Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, p.111.

10

William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), pp.8-9.

thought as a whole, and whether the concepts they borrowed could possibly have had the same meaning to them as for the Westerners who first produced them.<sup>11</sup>

Second, it cannot be overlooked that the decision to interpret Western ideas through the medium of Chinese scholars such as those named above may have involved an active and deliberate judgment about the Western value system which now confronted the Vietnamese. Pham Quynh, by way of his French-language education, was in a position to understand Western concepts much more deeply than those Vietnamese or Chinese who had received a more traditional, Confucian and Chinese-language education. Pham had read the works of the philosophes in their original language and was well aware that Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and K'ang Yu-Wei may not have grasped all of the nuances and the subtleties of Western philosophy. Pham conceded that their Confucian background prevented the Chinese scholars from fully understanding Western concepts, but his own tendency to preserve certain aspects of Confucianism allowed him to perceive such "shortcomings" in a favourable light:

Car c'était un noble idéal que servaient  
Leang K'i-Tchao et ses amis. Régénérer la  
Chine en lui donnant conscience de sa na-  
tionalité et en empruntant à l'Occident  
ce qui lui manquait. C'était le rêve de  
ces hommes qui, malgré leur engouement  
pour des idées et des conceptions qui  
n'avaient encore à leurs yeux que l'attrait

de nouveautés inédites, étaient restés au fond des lettres imbus de l'ancienne culture.<sup>12</sup>

As my discussion of Pham's writings will illustrate more clearly and in more detail in the chapters to follow, it is their incorporation of new concepts into a Confucian framework which prompted Pham to favour the writings of L'iang Ch'i-Ch'ao and K'ang Yu-Wei.

By definition, change and continuity appear antithetical,<sup>13</sup> and in terms of historical analysis, perhaps born of a tradition which bears certain implications of dualism,<sup>14</sup> historians have been inclined to provide interpretations of change and continuity which seem mutually

12

Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam à la Croisée, p.186.

13

Funk and Wagnall's Standard College Dictionary. Canadian edition. (1973), s.u. "change" and "continuity."

"change:1.to make different;alter;transmute-5.to become different;vary-6.to enter upon a new phase.

"continuity:1.the state or quality of being continuous2.an uninterrupted and usually changeless continuance or connection in space, time or development."

14.

Chang Tung-Sun, "Thought, Language and Culture," in The Language Experience, ed. James F. Hoy and John Somer (New York:Dell Publishing Company, 1974),pp.49-50.

In his article Chang attributes dualism and the dichotomous thinking of the West to Aristotelian logic and offers the following explanation:"Western logic is essentially based on the law of identity. Division, definition, syllogism and even conversion and opposition are based upon it. All of these are correlated and constitute a system...As it is based on the law of identity it (Western logical division) must be dichotomous in such forms as 'A and not A', 'literary books and non-literary books.' Thus there is the need in classification for the rule of exclusiveness."

exclusive. From an historical perspective, however, continuity need not exclude change, and Pham Quynh's efforts to preserve Confucian ideas appear conservative only when the concept of change is interpreted in active or positive terms. Marr's analysis suggests that Pham Quynh's quest for continuity is reactive and negative. Such conclusions are far removed from the Vietnamese reality; rather, they represent a Western philosophical assessment of an Eastern process. In this respect, what historians term "agency" is a key concept, for not only does it carry an implicit acknowledgement of the role played by Pham Quynh in Vietnam's history, but also that the choices he made and the positions he has taken cannot be interpreted in Western terms but must be understood in their own specific context. Pham Quynh's syncretism must be interpreted that way. As Ralph Smith, again, suggests:

The traditional mode of logic found in the West, from Aristotle onwards, has had as its fundamental aim the desire to arrive at some definitive truth; in other words, to eliminate contradiction.

Confucianism contained no philosophical basis for an insistence on the conformity of men's minds to one absolute truth.<sup>15</sup>

Pham Quynh's syncretic approach also represents deliberate efforts at conciliation. In addition to providing a bridge between the past and the present or continuity to change, Pham is also attempting to narrow the gulf between "Eastern" and "Western" philosophy. Pham provides a striking

example of this when he tries to explain the differences and the similarities of both cultures by using the principles of Yin and Yang and Hegelian dialectics as vehicles of interpretation:

Si je raisonnais comme un philosophe Chinois, je dirais que l'Orient, c'est le principe Yin (en Annamite âm) et l'Occident, le principe Yang (du'o'ng), que l'un représente la force et l'activité, et l'autre la pérennité et la stabilité... En présentant ainsi la question j'aurais l'air de la simplifier à l'extrême; mais aussi je l'aurais fait apparaître sous son jour le plus clair et le plus net en la résumant sous forme d'une dualité de deux principes qui, pour opposés qu'ils soient, n'en sont pas moins nécessaires l'un à l'autre, et, telle la thèse et l'antithèse, doivent se réunir et s'unifier pour former une synthèse.<sup>16</sup>

The fact remains that Pham's syncretic approach is one of choice. It is indicative of a process of intellectual selection whereby judgments are made, by Pham and by other Vietnamese intellectuals, of the new ideas presented them. Pham's approach is also similar to that of other Vietnamese intellectuals of that period who could not or would not yet divorce themselves from their Confucian past.

An analysis such as David Marr's also ignores an important dimension of Pham Quynh's philosophy; that in the face of French colonial intervention, Confucianism was a safeguard against cultural and political assimilation.

Pham Quynh could not but be sensitive to the

possibilities of cultural assimilation. Assimilation could be little else but the logical result of the colonial practices of establishing French-style government and French-language education in Vietnam. Assimilation was the foundation of the French notion of Mission Civilisatrice. While Pham saw benefits in many French policies, for the most part he feared they would result in the loss of what he referred to as the Vietnamese "soul." In order to preserve the essence of the Vietnamese "soul" Pham believed that assimilation must be based on choice:

Autant l'assimilation érigée en système de gouvernement et d'éducation et visant à transformer radicalement un peuple à l'image de l'autre, apparaît comme une entreprise téméraire vouée d'avance à l'insuccès, autant une assimilation naturelle résultant d'un choix librement consenti ou d'instincts affinités électives et s'exerçant dans le domaine de l'intelligence et de la raison, est chose éminemment utile et souhaitable. Elle procure un enrichissement de l'esprit, qui loin de nuire à la personnalité l'aide à prendre conscience d'elle-même en la confrontant avec d'autres personnalités étrangères, et ainsi la confirme et la fortifie.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most attractive ingredients of the interpretations of L'iang Ch'i-Ch'ao and K'ang Yu-Wei was that their Confucian background allowed them to remain Chinese despite the onslaught of Western ideas and mores. The desire and the necessity of preserving one's culture in the face of

external challenges was to become one of Pham Quynh's major preoccupations. It is this notion of cultural nationalism which led him to advocate the use and the propagation of Quoc Ngu, a romanized version of the Vietnamese language.

The fact remains, however, that Pham Quynh's nationalism was to be developed within a Confucianist framework. His idea of Confucianism related more to moral and cultural integrity than it did to political structures and strictures. Pham's concerns were the maintenance of peace and social order and the preservation of a Vietnamese culture. The Confucian legacy represented, for him, the means by which such concerns could be allayed.

It is interesting to note that Confucianism, which Pham considered a safeguard against French assimilation, was itself a product of Sinitic assimilation. There were, however, major differences between Chinese Confucianism and Vietnamese interpretations of Confucianism. John K. Whitmore has pointed out that the Confucianist society which emerged in Vietnam in the nine hundred years following the end of Chinese domination had managed to resist the orthodoxy of the Chinese patrilineal style.<sup>18</sup> Over the centuries the Vietnamese had adapted the Confucian model to their own particular needs and context. Vietnamese demographics had led to a development of the family unit which was more "nuclear" in nature than was



the Chinese "clan" notion of family.<sup>19</sup> In general, the Confucian structure of Vietnamese society was much less rigid than that of the society which had introduced it.

Second, Pham's attempts to fuse Western ideas with Eastern concepts were made with the intention of forging a distinct Vietnamese society which would have as its basis the better, "moral" qualities of both cultures. In effect, Pham was developing his ideas of Vietnamese cultural nationalism along syncretic, or synthetic, lines. It is important to stress, at this point, that syncretism represents an essential element of Confucian philosophy.

In "Values, Roles and Personalities," Arthur Wright provides the following explanation of syncretic tendencies in Confucian thought:

Confucians were often inclined to concede by word and act that their system of ideas was neither self-sufficient nor all-embracing. Taoism and Buddhism were often regarded as complementary traditions to be drawn on for inspiration, for philosophical depth, and occasionally for alternative ways of life.<sup>20</sup>

In this respect, Pham was advocating a form of nationalism which had "moral", rather than "political" priorities. As Alexander Woodside has noted:

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<sup>19</sup>

Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>20</sup>

Arthur F. Wright, "Values, Roles and Personalities," in Confucian Personalities, ed. Dennis Twitchett and Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 20.

No matter how many nationalist theories were imported from the West, moral goals rather than purely utilitarian goals had to be their object, at least for Vietnamese nationalists with one foot in the old classical tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Pham Quynh, as the bulk of his writings illustrates, was a staunch Confucianist who sought to forge Vietnam's independence on moral principles and basic cultural integrity. The importance of Pham's syncretism lies in that it was an approach which was indigenous to him. The impact of Western ideas on Pham Quynh must be measured with circumspection and with the realization that Pham adopted an indigenous approach to resolving what he perceived to be problems created by colonialism. In addition, as Woodside illustrates, above, Pham Quynh's emphasis, within his syncretic framework, was clearly on Vietnamese and Confucian values.

Historiographically, both Pham's defense of certain aspects of Confucian ideology and his syncretic approach have been analyzed in negative terms. David Marr interprets Pham's syncretism as being "conservative" and as seeking merely to wed certain compatible Western ideas to Confucian concepts.<sup>22</sup> Marr's interpretation of Pham's "middle-road" approach and syncretism stems from his own emphasis on the concept of change in Vietnamese history. The central hypothesis of Marr's

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Alexander B. Woodside, Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), p. 40.

22

David Marr, Vietnamese Tradition, p. 112.

Vietnamese Tradition On Trial, 1920-1945 is that "developments in the twentieth century history of Vietnam must be understood within the context of fundamental changes in political and social consciousness among a significant segment of the Vietnamese populace," between 1920 and 1945.<sup>23</sup>

Marr's emphasis on change affects his perceptions of Vietnamese tradition. In the first place, Marr is conducting his analysis from a Western perspective. It is an approach which stresses the notion of French impact on Vietnamese society and which subsequently greatly reduces the role of the Vietnamese with respect to the nature of their relationships with the French colonial apparatus. The necessary corollary to Marr's approach is that Pham's insistence on maintaining certain Confucian principles is static, reactive and conservative. It must be recognized that in comparison with more revolutionary approaches to the pressures of colonialism, such as armed insurgency and rebellion, Pham's position indeed appears conservative. Such an analysis, however, reduces Pham's position; it fails to recognize that he may have been an actor in his own destiny.

Huynh Kim Khanh writes that "the French-appointed mandarins," such as Pham Quynh, "were of shallow cultural roots," and that "whatever they knew of Confucianism and traditional Sino-Vietnamese civilization they had acquired

late through self-education." 24 Huynh's analysis is not based on a careful study of Pham's writings. The writings examined for this essay illustrate that Pham not only had a profound understanding of Confucianism but that he also deliberately chose to espouse Confucian principles and Confucian syncretism as a means of contending with the social upheaval French colonialism appeared to have created.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Language and Social Context in Vietnam

The social changes resulting from the French colonial presence in Vietnam were traumatic for Vietnamese of all classes. French domination compelled many Vietnamese intellectuals to question not only the nature of Vietnamese society as it had existed prior to the arrival of the French, but also the definition of their role within that society. As will be illustrated in the following chapters Pham Quynh sought answers to both of these questions. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the rise of debates conducted by Vietnamese intellectuals and French colonial officials alike over numerous aspects of Vietnamese society.

