

## EFEО - WHICH HERITAGE IS LEFT?

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*Founded in Vietnam in the early 20th century, French School of the Far East (École française d'Extrême-Orient - EFEО) and the internationally prestigious journal BEFEО are over hundred years old to date. The French – Vietnamese senior scholars of EFEО were good examples of the qualities of genuine intellectual, of passion and devotion for science, the spirit of independence and intellectual freedom.*

*What heritage has EFEО left for us? The author will contribute to clarify the mentioned question in this article.*

1. History is originally complex. Written history is even more complex. It is a house with many windows. From the outside and depending on each viewing location, observer can gain different views, see different, even contrast, shades of light and dark. A summary evaluating fairly, properly French colonial period is one of such cases. At first, the colonial officials and historians often selected some real but limited events to praise for the civilization achievements which French brought to Vietnam – a country had been outdated, stagnating. In contrast, the revolutionary soldiers and historians later profusely insulted acts of oppressions and exploitation of French colonialism with accurate evidences, but sometimes somewhat were one-sided, equated. Today, with time is ripe, with new scientific insights and a complex multi-dimensional approach, we can

calmly look back to assess more honestly and objectively.

The authors P. Brocheux and D. Hémerly were right when saying that French's actions in Indochina were the "ambiguous colonization" (*la colonisation ambiguë*) (P. Brocheux & D. Hémerly, 1994). Overall, on a dark background, it still sparked bright spots, of which EFEО was a typical case.

EFEО was formerly Permanent Archaeological Mission in Indochina (*Mission archéologique permanente de l'Indochine*), established under the decree of Governor General of Indochina Paul Doumer dated 15/12/1898. To gather in-depth information and date for a formal, visionary and large-scale colonial

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exploitation, Paul Doumer – an active and ambitious Governor, noticed that the history, language and culture of the colony had to be studied scientifically, systematically and comprehensively. The Mission was formed for that purpose. Louis Finot, Deputy Director of Paris Graduate School of Practices, was appointed by Academy of Inscriptions and Fine Letters to be the first director of the Mission based in Saigon.

Although deriving from a political motive, from the very beginning, this academic organization had in-depth, interdisciplinary scientific research function, approached system of study areas. Two years later, the Mission was renamed to EFEO under the decreed dated 20/1/1900 of the Governor General of Indochina. Article 1 of the Decree stated:

“Permanent Archaeological Mission in Indochina established under Decree dated 15/12/1898, under control of Academy of Inscriptions and Fine Letters (*Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres*) under Institute of France (*Institut de France*) from now will be renamed to French School of the Far East (*École Française d'Extrême-Orient*)<sup>(\*)</sup>.

This organization will continue to be governed by the terms of the Decree to establish and subsequent decrees related to its functions” (*Bulletin officiel de l'Indochine*, 2<sup>ème</sup> partie, 1900, p.52).

Governor Paul Doumer, the person who had the initiative to rename, explained that the previous name “Permanent

Archaeological Mission” was inaccurate scientifically. However, the new name “School” (*école*) also caused misunderstandings (because its main function was not a teaching facility but a research institute). In 1902, EFEO headquarter was moved from Saigon to Hanoi.

First research students granted EFEO's scholarship were H. Parmentier, H. Maspero, J. Bloch and G. Coedès (G. Coedès later became Director of EFEO). At the beginning, there was a specialized library under EFEO with many rare materials and a museum. Later, EFEO had 4 centers located in Hanoi, Danang, Saigon and Phnom Penh.

The Directors of EFEO from establishment until 1955 respectively were: Louis Finot (1898), Alfred Foucher (1905), Claude-Eugène Maitre (1908), Louis Finot (second time: 1920), Léonard Aurousseau (1926), George Coedès (1929), Paul Lévy (1947). In 1954-1955, Maurice Durand was in charge of EFEO for some time before EFEO headquarter was moved back to France from Hanoi.

In 1993, EFEO was officially back to Vietnam with the function of a bridge between French-Vietnamese cultures. The headquarter was in Hanoi, in 2011, there was another branch in Ho Chi Minh City.

2. After over a century of scientific research, EFEO has left us a massive legacy with rich information on Vietnamese as well as Oriental history and culture. This is a valuable asset including manuscripts, publications, maps, inscriptions, museum exhibits,

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(\*) It was later often called School of the Far East - EFEO.

preserved heritages and thousand of studies, , contributing to building the foundation of Vietnamese modern social sciences – humanities and culture - arts.