One of the important aspects of Vietnamese society and culture being discussed was that of language. French attempts to assimilate the Vietnamese had been expressed in a number of ways, not least of which had been the creation of a French-language-only educational policy. Faced with the possibility of cultural assimilation, Vietnamese intellectuals became concerned about language. It was during

the 1920's that debate over the question of language was most intense. Pham Quynh was one of the many Vietnamese intellectuals to recognize the importance of language in preserving Vietnamese culture. In order to better understand Pham's concern it is necessary both to briefly examine the social context within which the language question arose and to outline the nature of the language debates themselves.

In Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam, Alexander Woodside claims that between the 1860's and 1890's, French colonial rule over Vietnam resulted in a re-distribution of power among Vietnamese social classes. Under French policy, by 1918, the traditional examinations system was abolished. Traditional Vietnamese scholars could be, and often were, replaced as leaders by merchants, vendors, or military officials. In a society in which, traditionally, the literati and the bureaucrats were almost at the top of the ladder of social prestige, and in which the merchants found themselves on the lower rungs, it is possible to conceive that such transformations of social order may have engendered what Woodside calls "its own psychological crisis."<sup>1</sup> There is need, however, to measure carefully the depth of such a psychological crisis. In his study of Confucianism in Vietnamese society, John Whitmore argues that the bias against merchants was not as strong in

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander B. Woodside, Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), p.10.

Vietnam as it was in China.<sup>2</sup> Whitmore attributes this to economic and demographic changes in the seventeenth century in Vietnam whereby "commerce and wealth related to land ownership increased greatly," and in which "all levels of Vietnamese society and both sexes became involved in the growing international trade."<sup>3</sup> Again, according to Whitmore, it was not until the nineteenth century that the Vietnamese elite sought to tighten the "loose" and "flexible" aspects of Vietnamese Confucianism.<sup>4</sup> The elite's tightening of the Vietnamese political and social system through the medium of Neo-Confucianism may have resulted in a more critical attitude towards merchants than had existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it would be wrong to suggest that such criticism was ever as strong as it had been in China, where economics and demographics had not allowed that society to develop as flexible a structure as it had in Vietnam.

Presuming that a crisis in the Vietnamese political system existed before the arrival of the French, Woodside suggests that the problems within Vietnam's civil service

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<sup>2</sup> John K. Whitmore, "Social Organization and Confucian Thought in Vietnam," Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 15 (September, 1984), p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 306

became more pronounced and more severe under the colonial regime, and further advances the view that:

The Confucian bureaucracy, for all these reasons, remained the most important organized segment of traditional Vietnamese society to feel the full impact of colonialism. And the decay of the traditional bureaucracy after 1884 was a crucial aspect of that communal disintegration which haunted the psychology of so many Vietnamese patriots.<sup>5</sup>

Vietnam's scholars also found themselves contending with the imposition of new, Western ideas as well as their accompanying manifestations of customs, dress, values and political structures. French attempts to impose their values were especially evident in their educational policies where Vietnamese school curricula were amended to include instruction in French history, geography, mathematics, and science. Instruction was conducted in the French language. Such impositions were dictated by the firm belief that the values being promulgated were superior in nature to the traditions of the Vietnamese.

The ascent of new groups of Vietnamese to the bureaucracy contributed to the creation of a new elite, in large part comprised of traders, artisans, merchants and vendors. This new upper-class also included those Vietnamese David Marr has referred to as the "new intelligentsia," that is, those Vietnamese educated in the French school



system. Pham Quynh, by reason of his French-language education, was a member of this new intelligentsia. While a product of the French-language school system in Vietnam, Pham Quynh nonetheless came to publicly question the validity of French-language-only instruction. The debates carried on by Pham Quynh and a few other Vietnamese intellectuals, as well as by French officials, turned the language question into a public issue. The language issue was as complex to the Vietnamese as were the other challenges of French colonial rule. David Marr suggests that "no fewer than eight language options were theoretically available to Vietnamese in the early twentieth century."<sup>6</sup> Before attempting to analyze some of the various linguistic options and their significance to both the French and the Vietnamese, a brief history of language in Vietnam is necessary.

Since the 1920's there have been a number of arguments over the origins of the Vietnamese language. Some linguists, such as Haudricourt, claimed that Vietnamese is an

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David G. Marr, Vietnamese Tradition, p.147.

Marr enumerates the options as such:

<u>Spoken Language</u>		<u>Writing System</u>
<u>Mass</u>	<u>Elite</u>	
1 Vietnamese	Vietnamese/Chinese	Chinese/Nom
2 Vietnamese	Vietnamese/Chinese	Chinese
3 Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Nom
4 Vietnamese	Vietnamese	Simplified Nom
5 French	French	French
6 Vietnamese	French	French
7 Vietnamese	French/Vietnamese	French/ <u>Quoc Ngu</u>
8 Vietnamese	Vietnamese	<u>Quoc Ngu</u>

Austro-Asiatic language which was strongly influenced by Chinese, Malay and other Asian languages.<sup>7</sup> Others maintain that it belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. One thousand years of Chinese rule had resulted in strong linguistic borrowings, making the link to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages a plausible hypothesis. According to John DeFrancis, Chinese words make up one third of the Vietnamese vocabulary.<sup>8</sup> Other sources claim that fifty per cent of Vietnamese words were of Chinese origin.<sup>9</sup> Despite such a high degree of lexical borrowing, the Vietnamese nonetheless attempted to assert their sense of independence and identity by continuing to pronounce Chinese words according to their own phonetic patterns. Linguists now claim, however, that Vietnamese is not linked to the Chinese or Sino-Tibetan family of languages, but rather to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic family. Linguist Franklin Huffman sums up the argument as follows:

The question of the genetic affiliation of Vietnamese has long been debated. Attempts have been made to relate it to Chinese, to Tibeto-Burman, to Tai, to Mon-Khmer and even to Egyptian! But it is Haudricourt, who has most convincingly argued in favor of an

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<sup>7</sup> John DeFrancis, Colonialism and Language Policy in Vietnam (The Hague: Mouton Press, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Austro-Asiatic connection for Vietnamese..... In light of the explanatory power of Haudricourt's hypothesis concerning the relationship between Vietnamese tones and Mon-Khmer word shapes shown here, coupled with the undeniably basic nature of the lexical items involved, the genetic relationship of the Vietnamese language to Austro-Asiatic, if not Mon-Khmer proper, would appear to be highly probable.<sup>10</sup>

From 111 B.C. to 939 A.D., sinicization attempts dictated Chinese administrative policies. The introduction of the Chinese script in Vietnam came together with the presence of Chinese officials, refugees and Buddhist monks, but the script was given permanent cultural status with the creation, in Vietnam, of a traditional and classical examination system modelled on the Chinese system. Access to civil service positions was limited to a minute fraction of the Vietnamese population. That only a small fraction of the Vietnamese population could read or write Chinese characters was indicative of the hierarchical nature of Vietnamese society:

Nevertheless the number of Vietnamese who possessed a good command of Chinese characters was probably never a significant part of the population, no more than three to five per cent according to one estimate.<sup>11</sup>

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Franklin E. Huffman, "An Examination of Lexical Correspondences Between Vietnamese and Some Other Austro-Asiatic Languages," Lingua 43 (1977), p.171.

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John DeFrancis, Colonialism and, p.19.

It was also an indication of an even wider gulf between the masses and the elite in Vietnam than existed in China. The gulf created by the hierarchical nature of the Chinese-style, Confucian structure of government was deepened by the fact that the masses could not even understand spoken Chinese. DeFrancis analyzes this situation as follows:

What came out of this process was a class of scholars and their officials who at their Confucian best had a Patrician concern for their country, their peoples and their culture, but at their Confucian worst permitted their self-centered elitism to isolate them from the ordinary people and their problems. This separation between the intellectual elite and the illiterate masses was reinforced by the restricted availability of book knowledge through the medium of Sino-Vietnamese. Ordinary people were not only unable to read anything written in Sino-Vietnamese but were also unable to understand it even if it was read aloud to them.<sup>12</sup>

Gradually, the Vietnamese literati developed another form of writing known as Chu Nom. The new system consisted of ideographs which also bore phonetic value. In terms of the relationship between the Vietnamese literati and the Vietnamese masses, DeFrancis claims that "as a phonetic system (Chu Nom) is comprehensible even to illiterates when read aloud to them, provided, of course that subject matter, style, vocabulary;...are within their sphere of

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Ibid., p. 20. Sino-Vietnamese refers to those terms borrowed from the Chinese language but which were pronounced in Vietnamese.

understanding."<sup>13</sup> Despite the possibilities of social rapprochement Chu Nom appeared to offer, the literati, even up to the mid-nineteenth century, favoured the use of both Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese while Chu Nom was used chiefly as a pastime and for purposes of poetic exercise.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, those of the intelligentsia who wrote in Chu Nom "studded their writings to excess with Chinese elements which were nothing more than reminiscences of their classical studies,"<sup>15</sup> and which were incomprehensible to the majority of Vietnamese.

The arrival of the European missionaries in the sixteenth century resulted in the development of yet another form of written Vietnamese: Quoc Ngu. Quoc Ngu was a romanization of the ideographic system and was undoubtedly created to help European missionaries learn the Vietnamese language. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that both the French and the Vietnamese began to recognize the usefulness, both practically and ideologically, of the romanized version of the Vietnamese language.

The period of French colonial rule spawned almost continuous debate over the language issue. The various

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<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., p.28.

<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., p.35.

<sup>15</sup>

Ibid., p.47.

linguistic options available at that time held different meanings to both the Vietnamese and the French. For the government of the French metropolis the propagation of the French language in Vietnam was required not only for purposes of political and administrative expediency, but also as an extension of the Mission Civilisatrice, the ideological premise which both justified and rationalized their presence in that area of Southeast Asia. The threat of linguistic assimilation was not an imagined one for the Vietnamese. As David Marr has noted:

Complete assimilation to the French language had been advocated by a number of colonial theorists and officials in the 1860's and 1870's. Although proven by the 1880's wildly impractical, even in Cochinchina, it was never quite abandoned as a long-term objective.16.

For the French missionaries, the creation of Quoc Ngu did not merely simplify a foreign language which they found difficult to learn with any great speed; it also came to represent the means by which the missionaries might steer the educated Vietnamese away from the Chinese traditions which were sure to play havoc with their attempts at proselytization. French colonial administrators vacillated between the use of French and Quoc Ngu.

There often exists a close relationship between language and nationalism. Every ideology requires a language to

convey it. Many Vietnamese intellectuals and nationalists recognized the importance of language for language contained at least two elements which could be useful in a quest for national independence. First, language could become a source of cultural identification and national cohesion. According to David Marr, "at least 85 per cent of the population inhabiting what the French called Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina spoke the same language with only minor dialectical variations."<sup>17</sup> There are deeper implications to linguistic identification. Language may be more than a communications system; it often also reflects the cultural setting from which it originates. It may be argued that the customs, ideas and experiences of a given society are directly represented lexicographically, grammatically and syntactically in the language it uses. Given that they shared a common language it wouldn't be too difficult for the Vietnamese to imagine a strong sense of cultural cohesion.

The second element was that of literacy, and it was important in two ways: first, in the propagation of ideas and second, in the glorification of the vernacular. Marr states that many Vietnamese intellectuals were aware of the role played by mass literacy "in the strengthening of nation-states in Europe and Japan in the late nineteenth

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<sup>17</sup>David G. Marr, Vietnamese Tradition, p. 33.

century."<sup>18</sup> The propagation of ideas through mass print media began in colonial Vietnam with the opening of an Imprimerie Nationale annex at Saigon in 1879. Over time the number of printing presses and private newspapers proliferated. Despite problems of press censorship, Vietnamese intellectuals were nonetheless able, though sometimes only for brief periods of time, to publish their newspapers. These newspapers could not, of course, call for mass mobilization and rebellion, but until the end of the 1930's the Vietnamese press was able to voice certain opinions or complaints about French colonial policy.