In addition to rich book repository of history of Indochina and Asia written in Latin, Slave, Hán-Nôm, Japanese and Indian, EFEO also stores a lot of international science newspapers, magazines and journals, “there are up to 460 Latin periodical publications with over 30,000 issues, of which there are 48 Vietnamese periodical publications, bound to about 6,000 volumes” (Trần Thị Kiều Nga, 2013). In addition to publications for in-depth researchers such as *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, *Journal Asiatique*..., the most famous scientific journals stored by EFEO to mention are: *Bulletin de l'École d'Extrême-Orient*, *Revue Indochinoise*, *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué*, *Bulletin des Études Indochinoises*... EFEO also publishes its own publications such as *BEFEO* (*Bulletin de l'école d'Extrême-Orient*), *PEFEO* (*Publications de l'EFEO*). Volume XXIV of *PEFEO* was the monograph *Le Thanh Hoa* of Charles Robequain (1929) and Volume XXVII was the monograph *Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois* of Pierre Gourou (1936).

*BEFEO* is a quarterly journal (sometimes half-yearly), it is bound to one volume, from 4000 to 1,000 pages. Volume I was published in 1901. At that time, EFEO headquarter was in Saigon, but the Board of Directors decided to print at Schneider printing house in Hanoi, because only here had modern printing machineries. Right in

the introduction of the first issue, the Editorial Board advocated a methodology synthesizing interdisciplinary system, connecting and comparing all aspects of life of different countries in a region. The journal also emphasized empirical fieldwork survey, directly went to researched sites and monuments.

*BEFEO* was published regularly every year until the Volume XLIII (1943). Due to “events occurred in Indochina”, the journal was stopped publishing until the appearance of new set in 1951 which was printed with 3 volumes 44-1, 44-2 and 45-1 consecutively. Since then, the journal has continued its publications until now. Despite of being explained that after the 50th anniversary, EFEO has been reformed, “opened a new function, in an entirely different way compared to before” (with some additional modern history studies), in general, in the second phase, we do not find many research papers as excellent as in the first phase. Publishing time is not as regular as before (currently, two volumes are combined into one every two years). On one hand, one of the reasons may be due to the team of French Orientalists in the post-colonial period is somewhat decreased. On the other hand, due to increase in academic level, readers' requirements are also enhanced.

It is difficult to list all diverse, rich scientific works of team of authors who are permanent or term members, honorary members or news reporters, collaborators of EFEO. We can refer to several directories created (of which there is Nguyễn Văn Tổ directory) (See:

Nguyen Van To, 1921; *Bibliographie EFEO*, 1948; “Table des matières”, *BEFEO*, 1952-1992, aafv.org). To date, University of Lyon in France has digitized 107 issues of EFEO, published on the website *persee.fr* and we can access quite easily<sup>(\*)</sup>.

3. The most important thing to emphasize is the example of personal qualities and working spirit, energy which the team of scientists working for EFEO has left for us. They are all genuine intellectuals who are passionate, enthusiastic towards research, scientific creativity, the *homo academicus* (academic people – as words used by Laurent Dartingues) (Laurent Dartingues, 2012, p.45) – stepped into the career since very young age, such as: Paul Pelliot (21 years old), Henri Maspéro (25 years old), Henri Parmentier (29 years old), Jules Bloch (25 years old), Georges Coedès (25 years old). Louis Finot accepted to head of *Permanent Archaeological Mission of Indochina* since only 34 years old and Léonard Arousseau became Director of EFEO when 38 years old.

There were many cases when members of a family contributed to EFEO. Orientalist Henri Maspero (1883-1945) – with classic studies of Vietnamese ancient, medieval geography and history – was younger brother of Georges Maspero (1872-1942), author of the famous book *Le Royaume de Champa*. Henri Parmentier (1871-1949) – graduated from prestigious École des

Beaux-Arts de Paris, excellent archaeologist, architect – whose wife was talented journalist writer Jeanne Leuba (1882-1979). They stuck together in the cause of research and description of Cham Towers<sup>(\*)</sup>.

Especially noteworthy was female experts in the team of EFEO’s scientists. First to mention is Madeleine Colani (1866-1943), she dedicated most of her life with the excavation and studies of archaeological sites of Stone Age in mountainous areas Bắc Sơn, Hòa Bình and Chum field (Laos), and apparently forgot to get married. Next is Suzanne Karpelès (1890-1968), a resilient intellectual who was against abuse of power. She was a student of Paris Graduate School of Practice, student of great scholars Sylvain Lévi and Louis Finot. In 1922, she went to Hanoi to work for EFEO. She attached to the study of Sanskrit and Buddhism, she was the expert in charge of Cambodia Institute of Buddhism. In 1941, Karpelès was dismissed by government Vichy of France because of Jewish origin and her attitude against the colonial fascists. But later in 1945, after the war ended, she came back to work there.