There were as many debates and interests as there were newspapers, and, through these newspapers, numerous ideas, concepts and opinions were bandied about and offered at least to those who were literate. Vietnamese nationalists were later to take advantage of this situation as many scholars who were teachers in villages would propagate the information contained in some newspapers by reading it or translating it for their illiterate neighbours.

The rise of the vernacular was seminal as well, for as Benedict Anderson writes, "as literacy increased it became easier to arouse popular support, with the masses discovering a new glory in the print elevation of languages

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Ibid., p.138.



they had 'spoken all along.'<sup>19</sup> Anderson estimates that in Vietnam, by the late 1930's, ten per cent of the population was literate.<sup>20</sup> By Western standards, this figure may not have appeared staggering, but within the framework of a Vietnamese society in which literacy had been limited to an upper strata of small proportion, a ten per cent literacy ratio was a marked improvement. The growing acceptance of the vernacular, as expressed in the use of Quoc Ngu, represented more than a significant rise in the number of people to whom it was accessible. Of equal consequence was the fact that it represented also a breakdown of the linguistic barrier which existed between the Vietnamese elite and the Vietnamese masses. A complementary relationship therefore existed between the breakdown of the more rigid, former social interrelations, the growing literacy rate, and the propagation of ideas through the print media.

Language development was deemed crucial not only for French colonial officials but also for Vietnamese nationalists and intellectuals. While there developed a growing debate specifically over the use of Quoc Ngu, there were also initial arguments over the use of Chinese,

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Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and Spread of Nationalism (Norfolk, England: The Thetford Press, 1983), p. 77.

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Ibid., p. 117.

Sino-Vietnamese and French. Much like the use of Latin in Western societies, Chinese was still considered "necessary for access to a huge reservoir of knowledge."<sup>21</sup> To the French, perpetuation of the use of Chinese had been detrimental to their aims of making French culture predominant in Indochina. French officials considered that retaining the Chinese language and script would hinder the process of the cultural assimilation of the Vietnamese.

In 1905, writing in the Revue Indochinoise, Lieutenant Colonel Diquet bemoaned the abolition of Chinese on the grounds that it had resulted in a deterioration of moral values and in an increase in the crime rate:

(le) premier résultat fut de priver l'enfance de l'enseignement de la morale de Confucius qui lui inculquait les préceptes communs à toutes les religions, mais au premier rang le respect des parents des maîtres et des chefs. L'effet immédiat de cette suppression de l'éducation morale chez les enfants, tout au moins chez ceux qui n'apprenaient pas la morale chrétienne, c'est-à-dire chez la grande majorité, a été une augmentation considérable de la criminalité.<sup>22</sup>

The maintenance of Chinese in the Vietnamese educational system was advocated also by a number of Vietnamese. Continuity of a linguistic nature was not the only end to be achieved. Giau Tam Vong, for example,

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> La Revue Indochinoise, 1905, p.227.

complained that the French morale which had replaced Confucianism was unsuitable to the Vietnamese. Giaq also believed that there had been a decline in morality but attributed it both to the inapplicability of French ethics to the Vietnamese context and to the "utilitarian" motives of the Vietnamese choosing to study the French language:

Par une réaction, l'influence Chinoise sut capituler devant la conquête française, la population scolaire afflua vers les écoles françaises dans un but purement utilitaire, pour se créer une situation dans l'administration. Conséquence fâcheuse, il faut le dire, car à la morale Confucéenne se substitua bientôt la morale française qui est-je ne dis pas moins bonne; car après tout il n'y a qu'une morale, -mais peu appropriée quant à sa forme, à la majorité annamite.<sup>23</sup>

With respect to the use or the abolition of Chinese in the schools there was a marked difference of attitude between Vietnamese scholars of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. The two former were less likely to abandon Chinese for Vietnamese, or Quoc Ngu, a linguistic form they had always considered to be obscure, awkward, and "rustic." Furthermore, according to DeFrancis, the French policy of using both French and Quoc Ngu as vehicles of education was resisted by scholars who interpreted such

action as a "direct attack on their prerogatives."<sup>24</sup> Northern Vietnamese intellectuals likely realized that the French perceived the role of Quoc Ngu in transitional terms, that is, as a step towards assimilation. As David Marr has noted: "Indeed, many Frenchmen saw Quoc Ngu as strictly transitional script, a historical stepping stone to more general familiarity with the French language, if only in some pidgin variety."<sup>25</sup> Faced with the problem of a changing elite, the old Confucian scholars of Annam and Tonkin could do little else but associate the demise of the Chinese language with the decline of their own influence. It therefore followed that they would be less receptive to alternative language options. In this respect, given that he was a "northern" Vietnamese, Pham Quyn's promotion of Quoc Ngu was far from representing a reactionary or conservative stand.

In Cochinchina Confucianist tradition was not as deep-rooted as it was in Tonkin and Annam. It was not until the seventeenth century, for example, that the "Vietnamization" of the area the French called Cochinchina took place. Historically, Cochinchina had had less exposure to Vietnamese society modeled on the Chinese system. Thus there were fewer advocates of the retention of Chinese. It

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John DeFrancis, Colonialism and Language policy, p.149.

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David G. Marr, Vietnamese Tradition, p.148.

was there also that the French presence was most strongly felt. Saigon's Tribune Indigène, however, illustrates that even among the intellectuals within Cochinchina there existed strong differences of opinion. Some, like Giao Tam Vong, called for a return to Chinese while others clamoured for a French-language education. In 1918 Bach Le even went so far as to express the opinion that the dissemination of French ideas would not prevent the development of Vietnamese nationalism:

En imprégnant l'intellectualité des peuples indochinois des idées françaises on ne peut concevoir aucune crainte de voir se réveiller le nationalisme annamite, puisque celui-ci peut-être satisfait du régime qui convient à nos aspirations collectives, beaucoup mieux que n'aurait su faire l'ancien régime.<sup>26</sup>

Bach is representative of those Vietnamese who concluded that Vietnam needed to drop what they considered to be its archaic and inadequate traditions and modernize instead. By reason of its greater military and technological strength, France became the model. More and more Vietnamese intellectuals were calling for educational policies which would bring them in step with the West. Many felt that modernization should include technological and scientific education. The technology brought from France was entirely new to the Vietnamese and therefore only French could

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La Tribune Indigène, January 7, 1918.

provide the scientific instruction needed.

Il est inadmissible que sous prétexte de respecter nos traditions le gouvernement maintienne un enseignement désormais désuet, dont la vie moderne ne saurait plus s'accommoder. Le peuple annamite a évolué; il demande à le faire d'avantage et le plus rapidement possible en s'assimilant à la civilisation occidentale; il désire posséder une langue qui lui permette de communiquer avec le reste du monde civilisé, son idiome étant impropre à cet usage; quelle raison invoquer pour refuser de lui enseigner la langue française. 27

Whether from Tonkin, Annam or Cochinchina, Vietnamese intellectuals clamouring for French as a vehicle of education should not simply be classified as collaborators of the French colonial government. Nor should their position be interpreted as being anti-nationalist in nature. First, far from being collaborators or mere apologists, those Vietnamese in favour of an educational system in French only were sometimes running counter to the positions taken by the French colonial authorities. By the time Bach Le had written his article in the Tribune Indigène, French colonial officials had begun to recognize the nationalist and subversive potential of the writings of their own philosophes, and many, such as Diquet, advocated the re-institution of Chinese characters and ethics in the Vietnamese school programmes.

Second, in the context of French colonial rule in

Vietnam, the need for a more scientific education was strongly felt. The fact that the Vietnamese were no longer in control of their own territory was a daily reminder that they were technologically overpowered by the French. It was recognized by many Vietnamese that the only language which could adequately convey the concepts, the ideas, and the information which corresponded to this new technology was the French language. Attempts to place Vietnamese society on an equal technological footing with that of France were not necessarily anti-nationalist. It could even be argued that in some cases these attempts had a patriotic basis. Also, there does not necessarily exist an inherent ideological kinship between two societies engaged in similar technological or scientific pursuits. Therefore, Vietnamese endorsement of French scientific methods is not necessarily also an endorsement of French values.

The language debates were not limited to the practicalities of French or Chinese. The use of Quoc Ngu increasingly became an issue. There were mixed reactions to this romanized version of the Vietnamese language from both the French colonial administrators and the Vietnamese literati. At first the French had upheld the notion that Quoc Ngu offered an alternative to the use of Chinese characters. It was hoped that ideologically the use of the romanized writing system would wean the Vietnamese scholars away from the Confucian ethic. Furthermore, Quoc Ngu

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provided a useful and practical first step to the gradual transition to French. In an article signed by Henri Russier in the Revue Indochinoise, this particular goal was made perfectly clear:

Cet enseignement que nous cherchons à faire aussi pratique et positif que possible, et qui se donne d'abord en langue indigène au moyen du Quoc Ngu, devient peu à peu un enseignement en langue française, à mesure que les élèves avancent dans les études et, par sélection successives, se rapprochent graduellement du niveau français. Nous faisons ainsi de la diffusion progressive du français le but suprême de toute notre action et de la langue la clef de voute de tout notre édifice scolaire.<sup>28</sup>

The proliferation of the Quoc Ngu press, however, led to a revision of French policies. The French recognized that a growing portion of the literature written in Quoc Ngu was patriotic in nature and had the potential to seriously undermine the French colonial apparatus. The seriousness of the language issue was not lost on French rector Joubin, who, in 1924 stated that :

C'est à tort, il faut bien l'avouer, que nous en avons fait (le Quoc Ngu) la langue officielle en Cochinchine. En ce faisant nous avons poursuivi le but de rompre définitivement les attaches qui reliaient nos protégés à la civilisation Chinoise. C'est une tentement et à mesure que nous eussions substitués notre propre civilisation



à celle que nous voulions évincer.<sup>29</sup>

As the problems of Quoc Ngu became evident to the French, the Vietnamese increasingly recognized the nationalist potential of the romanized writing system. As a simplified method for writing the Vietnamese language, Quoc Ngu contributed to an increase in that society's literacy ratio. It was easy for Vietnamese scholars to teach Quoc Ngu outside the official educational system set up by the French government. A number of Vietnamese intellectuals believed that Quoc Ngu also opened up the Vietnamese language to a number of new concepts and ideas:

It was a considerable step forward because the means of expression became unbounded: it facilitated the use of technical and scientific terms. The language ceased to deal only with concrete things and began to express abstract ideas and human feelings. Books began to be printed and popular literature knew a rapid development.<sup>30</sup>

It would be wrong to suggest that Vietnamese intellectuals, even well into the first two decades of the twentieth century, were unanimous in their support for Quoc Ngu. There still existed what has been referred to as the "long and latent struggle between the Confucianist scholars and the younger generations," and "several writers were

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La Revue Indochinoise, 1905, p.227.

30

The Evolution of Vietnamese Literature: from Nom to Romanized Characters, Saigon (date unknown), p.10.

ailed because they refused to acknowledge that 'romanticism' would cause the disintegration of the family and bring the collapse of society."<sup>31</sup> Vis-à-vis the language issue, therefore, certain rifts still persisted among Vietnamese scholars and officials.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Quoc Ngu lay in the fact that ideologically it challenged the elitism of many Confucian scholars. Woodside contends that prior to the 1930's, the Vietnamese language still contained many words or phrases which served to reinforce the hierarchical nature of Vietnamese society. Quoc Ngu, Woodside adds, eventually challenged the hierarchical nature of Vietnamese society:

It helped to remove stylistic barriers between the intellectuals and the common people, barriers belonging to the old Confucian hierarchy, by freeing upper-class writers from some of the philosophical abstractions and aristocratic brevities of written classical Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese.<sup>32</sup>

Among the first and the strongest advocates of the use of Quoc Ngu in the Vietnamese educational system were Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh and Pham Quynh. John DeFrancis claims that Pham Quynh made, through the medium of his newspaper Nam Phong, outstanding contributions to the diffusion of Quoc Ngu:

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander B. Woodside, Community and Revolution, p.79.