Another female scholar was the ethnographer Jeanne Cuisinier (1890-1964) whose name were familiar with Vietnamese academia and highly rated. She was an expert on Mường ethnic group, combination of human geography studies and sociology, especially role of the performing arts in rites. Cuisinier

<sup>(\*)</sup> The website *gallica.bnf.fr* also has the collection of *BEFEO*, but not as complete as the website *persee.fr*.

<sup>(\*)</sup> Cham Museum in Danang was formerly called Parmentier Museum.

had extraordinary working will and energy. In her later years, despite of age and poor health (74 years old), she still continued to work to complete her last studies, “even until the night before her death” (J.Filliozat, 1966, p.53).

In the field of ethnography, besides researchers, there was significant contribution of a number of French officers and administrators who had passion for work of a scholar, such as studies of Mường people of Pierre Grossin, of Dao people of Auguste Bonifacy, of Thượng people of Henri Maitre<sup>(\*)</sup>.

Most EFEO's scientists, with passion for study, proved to be genuine intellectuals who had qualities and bravery in protecting independent thinking and academic freedom, fought against the pressure and intervention of the authorities (*Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, 2012)<sup>(\*\*)</sup>.

Georges Boudarel commented on the political attitudes of EFEO's academia: “Before 1900, the military government hailed the use of ethnography to assist the conquest and pacification of the country, and Oriental study was considered to meet the needs of the government. But since 1900, EFEO created a turning point, the study became more pure and was not politicized” (G. Boudarel, 1976)<sup>(\*\*\*)</sup>.

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(\*) Henri Maitre was the author of the famous book *Les Jungles Moi* (1912) (Vietnamese translation: *Rừng người Thượng*).

(\*\*) Cited: Pierre Singaravélou (1999), *L'École française d'Extrême-Orient ou l'institution des marges. Essai d'histoire sociale et politique de la science coloniale*, Harmattan, Paris.

(\*\*\*) G. Boudarel, *Sciences sociales et contre-insurrection au Vietnam*, in: *Le mal de voir*, P. 1976,

4. Along with examples of qualities and characters of intellectuals, EFEO has also opened up new paths of scientific opinion and methodology.

Early 20th century, Sinological education and examination system still existed in Vietnam, French and National language were included in the curriculum but only at elementary level. There was almost no social science study, people often just needed to comply with Confucian doctrine written already in the classical poetry books. History should be written based on the formal documents, political events of the dynasty, dismiss everything informal as well as all other aspects of people's lives. Ideologies and writings were only allowed in a narrow circle, they were not allowed to venture off to forbidden ideologies and knowledge outside the circle.

EFEO's scientists boldly broke that “binding headband” to build the foundation for “primitive” social sciences in Vietnam. They were intellectuals working for the colonial government, but most of them did not accept to be docile puppets of the government. Perhaps because they were young, eager, energetic intellectuals who had inherited the traditions and inspirations of movements of scientific rationalism, enlightenment, democracy and human rights from the metropole France and Europe.

EFEO school attaches great importance to empirical documents and field studies

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cited: Laurent Dartingues (2012), *Histoire d'une rencontre ratée et histoire à parts inégales. Essai sur le discours orientaliste à propos du Vietnam 1860-1940*, Paris, p.130.

(*in situ*). For historical bibliography<sup>(\*)</sup>, accurate, complete citation of origin is required. For archaeological documents, there must be specific physical evidences. Ethnology should be based on processed results of surveys. And the scientific conclusions should be drawn from those accurate data without imposing any pre-existing political views or prejudices. Unlike some Vietnamese colonial authors or “pen’s slaves”, EFEO’s scientists did not enthused about a “civilizing mission” (*mission civilisatrice*) of colonialism, although in fact, they were the ones who brought the torchlight of science to enlighten the civilization. They were Yersins in social science who contributed significantly to Vietnamese intellect.

EFEO’s scholars were also pioneers in combining classical and modern methods in scientific research, using surveying a region as the entire social, historical, cultural space, while using survey and analysis manipulations, comparing information and data in both micro and macro levels. Léopold Cadière attached with monographs on the land of Quảng Bình, Charles Robequain rummaged around Thanh Hóa, as well as Pierre Gourou dynamically went throughout the Northern Delta to collect materials for his monograph studies. In *BEFEO* volume in 1901, Academician Émile Sénart sent a reminder: “The more meticulous and precise studies our

times require, the more valuable we feel about the direct surveys of sites and relics” (“Lettre de M.E. Sénart”, *BEFEO*, 1901).

On the other hand, EFEO’s researchers have enough foresights to put events on the coordinate of the system of the region and continent, with characteristics of similarity and difference as well as mutually interacting relationships.

Right from the first issue of *BEFEO*, in the introduction, the Institute introduced the concept of systematic approach: “Far-East is not only a geographical term, it is a historical entity, a woven sheet of events associated with each other that one cannot separate them without making them crippled or weakened ... *BEFEO* can become a tool to compare and synthesize all aspects of social life [of Asian countries]” (Avertissement, *BEFEO*, 1901).

To elucidate the studies of Indochina in the regional context, EFEO conducted studies on major centers such as China, India, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Experts on China were Paul Pelliot, Henri Maspero, Paul Demiéville; experts on India were Silvain Lévi, Alfred Foucher, Jean Filliozat; experts on Japan were Claude-Egène Maitre, Noel Péri, Takakusu; experts on Southeast Asian were Édouard Huber, George Coedès, and Victor Goloubew...

EFEO maintains and develops many international cooperative and research relationships. EFEO has participated and introduced its achievements in international exhibitions such as Hanoi

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(\*) The most notable monograph of Vietnamese ancient documents published on *BEFEO* was by E. Gasparadone: “Bibliographie annamite” (*BEFEO*, 1934).

Exhibition in 1902 (Ngọc Lũ bronze drum was exhibited for the first time), international colonial exhibitions such as Marseille Exhibition in 1906 and 1922, Vincennes Exhibition (Paris) in 1931 (on this occasion, EFEO published many valuable summary studies). EFEO has also participated in many international scientific conferences abroad. EFEO itself also organized several international scientific conferences in Hanoi such as Congress of Far Eastern Studies in 1902, Congress of Far Eastern Prehistorians in 1931. A scholar whose works contributed in the development of international relationships of EFEO and had many friends in many countries was Victor Goloubew, a Russian native, a renowned expert on the bronze cultures in Indochina. G. Coedès appraised him as “the wisdom messenger of EFEO”.

On the other hand, EFEO's scholars were also very interested in interdisciplinary methods in the direction of encyclopedic study, linking geography with history, history with culture, material life with spiritual life. The two celebrated experts who followed this direction were Gustave Dumoutier and Léopold Cadière, who left a large number of diverse research works and essays on Vietnamese history and culture.

The role and influence of EFEO for Vietnamese and Vietnamese scholarship were huge, in terms of personal relationships and ideology, culture and science. The patriotic Emperor Duy Tân (who against French colonialism) was a close student of his two French teachers, Philippe Éberthardt and Léonard

Aurousseau – members of EFEO. Victor Goloubew talked about L. Aurousseau, King Duy Tân's personal teacher in the years 1913-1914:

“The young emperor [Duy Tân was 14 years old at that time] and his tutor were together daily for most of the time... The curriculum was composed of Physics, History, French, Chinese, Geography. The teaching of literature occupied a dominant position. Among French authors contributed to shape the mind of the young Emperor, there were Pascal, Fénelon, La Bruyère, the Encyclopedists and Victor Hugo. The Emperor enjoyed reading *The Miserable*, and noted very meticulously and accurately in each chapter” (V. Goloubew, 1929). One might wonder: Were those abovementioned liberal, democratic and humane ideologies inspired by an EFEO's scholar to Emperor Duy Tân one of the motives leading to Duy Tân's uprising happened in Huế citadel two years later?

Another prominent scholar member of EFEO, a “annamitophile” as French media often called, was Paul Mus (1902-1969). Lived in Hanoi since 5 years old, he was student at Albert Sarraut school, got Bachelor of Mathematics in 1919, then became a professor teaching in this school, worked in EFEO since 1927, defended doctoral thesis in 1933 and became an EFEO's expert on Southeast Asian. Japanese author Izutsu praised: “Paul Mus is a superhuman, a born genius with special power of creative thinking and unique ideas” (Vincent Lemieux, [classiques.uqac.ca](http://classiques.uqac.ca), p.8). Georges Condominas worshiped P. Mus

as “one of the greatest Orientalists of the present age” (Cited: Laurent Dartingues, 2012, p.294).