For all his subservience to France in the area of political control, Pham Quynh emerged as a defender of his mother tongue, though with the highly important qualification that it was trusted members of the intellectual elite like himself who should be permitted to guide the direction and the context of the evolving Vietnamese language.<sup>33</sup>

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Pham Quynh and the Notion of Cultural Nationalism

One of the most consistent elements of Pham Quynh's thought, and consequently of his writings, is his concept of cultural nationalism. In order to better interpret Pham's statement that what he strove to achieve was "essentiellement le nationalisme, mais au point de vue culturel,"<sup>1</sup> it is necessary first to examine his interpretations both of culture and of nationalism.

Pham Quynh's writings do not provide a specific definition of the term culture, but they do indicate that his interpretation of culture is rather broad. In his essays and in his newspaper Pham consistently refers to literature, architecture, art, philosophy, traditions, morale and

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<sup>1</sup> Pham Quynh, Nam Phong 164 (July 1931), p.186 as quoted in "Introduction au Nam Phong, 1917-1934," Pham Thi Ngoan from Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises Série Nouvelle, 48 (Paris:1973); p.278.

language as that which defines a nation's soul:

La culture nationale est l'ensemble des mouvements intellectuels, des recherches et des études d'un pays présentant une originalité par rapport à ceux des autres pays, et influençant les intellectuels du pays.<sup>2</sup>

Pham's conception of culture refers essentially to ideas and to the expression of such ideas through art, customs and language. The concept of morale, or ethics, also figures prominently in Pham's writings. For Pham, le plan moral, as he often referred to it, was "le refuge caché de l'âme de la race,"<sup>3</sup> that which developed over centuries and which represented the personality of a given people. Pham's writings indicate that his notion of culture also implied a code of ethics or a way of life unique to a given society.

The primary aim of Pham's writings was to promote the concept of a distinctive Vietnamese culture; it was not to analyze the term culture itself. It becomes useful, then, in order to better understand Pham's interpretation of culture, to provide a framework within which Pham's conception of culture will not only be allowed to emerge but will also be subjected to comparison. It is necessary that such a

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<sup>2</sup> Pham Quynh, Nam Phong 163 (June, 1931)p.515 as quoted in "Introduction au Nam Phong, 1917-1934," Pham Thi Ngoan from Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises Série Nouvelle, 48 (Paris:1973), p.278.

<sup>3</sup> Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam à la Croisée des Civilisations, p.200.

framework derive from a source which has as its primary aim analysis of the term culture. In this respect, his writings indicate that Pham's conception of culture corresponds quite closely to that of Raymond Williams.

In Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society Raymond Williams concedes that the word culture is one of the most complex of the English language.<sup>4</sup> In order to better understand the meaning of culture, Williams adds, it is necessary to examine two "broad active categories of usage."<sup>5</sup> Williams' categories are "the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development," and "the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general."<sup>6</sup>

Pham was alluding to such a general process, and to a similar notion of a way of life, when he developed his "three-plane" concept of a Vietnamese culture. Pham contended that the fusion of Eastern and Western ideas could be carried out on three major levels: intellectual, aesthetic and moral. On the intellectual plane, Pham advocated the

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Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1976), p. 87.

5

Ibid., p. 90.

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Ibid.

development of an "intelligence" which would have as fundamental components both the ancient reflective wisdom of the Eastern sages and the modern Western "scientific" concepts of precision, method, analysis objectivity and initiative.<sup>7</sup> The end result of such a fusion, according to Pham Quynh, would be the development of an "intelligence" which was uniquely Vietnamese and which would represent an essential component of Vietnamese culture.

On the aesthetic plane, Pham maintained that a fusion of East and West could only be minimal since l'esthétique, or the arts, could be nothing other than the reflections of a society's total shared experiences:

J'admire la cathédrale de Reims, monument prodigieux, ... Mais mon admiration est pour ainsi dire toute intellectuelle, et je ne ressentirai jamais devant cette merveilleuse dentelle de pierre, l'impression profonde que je ressens, par exemple, devant le tombeau de Minh-Mang. Je n'ose affirmer que ce dernier soit plus beau, et pourtant sa conception et sa réalisation répondent mieux à l'idée que je me fais, que se font les hommes de ma race, de la beauté.<sup>8</sup>

What Pham is also suggesting is that shared experiences invariably imply shared perceptions. The sentiments evoked by such artistic expression as the Minh-Mang tomb bears testimony, by the existence of shared experiences and shared

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam à la Croisée des Civilisations, p.197.

8

Ibid., p.199.

perceptions, to the existence also of a sense of communal appartenance.

Pham Quynh found the third, or moral plane to be synonymous with the concept of a society's way of life or code of ethics. This moral plane is unique and constitutes the most distinctive element of a society's culture. Within the context of colonial Vietnam this plane, according to Pham, did not need to be developed but rather it needed to be protected from external influences for it represented "la condition même de la vie des peuples."<sup>9</sup>

L'influence de l'occident doit donc  
s'arrêter a ce domaine réservé où  
se manifeste la vie intime de cha-  
que peuple, à ce sanctuaire sacré de  
ses traditions et de son âme.<sup>10</sup>

Pham's interpretation of culture corresponds quite well to the two categories of usage Williams is describing: the process of development of culture and culture as representing a way of life. Pham had no perception of the interpretative dichotomy pointed out by Williams and which both levels of usage eventually created. For Pham, there existed a symbiotic relationship between both levels of usage. The logical outcome of the first level of usage was the second level of usage, and also vice versa. Pham perceived of culture in deterministic terms. The nurturing

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.201.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.202.



and the development of an indigenous culture based on shared characteristics and experiences would result in the development of a truly indigenous way of life.

Pham maintained that without such a way of life, or a doctrine, as he sometimes referred to it, Vietnam could not reach political or economic autonomy. In other words, without a "soul", a nation could not exist. Pham Quynh realized that one of the most important characteristics the Vietnamese shared was their common language. Believing that a society's soul can be created, nurtured and developed, Pham argued that literature would be the instruments of Vietnam's eventual independence:

Sans littérature nationale, il ne peut  
y avoir d'indépendance intellectuelle;  
sans indépendance intellectuelle, il ne  
peut y avoir d'indépendance politique.  
C'est le dogme numéro un de mon nationa-  
lisme.<sup>11</sup>

Underlying Pham Quynh's belief in cultural determinism is the Confucian concept of the role of culture. In the political realm, Confucianism entailed that a given enemy (and in the case of colonial Vietnam this enemy would be France) should be conquered by cultural superiority first, rather than by force.<sup>12</sup> It is this Confucian concept which

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Pham Quynh, as quoted in Bernard LeCalloc'h, "Pham Quynh: Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre," Mondes et Cultures 45 (January, 1985), p.14.

12

Raymond Dawson, Confucius (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.15.

led Pham to advocate the promotion and the advancement of a Vietnamese culture. It also led him to adopt evolutionary, peaceful means to political independence as opposed to a more revolutionary or violent approach.

Close examination of Pham's writings leaves little doubt that he did indeed believe that Vietnam possessed the potential to develop a "superior" culture. In fact, many of Pham's articles, and many of his views on what aspects of Western culture the Vietnamese should borrow, indicate that he believed Vietnam's moral traditions were already superior to French or to Western culture. The "three-plane" concept already mentioned illustrates this quite clearly. Pham allowed that the Vietnamese could borrow, "avec empressement, voire avec enthousiasme, sans réticence et sans inquiétude,"<sup>13</sup> Western scientific, technological and methodological knowledge. As far as artistic, or aesthetic, borrowing is concerned, however, Pham called for circumspection: "L'Asie perd son temps à vouloir en toutes choses copier, ... il lui importe de maintenir intact ses idéaux d'art et de beauté. Il y va de sa vie, il y va de son âme."<sup>14</sup> The third, moral, plane, however, is the most significant; it is the level at which Pham believed there

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam a la Croisée des Civilisations, p.197.

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Ibid., p.200.

should be no compromise. In addition to alluding to the West's lack of sagesse, or wisdom, as we have observed earlier, Pham comments on the consequences of such shortcomings:

Si la science antique (Occidentale) était synonyme de sagesse, la science moderne en est souvent la négation, qu'elle ne tend qu'à instaurer dans le monde le règne de la machine, destructrice de tout idéal et de toute sagesse, et chaque pas fait dans son acquisition marque pour l'homme un recul dans le domaine des valeurs morales et spirituelles. Cette incompatibilité entre l'idéal de puissance et l'idéal de sagesse, ainsi que les méfaits d'une 'science sans conscience,' n'est jamais apparue aussi nettement aux Orientaux que lors de l'immense tuerie dont l'Occident tout entier vient d'être le théâtre.<sup>15</sup>

The above allusion to the destruction and the slaughter of the First World War provided Pham with a rationale for his insistence on the preservation of certain Confucian principles.

This moral plane is the one on which Pham placed the most emphasis. It is also the level which most clearly illustrates the depth of Pham's adherence to Confucian principles. Pham's emphasis on the cultivation of moral ideals as one of the most important elements of a people's culture is in direct accordance with the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation. In Imperial China, for example, the Confucian educational system mostly consisted of providing

the moral training necessary to produce "officials whose conduct could be a model for the people to imitate and reciprocate; so self-cultivation, or cultivation of the moral personality was the heart of the matter."<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Pham's belief in the deterministic nature of culture reflected the Confucian notion that self-cultivation was the basis for political and moral life. Personal and ideological forms of self-cultivation would transcend to the public and the political realm. In essence this process of transcendence is one which finds expression on two levels. First, self-cultivation of the individual eventually results in the cultivation of the masses. It is with respect to this particular level of cultural attainment that Pham Quynh stressed the importance of a strong and ideologically unified Vietnamese elite. Pham referred to this elite as the "école dirigeante" whose role is that of a "guide moral de la nation."<sup>17</sup> It is this precise Confucian concept which led Pham Quynh to propose that an indigenous elite impose moral and national discipline on the Vietnamese masses. Pham's definition of what constitutes moral and national discipline stems largely from his perception of the concept of assimilation. Pham's

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Raymond Dawson, Confucius, p. 81.

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam à la Croisée des Civilisations, p. 264.

interpretation of assimilation contrasted with the French understanding of that term, which implied in the realm of culture the imposition of French or Western ideas and mores on the Vietnamese. Pham's interpretation of cultural assimilation was neither negative nor reactive. His writings illustrate that he believed the Vietnamese people, guided by their own intellectual elite, had not only the ability, but also the prerogative to choose deliberately to adopt or to reject whatever elements of Western or French culture they saw fit and which best suited their aspirations and complemented their own cultural foundations. For Pham the process of assimilation was both active and developmental in nature:

Prendre à autrui ce qui vous manque,  
choisir ce que les autres ont de bon  
pour se l'incorporer dans sa substan-  
ce propre, en vue de l'enrichir et de  
la fortifier, voilà en quoi consiste  
cette assimilation naturelle et libre.  
que nous opposons volontiers à une  
assimilation forcée et artificielle, et  
imposée du dehors pour des fins inté-  
ressées, et non pas acceptées du dedans  
dans un but de perfectionnement et d'en-  
richissement.<sup>18</sup>

Moral and national discipline, of course, also possessed more tangible characteristics. The process of choice, according to Pham, entailed the adoption of certain precise European qualities and the preservation of certain Confucian characteristics:

Le fond (de la nouvelle culture annamite) en sera puisé aux sources mêmes de la pensée extrême-orientale: confucianisme, bouddhisme, taoïsme; il sera constitué par ces 'humanités Sino-annamites' dont l'enseignement devra être organisé méthodiquement. Mais la forme sera celle de la science Occidentale dans tout ce qu'elle comporte de discipline et de méthode, dans sa technique infaillible, dans son évidente objectivité, dans sa parfaite précision et dans ces lois rigoureuses, le tout n'excluant pas cette part d'intuition inhérente à la connaissance orientale, connaissance qui est à la fois science et sagesse.<sup>19</sup>

It was the role of the Vietnamese elite, according to Pham Quynh, to cultivate those qualities mentioned above and to serve as an example for the general Vietnamese population: "l'élite doit s'imposer à elle-même 'cette discipline avant de l'imposer au peuple.'"<sup>20</sup> Pham contended that the Vietnamese masses did not yet possess the ability to discriminate between those aspects of Vietnamese culture which needed to be discarded and those which needed to be added from other cultures. In addition, Pham maintained that those Vietnamese who had been educated strictly in the traditional, Chinese-style school system had been trained to imitate rather than to assimilate,<sup>21</sup> resulting in a very

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam Problèmes Culturels et Politiques, p.107.

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Ibid., p.63.

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam à la Croisée des Civilisations, p.245.

shallow interpretation of their own as well as Western ideas:

Ne voit-on pas qu'elle est de même nature (cette assimilation) que celle de ces hommes habillés à la dernière mode de Paris, parlant, gesticulant, affectant des allures indépendantes, incompatibles avec la plus élémentaire politesse ancestrale, mais parfaitement incapable de raisonner avec logique, de mettre un peu de clarté française, de cet ordre ou de ce bon sens cartésien dans leur pensée incohérente et leur esprit nébuleux?22

Second, those principles of self-cultivation applied to art and to the family, the basic structure of Confucianist society, applied also to the political sphere, that is, to government. Arthur Wright offers the following, lengthy explanation:

If an ordered and frictionless hierarchy dominated by a benevolent ruler and a wise and worthy elite was an ideal, what means to that end did Confucians advocate? The range is enormous, but we may mention a few of the most fundamental and most persistent. One was the well-ordered family wherein the adults learned how to manage community affairs and direct others for the common good while the young gradually learned to obey and to play their proper roles in the kinship hierarchy. The family was thus seen as a microcosm of the socio-political order; the wise father was a model for the wise ruler or minister and dutiful children were the models for properly submissive subjects who know their place, their role and

their obligations to others.<sup>23</sup>

Self-cultivation was thus an instrument for guiding one's conduct and would eventually guide society's conduct as well.

One of Pham Quynh's most interesting contentions with respect to culture was that the Vietnamese did not possess their own distinctive, indigenous culture. The factors at play in this problem, according to Pham, were rooted in Vietnam's past. Pham did not deny the existence of a Vietnamese past or of Vietnamese traditions. In fact, he found the notion that the Vietnamese could fall back on twenty five centuries of history to be a "suprême réconfort dans les moments de désenchantement et de doute."<sup>24</sup> In his writings, particularly the Essais Franco-Annamites, Pham devotes much time and energy to describing Vietnam's past. Some of his essays simply provide basic historical data, that is "dates and names of various Vietnamese dynasties and revolts against the Chinese invasions. A number of his essays, however, addressed the issue of the role played by history in the development of society. Here Pham embraced the notion that history, the knowledge of one's past, enables one to understand the present and to build the

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Denis Twitchett, and Arthur F. Wright, eds. Confucian Personalities, pp.6-7.

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam à la Croisée des Civilisations, p.21.



future. The lessons of history are also meant to guide one's conduct. It is Vietnam's history, Pham maintained, which will provide "les forces nécessaires pour affronter le présent et préparer l'avenir."<sup>25</sup> History and tradition are therefore essential components of Vietnamese culture. What Pham believed Vietnam to be lacking was that general process of cultural development and that distinctive way of life referred to in earlier pages.

Pham Quynh attributes this phenomenon to one thousand years of Chinese rule over Vietnam, and to the nature of the Chinese-style examination system established during the millenium of Chinese domination and maintained during the millenium following China's expulsion from Vietnam. Chinese domination over Vietnam, according to Pham, prevented Vietnamese literature and Vietnamese philosophy from developing:

L'Annam n'a jamais été qu'un élève de la Chine. En art, en littérature, en religion, en philosophie, il n'a jamais vécu que sur un fond de concepts et d'idées qui dérivent en droite ligne de la Chine.<sup>26</sup>

Under Chinese rule the Vietnamese language was neglected, resulting in a body of literary works written mostly in the Chinese language and reflecting Chinese form and

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Ibid.

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam: Problèmes Culturels et Politiques (Essais 1922-1932) (Paris: Editions Y Viet, 1985), p.101.

ideas. Vietnam also followed China's philosophical lead, and as the Chinese began to abandon the more flexible and supple influences of Taoism and Buddhism in favour of a more orthodox interpretation of Confucianism, so too did the Vietnamese. During Chinese rule the political reality had forced the Vietnamese elite to think and to write in Chinese, but once free of their colonizers, the Vietnamese litterati nonetheless continued to follow the Chinese tradition, creating a deeper ideological gulf between itself and the Vietnamese masses.

More than Chinese rule itself, according to Pham Quynh, the classical examination system established by the Chinese had been detrimental to the development of a distinctive Vietnamese culture:

Mais ce qui a contribué le plus à maintenir l'Annam dans ce que nous pouvons appeler, sans trop d'exagération, cet esclavage intellectuel à l'égard de la Chine, c'est le système des concours littéraires... La monarchie absolue trouvant dans cette institution un merveilleux instrument de domination, l'a entourée d'une telle pompe qu'elle prend le caractère d'une sorte de rite sacré. Et cette institution a sévi pendant si longtemps qu'elle a contribué à couler pour ainsi dire tous les cerveaux annamites dans le même moule traditionnel et scolastique.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to its being a reflection of Chinese culture rather than of Vietnamese culture, Pham maintained

that the examination system was static in nature; it had become frozen in time and no longer applied (particularly within the context of colonial Vietnam) to the aspirations and the needs of Vietnamese society. With its emphasis on the classics, for example, the traditional examination system had not prepared the Vietnamese to face the technological superiority of the West any more than it had prepared the Chinese for it. Many Vietnamese nationalists and intellectuals, including Pham Quynh, blamed the old educational system for inadequately equipping Vietnam to confront external challenges.

Pham also believed the traditional examination system was static and passive in nature in that it merely sought to develop "rote" learning and did little, if anything at all, to encourage and develop scientific, artistic, intellectual, cultural and literary creativity. Pham attributed Western wealth and prosperity to the existence of such a creative capacity.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted here that Pham believed technological and scientific advances to be essential components of a society's culture.<sup>29</sup> The traditional examination system had not only managed to neglect Vietnamese expression but had also eliminated the

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam a la Croisée des Civilisations, p. 82.

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Ibid.

means through which such expression might have been allowed to take form. In other words, the Chinese-style examination system, with what Pham Quynh referred to as its bookishness and its heavy scholasticism, had not only stifled Vietnamese creativity but had also set up a framework which prevented the creative process from developing. The consequences of such shortcomings, Pham declared, were that Vietnam did not possess a national culture "digne de ce nom."<sup>30</sup>

We must now examine Pham Quynh's interpretation of the term nationalism. Pham's definition of the concept of nationalism was rather vague. In the Vietnamese context he simply referred to it as "l'ensemble des aspirations nationales du peuple annamite."<sup>31</sup> Pham offered the following definition of a nationalist:

Un nationaliste est pour nous un homme qui reste profondément attaché à son pays et à sa race, qui a un sens aigu de la solidarité nationale et de la continuité historique; c'est un patriote, mais un patriote qui aime son pays non seulement par sentiment mais par raison, un patriote qui voudrait ériger son patriotisme en une sorte de doctrine morale et politique. D'un sentiment naturel, instinctif, qui se trouve dans le coeur de tout homme, il voudrait faire une règle de vie ou de conduite pleinement consciente et

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Ibid., p.100.

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam: Problèmes Culturels et Politiques, p.292.

raisonnée.<sup>32</sup>

Again, as in his interpretation of culture, the wider body of Pham's writings needs to be examined if any sense of his interpretation of nationalism is to emerge. It is necessary, first, to establish what constituted Pham's conception of a nation. Secondly, his definition of a nation's aspirations needs to be analyzed.

In one of his articles, Pham provided the following definition of the Vietnamese, or "Annamite", people: "c'est une nation d'au moins quinze millions d'individus, formée par une longue histoire, parfaitement cohérente et disciplinée..."<sup>33</sup> Throughout his writings Pham's conception of the Vietnamese nation is expressed mostly in cultural terms, that is, those characteristics of culture we have already examined. It is relatively clear, however, that despite his belief that Vietnam lacked a number of cultural prerequisites, such as scientific and technological knowledge and innovation, Pham Quynh believed that there was such a thing as a Vietnamese "nation." The existence of the Vietnamese nation, according to Pham, derives from its history. First, attempts to rid themselves of Chinese domination reveal a Vietnamese sense of self, of

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Pham Quynh, Nouveaux Essais Franco-Annamites (Hué: Editions Bui-Huy-Tin, 1938), p. 467.

33

Ibid.

separateness from their Chinese conquerors:

A vrai dire le sentiment national a toujours été très vif chez nous. Il n'y a qu'à lire notre histoire pour se rendre compte que, malgré la vassalité nominale de l'annam à l'égard de la Chine, chaque nouvelle invasion chinoise, chaque emprise nouvelle de la Chine sur ce pays fut suivie d'une explosion de ce sentiment dans la masse...<sup>34</sup>

Second, the Vietnamese displayed a sense of their own dynastic possibilities when they attempted and eventually succeeded in expanding into Champa in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. It may very well be that Pham interpreted such expansionism as a validation of Vietnamese "nationhood." Expansionist tendencies perhaps allowed Pham to place Vietnam on an ideological and political par with other expansionist nations such as China, France and Great Britain. Throughout Pham's writings, there is the tacit assumption that given the proper circumstances Vietnam had the ability to define its own territory, implying not only a definite sense of national awareness, but also a sense of what the national self is capable of envisioning and accomplishing. In addition, the Vietnamese possessed the one, distinctive cultural characteristic which Pham Quynh found crucial to a nation's existence: a common language.

Pham's belief in the existence of a separate Vietnamese identity is illustrated clearly in an article written in

1930 and in which he discusses the possibility of the creation of an Indochinese federation which would place not only the three divisions of Vietnam, but also Laos and Cambodia under one single federal umbrella. In his article Pham maintains that "dans l'Indochine française, le groupement le plus important, le plus homogène, et aussi le plus évolué, est sans conteste, le groupement annamite."<sup>35</sup> In addition, Pham maintains that within the context of such a federal union, the Vietnamese nation was the most important:

Comme la nation annamite est la plus importante, il est naturel qu'elle occupe une place prépondérante dans la fédération. Si c'est là une "hégémonie" elle tient de la nature des choses, et personne n'y peut rien.<sup>36</sup>

It is obvious from the above that Pham not only believed in the existence of a Vietnamese nation but also in its capacity to dominate its Indochinese neighbours. Pham displays, throughout his writings, an amazing consistency of thought. He defended Vietnamese mores as superior to Western mores, and he understood Vietnamese culture, because of its traditions and because of its desire to modernize and to become technological and modern, to be superior to the Laotian and the Cambodian cultures. In addition, just as

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

those intellectuals such as himself who constituted the "new elite," possessed the ability and the duty to serve as moral and cultural guides to the Vietnamese masses, so Vietnam, the elite society of Indochina, possessed also the ability and the duty to serve as guide to the other Indochinese states and peoples.

Pham's definition of Vietnamese national aspirations may be analyzed on two levels: cultural and political. In examining the cultural level, it is important to stress that Pham's perceptions of these aspirations are based mostly on his own personal ideas and principles rather than on those of the general Vietnamese population. It is made quite clear in his writings that Pham believed that he, and other intellectuals such as himself, knew best and could decide what those aspirations should be. Pham's elitist tendencies have been noted already, above, but it is important to stress that his conceptions of cultural reform were vertical in nature. In the first place, the assimilation of Western concepts entailed, according to Pham, certain dangers. Western ideas could easily be misunderstood and thus lead to social upheaval:

l'assimilation, telle que nous l'entendons, doit se faire par en haut et non par en bas. Elle ne peut être que le fait d'une élite sélectionnée, mise à même d'accéder à l'esprit occidental dans ce qu'il y a de meilleur et de plus original. La masse ne peut évoluer que lentement;...elle ne peut pas en tous cas, recevoir directement les apports vivifiants de l'occident sans les



altérer, sans leur faire perdre de leur valeur et de leur vertu.<sup>37</sup>

It was Pham Quynh himself and like-minded intellectuals, who ought to decide what elements were to constitute the new Vietnamese culture.