P. Mus had many Vietnamese friends, appreciated close colleagues such as Nguyễn Văn Khoan, Nguyễn Văn Huyền and Nguyễn Văn Tổ<sup>(\*)</sup>. P. Mus was the author of the famous book *Vietnam: Sociologie d'une guerre*, the book analyzes paradoxes of French – Vietnamese war, from the perspectives of sociology and history. In May 1947, P. Mus was appointed as the ambassador of peace, met President Hồ Chí Minh in Thái Nguyên, discussed the possibility of Vietnam – France peace talk (See: Lê Thành Khôi, 1955, p.473; P. Mus, 1952, p.372), but unfortunately it did not lead to any result due to unacceptable conditions offered by France.

On the academic expertise, EFEO left profound impressions among first modern scholars studying Vietnamese social sciences. Phạm Quỳnh was a collaborator of EFEO in the years 1912-1916 (EFEO, 1970, www.efeo.fr). In around 1925, Sở Cuồng (Lê Dư) was in charge of Japanese book repository in EFEO library (Nguyen Phuong Ngoc, 2008). Those who worked directly in EFEO and had research articles published in EFEO's journal in the first half of 20th century to be mentioned was Nguyễn

Văn Tổ, Nguyễn Văn Khoan, Trần Văn Giáp, Nguyễn Văn Huyền and Trần Hàm Tấn<sup>(\*)</sup>. Later, some other authors also collaborated with EFEO such as Ứng Quã, Hồ Đắc Hàm, Đàm Quang Tấn, Trương Vĩnh Tổng, Bùi Quang Tung, Tạ Trọng Hiệp...

Many Vietnamese scholars, although not directly collaborated with EFEO, were influenced by this school in methodology, document research and citation, scientific arguments on Vietnamese ancient state, issues of Northern domination, achievements of archaeological surveys and archaeological excavations, issues of geography, history, culture, religion, bibliography study, study of some historical figures, historian, literary classics... Among these, we can find the Tri Tân group, scholars Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu<sup>(\*\*)</sup>, Đào Duy Anh and his students, overseas Vietnamese historian Lê Thành Khôi<sup>(\*\*\*)</sup>... The young Vietnamese researchers have also currently collaborated in research effectively with EFEO's members in Hanoi such as

<sup>(\*)</sup> In the book *Vietnam: Sociologie d'une guerre* (Seuil, Paris, 1952), P. Mus admitted to be quite a close friend of Nguyễn Văn Khoan (p.140), appraised Nguyễn Văn Huyền as “a world famous ethnographer” (p.80) and Nguyễn Văn Tổ as “a great citizen face” (p.343). According to Nguyễn Phương Ngọc, in the book *Angle d'Asie*, P. Mus also mentioned his friendship with Trần Văn Giáp (Nguyen Phuong Ngoc, 2008).

<sup>(\*)</sup> In addition, Công Văn Trung and Trần Huy Bá (graduated College of Technology and Practice in 1924) architectural graphic designers of EFEO.

<sup>(\*\*)</sup> Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu (1916-1967)'s hometown was Hạ Đình ward (Thanh Xuân, Hanoi). He studied at Sorbonne University, Paris, majored in Human geography. IN 1941, he was day-work assistant to EFEO (Nguyen Phuong Ngoc, 2008). Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu did not have article published on *BEFEO*, but he wrote many research papers on other journals, including *BAVH*.

<sup>(\*\*\*)</sup> Father of Prof. Lê Thành Khôi was Lê Thành Ý, former classmate of P. Mus at Lycée Albert Sarraut School in Hanoi (Nguyen Phuong Ngoc, 2008). Around early 1940s, he was also a professor of Vietnamese literature of this school. At that time, Lê Thành Khôi was also student of this school (*Lycée Albert Sarraut*, 1941).



Philippe Papin, Andrew Hardy, Olivier Tessier, Philippe Le Failler... through library activities, associated research projects, publications and organization of training and fostering classes.

Today, global exchange acculturation has developed, scientific vision is expanded. Theories, methods and materials serving the studies of social sciences in the world in general and in Vietnam in particular can surpass EFEO's previous level in some aspects. And thus, the "new" of EFEO in the old days has become the "old". Of course, we are bigger than our ancestors because we were lifted on their shoulders. But overall, in terms of significance of scholar, the peaks of EFEO's Orientalists in the first half of 20th century have not been conquered. And people will never forget the meaning and flavor of the first meetings, fates and debts and contributions of EFEO in laying the foundation for the formation and development of Vietnamese social sciences in over a century □

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