It was both Pham's perception of Vietnam's lack of a distinctive, "modern" culture, and his deterministic approach to the very concept of culture which prompted him to advocate the promotion of a truly Vietnamese culture. Pham's approach to the creation of such a culture was consistent with his approach to a number of other issues: it was highly syncretic. The new Vietnamese culture would reconcile tradition with modernity. Pham perceived of no dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Some of Pham's critics, such as modern historians David Marr and Huynh Kim Khanh, have seen Confucianism as synonymous with traditionalism and "accused" Pham of conservatism. Pham maintained, however, that if the definition of conservatism implied the negation of progress, then Confucianism could not possibly be conservative in nature. He held that Confucianism, with its emphasis on discipline, moral principles, and sense of duty, was a prerequisite for progress. Self-cultivation and self-development were the touchstones of Confucianism, Pham stressed. Pham's belief in the deterministic nature of individual self-progress made

it all but impossible for him to believe that such a pursuit would not eventually lead to societal progress. It is obvious that Pham perceived of no conflict between tradition and progress:

Est-ce à dire que la tradition exclut toute idée de changement et de progrès non, la tradition, comme toute chose vivante, doit elle-même évoluer. 38

We have already observed that the new culture Pham Quynh sought to promote was a synthesis of Vietnamese and Western culture, and we have already examined the elements and the characteristics of each culture which Pham sought to preserve or to adopt. One of the most logical rationales for an East-West synthesis, according to Pham, was the Japanese model. The Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905 justifiably captured the imagination of Chinese and Vietnamese nationalists and intellectuals alike. Pham Quynh recognized Japan's ability to modernize, to adopt Western technology and yet to remain fundamentally Japanese. Pham further advanced the view that the Japanese had also managed to win the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 because, unlike China, Japan had chosen not to ignore Western ideas: "Si le Japon avait pu avoir raison de la Chine, c'est qu'il avait eu la sagesse de ne pas mépriser les Occidentaux, mais au

contraire de se mettre résolument à leur école."39

In addition, and to Japan's credit, Pham believed, the Japanese had maintained a vertical, hierarchical societal framework:

L'Exemple du Japon nous montre que cette oeuvre est possible et réalisable, Si ce pays est arrivé, en peu de temps à accomplir une évolution formidable qui provoque l'étonnement et fait l'admiration du monde il le doit à l'existence au début de l'ère Meiji, d'une élite clairvoyante imbue de l'idée nationale.40

By keeping this hierarchical societal framework the Japanese had managed to counter the effects of "les théories les plus nocives de l'occident."41 And this countering effect had been made possible by the fact that the Japanese elite had taken its responsibility and had kept its duty to properly educate and guide the Japanese masses. It did not appear to be a breach of freedom to Pham Quynh that one of the Japanese elite's educational methods had been to ban the study and the books of Rousseau and Zola.42 For Pham, the prohibition of certain, "harmful" theories was part and

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39  
Ibid., pp.184-185.

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet nam: Problèmes Culturels et Politiques, p.64.

41  
Ibid., p.69.

42  
Ibid.

parcel of the Confucian gentleman's duties.

The Japanese model also provided Pham Quynh with a rationale for his perceptions of Vietnam's political aspirations. Culture was to be fostered by a sound educational system which would reflect the Vietnamese personality. Cultural independence was the means and political independence was the end, but Pham nonetheless concentrated chiefly on the means.

Although Pham frequently wrote that he found politics distasteful, he nonetheless realized that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the centuries of the creation of the nation-state. In his writings Pham provided little information as to what he believed the political structure of Vietnamese society should be. His only attempt to define Vietnam's political framework was an article written in 1930 in which he called for the institution of a constitutional monarchy in Vietnam. Pham advocated the maintenance of both the monarchy and the mandarinat but provided no further details of how such a political system should be established or organized. Because he was a translator and a philologist, and because he was preoccupied with the notion of Vietnamese cultural nationalism, the one specific political portfolio to which Pham paid any sustained attention was that of education.

Pham contended that even under the auspices of the French protectorate, the Vietnamese should control their own

educational system:

Ainsi on ne conçoit pas la réforme intellectuelle et morale de tout un peuple sans l'existence d'un gouvernement national qui aurait, dans le domaine de l'éducation, tous pouvoirs d'initiative et d'impulsions nécessaires... Aucune autorité étrangère, fût-elle éminemment bienfaisante et tutélaire, ne saurait se substituer à lui pour cette oeuvre primordiale et essentielle, sous peine de tomber dans des difficultés inextricables et d'aboutir à un échec certain.<sup>43</sup>

For Pham then, even in the political realm, the definition of the "idée nationale" is cultural in form. The culture precedes the politics for the politics eventually result from the culture. It is for this reason Pham found the Japanese model most useful. At the base of Japanese politics, Pham held, was the notion of the need for the elite to educate the masses, to adopt those Western concepts which would bring prosperity and power, and to create a modified culture which was still essentially Japanese (or Vietnamese or Asian) in nature.

One of the most problematic aspects of Pham Quynh's concept of nationalism is his insistence on the need for French protection while Vietnam was to undergo the developmental process of cultural and political independence. The concept of cultural and political

independence of course clashes with the concept of the protectorate. Analysis of Pham's position is made all the more difficult by the fact that he does not provide concrete explanations or definitions of the concept of nation. Neither does he allude, in all of his writings, to the notion of national sovereignty.

On a number of occasions Pham mentioned that the Vietnamese did not yet possess those qualities necessary for a modern nation. Vietnam had not modernized in the technological sense and was likely an easy prey:

L'Annam réduit à lui-même serait dans l'impossibilité de se maintenir, de se conserver, et retomberait facilement sous le joug d'une autre nation peut-être moins désintéressée et plus âpre, perdant ainsi tout le fruit qu'il a tiré du contact avec la France 44

Because Pham's perception of cultural development was evolutionary as well as deterministic, it follows that his perceptions of political development should also be evolutionary. Just as the Vietnamese needed to nurture their own indigenous culture, so too did they need to nurture their own political independence. It has been suggested that Pham's writings reveal his naive judgment that the French were the ideal, disinterested protectors who would eventually allow Vietnam to emancipate itself, but such contentions ignore the tone of many of Pham Quynh's

articles. Pham consistently openly denounced the notion of French cultural assimilation:

Au reste la politique d'assimilation et les méthodes d'administration directe qui en sont la conséquence, sont condamnées par tous les hommes compétents qui ont étudié avec impartialité la question annamite.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, Pham was more than adept at pointing out to the French authorities that they were not living up to their own ideals. In 1932 Pham called for a "politique d'égards" between the French and the Vietnamese. In the following lengthy excerpt Pham offered the French a few suggestions on how to treat the Vietnamese:

Une circulaire officielle a interdit le tutoiement à l'égard des collaborateurs indigènes dans les services publics. C'est très bien mais ce n'est pas suffisant. Certes le tutoiement est toujours vexant surtout quand il est traduit mentalement en Annamite par celui à qui il s'adresse, car le may tao annamite est nettement méprisant et péjoratif. Mais il est des façons de dire 'vous' qui parfois blessent également. Il est des marques de condescendance qui confinent au mépris. Tout ici est affaire de nuance, de tact, et le Français qui a la réputation d'être un des peuples les plus polis du monde, doit s'y entendre parfaitement. ...il suffit qu'il soit et reste toujours lui-même, et ne se croie pas obligé, par un souci exagéré du prestige, d'être pour ainsi dire en représentation continuelle devant l'indigène. Le prestige réel émane de la personnalité même, de l'ensemble de ses

qualités et de sa valeur morale; il ne saurait être l'effet de je ne sais quel orgueil de race, qui fait que quand on appartient à une race réputée supérieure, on croit avoir le droit de le manifester à tout propos à l'égard d'hommes d'une autre race soi-disant inférieure.<sup>46</sup>

It must be remembered that Pham was writing under strict colonial censorship laws. His message is nonetheless clear enough. It would be wrong to suggest that he was not aware of the gaps existing between France's ideals and its colonial policies. Pham consciously sought to make the French aware of these gaps, but especially to make them aware that the Vietnamese were also aware of these gaps. It is interesting to note that Pham chose both language and ethics to illustrate the discrepancies between French ideology and French colonial practices. In this respect Pham was being consistent. Language, and culture were his primary preoccupations and he tended to view matters in these terms especially.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Quoc Ngu and Vietnamese Nationalism

Pham Quynh was one of the many Vietnamese intellectuals who perceived the relationship between language and nationalism to be important. There was little originality in Pham's emphasis either on language or on nationalism. In terms of language, Pham was undoubtedly following a trend already begun in Europe in the nineteenth century. The study of language and of languages had become, by the middle of that century, a widespread phenomenon. By this time also, the study of literature and the study of language had already achieved a degree of scientific credibility by reason of the terminology used to define them—philology and linguistics. A number of European intellectuals such as Marx, Hegel and de Saussure had found the issues important enough to devote time to analyze and to provide their own theories on linguistics. In his book Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of

Nationalism, Benedict Anderson notes that:

As Seton-Watson most usefully shows, the nineteenth century was in Europe and its immediate peripheries, a golden age of vernacularizing lexicographers, grammarians and literateurs.<sup>1</sup>

Pham Quynh's extensive writings on language and literature indicate clearly that he was aware of the movement Anderson describes above. As seen in the previous chapter Pham Quynh clearly expounded his theories of cultural nationalism in many of his writings. In addition, Pham transcended this awareness and actually became an actor in the movement Anderson suggests. In the more specific realm of language and literature Pham did more than convey ideas, concepts and opinions. With regards to studying Vietnamese literature and to developing and improving the Vietnamese language Pham undertook definite and concrete actions.

In 1924 Pham taught a course in Sino-Vietnamese literature and philology at l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes Indochinoises at the university in Hanoi. In the introductory lecture to that course Pham Quynh introduced his students to his interpretation that the essence of a given people is reflected in its language. Pham attributed to philology a role as important as that of history. In the same

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Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism (Norfolk, England: The Thetford Press, 1983), p. 69.

lecture Pham stressed that research and analysis of one's literature and written documents allowed for the discovery of one's historical, intellectual, political, cultural and social evolution.<sup>2</sup> Pham's interpretation of language and literature was similar to his interpretation of culture. The personal was intended to lead to the public, that is, if one's writings revealed much about oneself, they also revealed much about society at large. A community's literature and written documents revealed the essence of that community. To Pham, languages were the "vivant refl t de l' me profonde d'un peuple."<sup>3</sup>

Again, like his perceptions of culture, Pham perceived of the roles of language and literature in deterministic terms. Literature, Pham stressed, had important functions: it should not be simply a leisurely pastime. French historian Bernard Le Calloc'h, when writing on Pham Quynh's role in the promotion of Quoc Ngu, points out that for Pham, and intellectuals like him, literature was necessarily an important educational tool:

C'est que tous  taient  galement  
convaincus de ce que la litt rature  
n'est pas un art d'agr ment, un  
moyen de d tente ou un d rivatif    
l'ennui, mais un tr s actif

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet-Nam: Probl mes Culturels et Politiques (Essais 1922-1932) (Paris: Editions Y Viet 1985): p.139.

3

Ibid., p.119.

instrument d'éducation.<sup>4</sup>

Pham's insistence on the study and on the deterministic nature of literature also stemmed from his avowed Confucian perceptions. In Confucian China much emphasis was placed on literature. The examination system which produced the literati, or the intellectual elite, was based on memorization of ancient texts and in the ability to compose literary essays. In that system, where education was synonymous with moral training, writing was one of the ancient "six arts."<sup>5</sup> In Confucius, Raymond Dawson points out that Confucius showed no interest in literature as such or any awareness that writing could be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities: "All study, even of literature, is undertaken for purely practical purposes."<sup>6</sup> While Pham Quynh did not share Confucius' apparent lack of interest in the aesthetic value of literature, he nonetheless shared the pragmatic value Confucius attributed to literature. There existed, in fact, a consistent streak of pragmatism in Pham's approach to language, literature, and culture. It is

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Le Calloc'h, "Le Rôle de Pham Quynh dans la Promotion de Quốc Ngu et de la Littérature Vietnamiennne Moderne," Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer 72 (1985):p.313.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Dawson, Confucius (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1981):p.20. The other five "arts" were:rites, music, archery,charioteering and mathematics.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,p.22.

this tendency to view culture and cultural manifestations in practical terms, which led him to undertake, in addition to his university course, two more projects.

Two of Pham's most relevant projects had been to create Nam Phong and to found A.F.I.M.A.. Both of these undertakings of Pham's had at their basis two fundamental assumptions. First, was the notion that there existed a Vietnamese "community" and that that "community" was entitled to develop, prosper and gain independence. Second was the concept that a well-developed national language would allow Vietnam to achieve those ends.

In terms of the existence of a community based on linguistic commonality, Benedict Anderson, puts forward the following hypothesis:

The lexicographic revolution in Europe, however, created, and gradually spread, the conviction that languages (in Europe at least) were, so to speak, the personal property of quite specific groups--their daily speakers and readers--and moreover that these groups, imagined as communities, were entitled to their autonomous place in a fraternity of equals.<sup>7</sup>

It would be wrong to suggest that Pham's perceptions of a Vietnamese community, much like Anderson's general views, were based solely on the existence of a common language. Pham, as seen earlier, felt that shared

experiences were also elements which constitute a community. Language was merely one of such shared experiences. There is no doubt, however, that Pham felt that Vietnam was a nation in the cultural sense of the term:

L'Annam a toujours été une nation dans la pleine acception de ce mot, et une nation des plus homogènes, qui a ses caractères, ses traditions, son génie propre, qui depuis au moins deux mille ans a évolué dans un milieu particulier qui le différencie nettement des autres peuples.<sup>8</sup>

Pham's resolve to develop and improve the Vietnamese language stemmed, much like his perceptions of Vietnamese culture in general, from his belief that a unique and distinctive Vietnamese literature did not exist. It was Pham's premise that Vietnam needed to upgrade its educational system in order to gain prosperity and autonomy. The basis of such prosperity and autonomy, Pham wrote, resided in the quality of its language and literature:

Je pense que si l'on veut le progrès du pays, il faut forger l'outil pouvant permettre la diffusion du savoir et de l'éducation. Cet outil c'est la langue,

l'écriture, la littérature.<sup>9</sup>

Such a statement clearly illustrates Pham's deterministic approach to the role of language in the development of nationhood. It was through the media of Nam Phong and of A.F.I.M.A. that Pham Quynh sought to forge the "new" Vietnamese language and the literature which would subsequently emerge from that new language. As a result, Nam Phong became the vehicle through which Pham Quynh promoted his idea that Quoc Ngu, the romanized form of the Vietnamese language, should become Vietnam's official language. Nam Phong also became the medium through which Pham's views on culture, language, nationalism and politics were made public. In terms of the question of language itself, Pham's writings focused mostly on the following issues: the condition of the Vietnamese language, the unsuitability of linguistic options other than Quoc Ngu, and finally, the composition of the new Vietnamese language.

Pham Quynh maintained that the Vietnamese language was in a lamentable condition. It lacked a number of important elements. Pham attributed such shortcomings to three main factors. First, one thousand years of Chinese rule over Vietnam had resulted in the sinicization of the Vietnamese

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Pham Quynh, Nam Phong 152 (July 1930), p.13 as quoted in "Introduction au Nam Phong, 1917-1934," Pham Thi Ngoan from Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises Série Nouvelle, 48 (Paris:1973), p.276.

language. Second, also a result of the Chinese "millenium" in Vietnam, the Vietnamese elite had all but abandoned the Vietnamese vernacular. Third, French colonial policies were not allowing young Vietnamese students to learn their own language in any organized or systematic way.

In terms of Vietnamese linguistic shortcomings, first, under and following Chinese rule, Vietnamese scholars communicated largely through the medium of the Chinese language. As seen earlier, except for the use of Chu Nom, Vietnamese scholars rarely communicated among themselves in Vietnamese. Surely the Vietnamese elite spoke to the masses in the vernacular, but it is the written body of literature, and not the oral, which was important to them. This attitude on the part of the very small percentage of Vietnamese who were literate may very well account for the fact that even up to the beginning of the twentieth century, the Vietnamese language did not possess such educational and organizational tools as elaborate encyclopediae, dictionaries or grammar textbooks. In an article entitled "Pham Quynh et la Promotion du Quoc Ngu et de la Littérature Vietnamienne Moderne," Bernard Le Calloc'h outlines the linguistic reforms Pham attempted to bring about:

Il fallait compiler un dictionnaire, unifier les règles de grammaire, fixer le vocabulaire, imaginer des néologismes, emprunter au français les modèles qui serviraient à créer une langue scientifique, technique, mais aussi juridique ou philosophique. Il



fallait généraliser les normes de  
l'orthographe, rédiger des manuels  
scolaires, retranscrire en Quoc Ngu  
les textes en Nom et en chinois... .10

Through the agency of A.F.I.M.A. Pham sought to rectify those problems. Such were the technical and practical problems Pham encountered in his quest to create and develop a Vietnamese language which could serve as a vehicle for his idea of a Vietnamese "culture." Such a vehicle found expression in both practical and ideological terms.

In practical terms, Quoc ngu provided the means through which the technical problems pointed out above could be resolved. It was Pham's premise that much like Vietnamese culture, the Vietnamese language should be a fusion of the past and the present and a fusion also of the East and the West. The romanized script, with its diacritical symbols to designate tones made the borrowing of certain Chinese terms and the integration of Vietnamese expression phonetically feasible. In addition, Quoc Ngu, through its use of the Roman alphabet, also made it possible to borrow French words and adapt them phonetically to the Vietnamese language. The romanization of the Vietnamese language also rendered the compilation of vocabulary, expressions and locutions into dictionaries and encyclopediae all that much simpler.

Ideologically, Quoc Ngu also represented an antidote to

the impoverished state of the Vietnamese language. Pham attributed the poor state of the Vietnamese language to the colonial policies of both the Chinese and the French. As seen earlier, Chinese rule over Vietnam had resulted in the use of Chinese for all official matters during both the one thousand years of Chinese rule and the nine hundred years following Vietnam's liberation from China. Some of the effects of the institutionalization of the Chinese language in Vietnam were, according to Pham, the neglect and the debasement of the Vietnamese popular language or vernacular. Pham contended that there existed a rich Vietnamese popular literature which the Vietnamese elite had all but ignored: "J'ai dit comment notre langue, longtemps négligée par les lettrés, fut cultivée dans le peuple et quel riche fonds populaire elle possède."<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Pham advanced that the "form" of the Chinese language had also hindered the development of the Vietnamese language:

La langue annamite, dans ces conditions, ne pouvait guère se développer comme langue littéraire ou langue de culture, et prise dans le moule rigide du chinois classique avec son parallélisme et sa métrique rigoureuse, avec ses allusions et son symbolisme, elle ne pourrait produire que des poèmes savants, compliqués d'un maniérisme et d'un archaïsme exagéré, distraction de

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Pham Quynh, Le Viet Nam: Problèmes Culturels et Politiques, p. 87.

dilletantes ou d'humanistes plutôt que  
floraison d'une véritable littérature  
en langue nationale.<sup>12</sup>

The above quotation suggests that Pham believed that the rigid and orthodox Chinese literary style had not allowed the Vietnamese essence to emerge from those writings. The Vietnamese soul, Pham suggested, in the following, lengthy quotation, had found expression especially among that country's masses:

Celle ci était au contraire  
cultivée dans la masses par  
des poètes populaires, sortes  
de trouvères ou troubadours,  
improvisant des chansons et des  
poèmes dans le goût et la langue  
du peuple. Le parler populaire  
s'enrichissait aussi chaque jour  
de tournures et d'expressions  
originales, parfois de véritables  
trouvailles, ingénieuses et  
savoureuses, et toute une  
littérature orale, en grande partie  
poétique, se formait en quelque sorte  
spontanément, en dehors de toute  
collaboration de l'élite. Cette  
littérature populaire composée de  
dictons, de proverbes, de sentences,  
de distiques, de phrases plus ou moins  
assonancées, de chansons, de petits  
poèmes, de comparaisons, d'allégories,  
etc..., est infiniment riche et  
pittoresque, et montre que la langue  
annamite n'est pas si pauvre  
qu'on le prétend d'ordinaire.<sup>13</sup>

It would be misleading to suggest that the above reflects anti-elitist sentiments on the part of Pham

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<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., pp. 129-30.

Quynh. The issue is not as simple as an elitist-anti-elitist dichotomy would suggest. In order to better gauge Pham's views it is necessary to examine his approach to the linguistic question. Pham's emphasis lies primarily on what the Vietnamese language, to him, is not. While singing the praise of Vietnam's popular language and popular literature, Pham nonetheless maintained that they were not in themselves worthy of becoming official elements of Vietnamese culture. Only the Vietnamese elite, Pham maintained, could transform Vietnam's popular literature into a cultural form worthy of national aspirations:

Mais née du peuple, cette littérature se ressent de son origine, et elle manque de cette distinction qui est la marque d'une culture raffinée. Elle est loin de constituer une littérature nationale à proprement parler, laquelle doit être l'oeuvre de l'élite travaillant à organiser, discipliner la langue populaire, à l'assouplir, à la perfectionner, à en exploiter méthodiquement toutes les richesses.<sup>14</sup>

It would be wrong to attribute to Pham's promotion of the use of the vernacular in the development of the new Vietnamese language wider connotations than Pham himself was willing to allow. Ideologically, Pham's attempts to achieve a measure of vernacularization should not be interpreted as efforts on his part towards either a democratization of Vietnamese society or a total glorification of Vietnam's

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Ibid., p.130.

popular language. The rise of the vernacular in Vietnam, through the use of Quoc Ngu, did result in a rise of the literacy ratio, but nowhere in the writings examined for this essay did Pham Quynh suggest that mass literacy was his objective. Pham's Confucian perceptions of education allowed him to suggest that "le but supérieur de l'éducation est de contribuer au plein développement de la personnalité humaine."<sup>15</sup> Pham's Confucianist approach also allowed him to perceive of education, or self-cultivation, as something every human being should strive for but it is nonetheless quite evident from his writings that the bases of self-cultivation were to be determined and established only by a responsible elite.

In terms of the quality of the Vietnamese language, it is obvious Pham felt that popular language and popular literature were not, of themselves, adequate. Their chief quality, according to Pham, was that they were, because they had not been developed by a sinicized elite, indigenous in nature. In assessing both the qualities and the shortcomings of the Vietnamese vernacular Pham was again putting emphasis on what was not rather than what was. First he stressed that the vernacular was not Chinese in nature, and second, he stressed that the vernacular was not refined enough to convey the Vietnamese "culture nationale" he was seeking to

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Ibid., p.31.

establish.

It was Pham's premise that French colonial educational policies had also been detrimental to the development of the Vietnamese language. The French-language-only educational policy adopted by the French had been one cause of the impoverished state of the Vietnamese language and of Vietnamese literature. The inevitable result of France's policies, Pham contended, had been that the Vietnamese could not acquire a command either of their own language or of the French language:

C'est un fait que la plupart des jeunes annamites connaissent mal leur langue. Ce n'est pas de leur faute, puisqu'ils n'ont pas l'occasion de l'apprendre comme il faut.<sup>16</sup>

The inevitable result of the poverty of the Vietnamese language, Pham continued, was also a poverty of thinking:

Ne pensant ni en français ni en annamite, nous pensons donc en Métis-qu'on me permette cette expression qui ne renferme aucune intention péjorative à l'égard des Eurasiens. Notre pensée qui n'est plus soumise à aucune discipline inhérente à toute langue définitivement formée, se débat dans l'à-peu-près, dans le vague, dans une imprécision propice à l'anarchie.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that they were receiving a French-language primary

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<sup>16</sup>

Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>17</sup>

Ibid., p. 126.

education was detrimental to the Vietnamese, according to Pham, for at that particular level of instruction not only were Vietnamese students cut off from their own linguistic foundations but they were also not in a position, yet, to properly understand the French language:

Pour pouvoir exprimer ses idées  
dans une langue aussi difficile et  
d'un génie si différent de la nôtre  
que le français, il faut un effort  
de compréhension et d'assimilation  
qui n'est pas à la portée de toutes  
les intelligences.<sup>18</sup>

The French colonial language policies, Pham argued, were making the Vietnamese linguistic jacks-of-all-trades but masters of none.

In putting forward his arguments in favour of Quoc Ngu, Pham Quynh first sought to discount the other two principal linguistic alternatives: that of the exclusive use of either the Chinese or the French language. Again, Pham found both practical and ideological motives for discounting those two linguistic options. To those in favour of maintaining the Chinese characters, Pham argued that, in practical terms, the Chinese script was adequate to express ideas and concepts which were abstract in nature and which were, though Chinese in origin, relevant to the Vietnamese experience:

Le vocabulaire abstrait, le  
vocabulaire des idées, des sciences

morales, politiques, et philosophiques est en grande partie, formé de caractères chinois transcrits en annamite. Cela s'explique aisément, les caractères chinois étant tous des idéogrammes, particulièrement aptes à exprimer les idées.<sup>19</sup>

Believing that Chinese culture was on the whole unable to deal with modern problems, Pham also maintained, however, that the Chinese script was unable to express modern, scientific or technological concepts:

Par contre, pour le vocabulaire des sciences concrètes, physiques, chimiques, naturelles, pour les noms propres d'histoire, de géographie, l'emploi du sino-annamite n'est nullement nécessaire et les emprunts au français sont plus désirables.<sup>20</sup>

Technically, however, Quoc Ngu provided a solution to this problem. The romanized script could phonetically translate those words which, formerly in character form, had been used to express abstract ideas and concepts and whose significance was in the sphere of Vietnamese experience. It was therefore not necessary to maintain Chinese characters. While Pham advocated the abolition of the Chinese character system, he did not advocate that the Vietnamese no longer use Chinese words or expressions. Pham's promotion of Quoc Ngu assumed a certain degree of lexical borrowing from the Chinese language. Pham

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<sup>19</sup>  
Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>20</sup>  
Ibid., pp. 93-94.



was objecting to the exclusive use of the Chinese language in education.

In terms of ideas Pham found it impossible, in fact, not to borrow from the Chinese language. As he told his university class in 1924, complete abandonment of the Chinese language was synonymous with the denial of one's past:

Nie-t-on pour cela l'influence profonde exercée par ces derniers (les chinois) sur le mouvement intellectuel du pays d'Annam depuis des siècles? Ce serait nier l'évidence et toute l'histoire d'Annam protesterait là contre. En vérité nous avons été nourris pendant deux mille ans du suc de la culture chinoise savamment distillée par une pléiade de grands poètes et de grands prosateurs qui n'ont leurs égaux que dans l'ancienne Grèce ou dans l'ancienne Rome.<sup>21</sup>

Pham's perception of a Vietnamese culture as being a fusion of the past and the present could not possibly allow him to discard that which had been an integral part of Vietnamese culture for one thousand years. While it could be argued that the Chinese language was, indeed, in Vietnam, the prerogative of only a small elite, the customs, the rites, the religion and the political systems of China were nonetheless inevitably imposed on the Vietnamese masses. The Chinese vocabulary necessarily reflected those cultural and political manifestations. It is quite safe to venture that the whole of the Vietnamese population had been, in various

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<sup>21</sup>

Ibid., p.157.

degrees, sinicized. It follows that Pham's emphasis on the preservation of Chinese expressions in the Vietnamese language was more than the preservation of an elite's traditions; it was also the preservation of Vietnamese culture in general.

It was Pham's premise also that the Chinese influence had been so pervasive on the Vietnamese language that it was virtually impossible completely sever those ties:

Certes, il n'est jamais souhaitable pour une langue de faire des emprunts à une autre. Mais les emprunts de l'annamite au chinois sont d'une nature très spéciale, et le fait seul que les néologismes Chinois sont entrés sans difficulté, presque naturellement, dans la langue annamite, montre une affinité profonde entre les deux langues.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, Pham often stressed in his writings that borrowing from the Chinese language was on the part of the Vietnamese a form of cultural attainment much like that the French sought by borrowing words and expressions from classical Greek and Latin. This perception of Pham's stems primarily from his notion that history is an important part of one's culture. Also, for the Vietnamese, the Chinese model represented more than an imposed linguistic or political set of structures. It also served to legitimize Vietnam itself. Boasting of having had a dynastic past, of having defeated the powerful Chinese and of having moved

southward and expanded into Champa carried the tacit yet strong suggestion that Vietnam was also a "middle-kingdom" of some sort. A degree of emulation of the Chinese was thus a necessary tool of legitimization. Borrowing Chinese words in modern times implied similar connotations. It gave Vietnam what France had a "classical" past, a "golden age." It placed Vietnam on a similar cultural plane to France. The significance of such borrowings is obvious when one takes into consideration Pham's admiration for French culture and the importance of culture within his own society.

To those in favour of the use of the French language only Pham countered that the French language, much like French culture in general, was not entirely suitable to the Vietnamese context. The Vietnamese language, according to Pham, could be synthetic in nature and could borrow from both the Chinese language and from the French language, but it possessed its own qualities and its own expressions which needed to be preserved.

Pham made it quite clear in his writings that education of the Vietnamese conducted uniquely in the French language was undesirable. We have seen that Pham had disagreed with the French colonial government's policy of French-language-only primary education for the Vietnamese, and had claimed that such a policy had contributed to the impoverishment of the Vietnamese language itself. Pham also disagreed with the exclusive use of French in Vietnamese

schools on moral grounds. In the first place, Pham believed that language was the reflection of a community's soul. It therefore followed that the disintegration of the Vietnamese language would result in the disintegration also of the Vietnamese identity or essence. Such was the relationship between a community and its language:

Il y a en effet, dans cet attachement des hommes à leur langue natale, une sorte de mysticisme qui est une des forces agissantes du monde moderne.<sup>23</sup>

Les langues ne sont plus, comme ont le croyait au dix-huitième siècle des systèmes artificiels, des signes destinés à exprimer nos idées. Elles sont le vivant reflet de l'âme profonde d'un peuple.<sup>24</sup>

Pham believed that the French language necessarily reflected French mores. As we have seen, Pham not only maintained that they contained elements which were not suited to Vietnamese culture but also that they contained elements which were undesirable in view of their destructive potential:

Mais de même que l'Asie fut perdue par sa déficience matérielle, résultat de son esprit trop exclusivement contemplatif, l'Europe le sera par son excès de puissance dans le domaine de la matière; en tout cas cette puissance l'entraîne à des excès qui lui ont coûté et lui coûteront d'avantage encore, ils lui font perdre toute préoccupation

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Ibid., p.118.

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Ibid., p.119.

idéale et l'enfoncent de plus en plus  
dans un lourd matérialisme.25

Pham nonetheless believed in the usefulness of borrowing certain elements of the French language. In addition to the lexical borrowings referred to above, Pham maintained that the Vietnamese were also borrowing forms of the French language. During a conference at l'Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes Pham declared that:

Votre langue, par ses dons de clarté et d'harmonie, par la logique de sa syntaxe et l'ordonnance de son style qui en font l'une des créations les plus parfaites de l'esprit humain, agit encore sur la langue annamite en évolution d'une façon plus intime, plus interne, si je puis ainsi dire. Si une partie de notre vocabulaire dérive encore du chinois, la texture même de notre langue se ressent de plus en plus du français.26

In essence, Pham's proposed composition of the new Vietnamese language was a microcosm of his proposed composition of the new Vietnamese culture. Again, it was highly syncretic.

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Pham Quynh, Essais Franco-Annamites, p.101.

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Pham Quynh, Nouveaux Essais Franco-Annamites, p.66.

## CONCLUSION

The body of essays and articles written by Pham Quynh reveal a number of important facts. First, Pham's writings clearly illustrate that he was a nationalist. Although it is never expressed in strictly political terms, Pham nonetheless perceived of the existence of a distinctive Vietnamese identity. Pham also perceived of Vietnam's right to political independence and autonomy. His approach to the nationalist question, however was always cultural.

Pham's cultural approach to the development of nationhood was Confucian in nature. It was based on the Confucian principle that it is through self-cultivation one eventually achieves political ends. Pham's approach reflected the same order of priorities found in Confucian doctrine, that is, culture or morale precedes political action.

Third, contrary to Huynh Kim Khanh's analysis, Pham's writings display a profound knowledge and understanding of Confucian doctrine. Pham's position as Ministre de l'Education cannot simply be interpreted as a

self-interested political gesture. The ministry provided Pham with the opportunity of presiding over a field to which he attached the utmost importance. Again, it was consistent with his Confucian approach to life and politics.

It must also be remembered that Pham's argument in favor of Quoc Ngu was but one of many positions on the language issue taken by Vietnamese intellectuals of that period. Pham's concern for the need to develop a true Vietnamese culture was shared by many other Vietnamese scholars. Pham's Confucianist stance was also a reflection of many Vietnamese intellectuals' attempts to resolve problems presented by colonialism.

Fourth, Pham's contributions to the dissemination of Quoc Ngu cannot be ignored. While it would be unfair to attribute the successful implementation of Quoc Ngu only to Pham Quynh, it would be equally unjust to ignore Pham's efforts and accomplishments in that regard.

Finally, Pham's conciliatory, collaborationist, and syncretic approach was also Confucianist in nature. Aware of the criticisms his "middle-road" approach were drawing, Pham provided the following explanation:

Le juste milieu n'est donc pas, comme on pourrait le croire, cette attitude commode, cette neutralité passive de l'homme timoré et prudent qui se maintient volontiers dans la voie moyenne, sans avoir à prendre parti dans un sens ou dans l'autre. Il n'est pas non plus ce sage éclectisme qui, entre

des opinions différentes en réalise la moyenne et n'est pas loin de la considérer comme l'expression de la vérité. Il est la manifestation d'une loi universelle qui régit tous les êtres et nul n'y attend qu'avec la connaissance profonde de cette loi et la ferme volonté de s'y conformer strictement. C'est donc dire que ce juste milieu est en réalité le symbole par excellence de la perfection;... .27

Pham's syncretism was also a real attempt to grapple with the difficult problems of colonialism. In Viet-Nam: Sociologie d'une Guerre Paul Mus explains the phenomenon of linguistic syncretism in the following terms:

Qu'est-ce qu'une civilisation, sinon quelques formes et quelques mots chargés de sens?... Ce n'est point par caprice ou affectation que l'on voit un des plus brillants polytechniciens vietnamiens aider à donner à ses compatriotes un dictionnaire des caractères sino-vietnamiens avec leur application à la science moderne.

L'effort des vietnamiens pour transporter dans leur langue les formes de nos sciences n'est point un chauvinisme. Si j'ai saisi sous la réserve qu'appellent des impressions aussi intimes, quelque chose du drame intérieur vécu par tant de mes amis d'enfance, c'est vis-à-vis d'eux-mêmes, un effort de réunification.28

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27

Pham Quynh, L'Idéal du Sage dans la Philosophie Confucéenne (Hanoi: Dong Kinh An Quan, 1928), p.18.

28

Paul Mus, Viet-Nam: Sociologie d'une Guerre (Paris: Editions du Deuil, 1952), p.143.



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