

A Healthy Body for a Healthy Mind? The Corporal Impact of Student Mobility From and Towards Indochina, 1900–1945

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Abstract

This chapter explores how educational migration from and towards Indochina transformed the students' bodies during the first half of the twentieth century. It, therefore, challenges the binary idea of intellectual training by associating it with corporal changes. Climate, illnesses and even clothing influenced the students' experiences abroad. At the same time, education could modify how the migrants considered their physical characteristics. Consequently, some recommendations and initiatives, coming from both public authorities and private actors, emerged as early as the 1900s. Stressing this entanglement of actors, I show how the students' bodies became an issue regarding the development and effectiveness of educational migration, using material from the Government General of Indochina and French institutions, including the sanatorium des étudiants welcoming Indochinese in the metropole, and students' magazines.

Keywords: educational migration; Indochina; intellectual training; physical changes; metropolitan France; students' experience

“Đáng was among the best pupils, and perhaps the best pupil from Hanoi’s *Collège du Protectorat*, when in 1910, the *Société d’Instruction Occidentale* decided to offer again a certain amount of scholarships in order to allow some educated and hard-working natives to continue their studies in the metropole. Đáng joined the competition and finished first. He boarded with several other compatriots, all scholarship-owners, from the *Société d’Instruction Occidentale*: Lê, Dư, Quynh, who were also our pupils for 1910–1911.

Among those four, Đáng was the one who, due to his size, looked like a child the most. His pensive face, his large forehead were supported by a body that looked really fragile. We could wonder whether his small self could resist the change of climate well. Thanks to the school’s healthy diet, to fresh air, to rational physical

exercises, Đáng, to our great satisfaction, acclimated himself perfectly. He could work as much as he wished: what a huge joy it was for him!”¹

In 1912, the *Comité Paul-Bert*, a patronage committee dedicated to Indochinese pupils studying in metropolitan France, published this obituary for one of its *protégés*, Nguyễn Văn Đáng. Born in 1894 in Tonkin, the northern province of French Indochina, the young man was enrolled at the *Institut du Parangon*, a professional school welcoming both French and colonized students located in Joinville-le-Pont, east of Paris. If the tribute praised the brilliant educational trajectory of Đáng, it also highlighted some of the *Comité’s* fears and doubts regarding the acclimatization of Indochinese students sent to France.

In the 1910s, student mobility was nothing new within the French colonial Empire: a handful of Indochinese youth started to travel during the late nineteenth century and official support regarding this academic migration developed at the turn of the century.² In 1911, as a result, the *Comité Paul-Bert* was supervising no less than 44 students,³ including Đáng. Educational flows increased after the Great War: in the mid-Interwar years, between 150 and 200 Indochinese attended Paris’ educational institutions, representing about half of the educational diaspora in the metropole. At the same time, an Indochinese university was thriving in Hanoi: it re-opened in 1917 after an initial launch—and closure—in 1907–1908, welcoming students from the whole Indochinese peninsula but also from other Asian territories, including China and Japan.

Historians’ attention was first drawn to this Asian appetite for training as early as the 1970s;⁴ some of them considered the students’ experiences in the metropole through a political lens,⁵ while others focused on the institutional history of education in South-East Asia.⁶ Yet, Đáng’s story epitomizes the necessity of associating intellectual training with physical issues: his body was more than once considered

¹ *À la mémoire de Nguyen Van Dang* (Tours: Imprimerie E. Arrault et Cie 1912) p. 5.

² Sara Legrandjacques, “Voies étudiantes. Pour une histoire globale des mobilités étudiantes en Asie (Inde britannique-Indochine française, années 1850–1940)” (PhD diss., Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne 2021).

³ Archives nationales d’outre-mer (ANOM), Gouvernement général de l’Indochine (GGI), file 2 568 : « Statistics for March 1911 ».

⁴ Daniel Hémerly, “Du patriotisme au marxisme : l’immigration vietnamienne en France de 1926 à 1939,” *Le Mouvement social*, n°90 (1975) : pp. 3–54.

⁵ In addition to Daniel Hémerly’s paper, see: Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France 1919–1939* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 1989); David M. Pomfret, “Colonial Circulations’: Vietnamese Youth, Travel, and Empire, 1919–1940,” in *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard I. Jobs, David M. Pomfret (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), pp. 115–143.

⁶ Gail P. Kelly, *French Colonial Education. Essays on Vietnam and West Africa*. (New York: AMS Press 2000); Pascale Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice? L’expérience indochinoise (1860–1945)*

a hindrance to his education—because of ideas around acclimatization but also due to a bike accident which prevented him from studying for weeks, and which eventually led to his death. Dáng's obituary includes a photograph of him, showing a young man wearing a European three-piece suit with tie, his hair precisely combed backwards with brilliantine. Here, this physical presentation invites us to investigate how bodies were visually westernized, and under which circumstances, considering the use of official representations through photographs.

This chapter attempts to challenge the traditional perception of academic migration, associated with intellectual goals, by stressing the corporal effects of student mobility from *and* towards Indochina. It follows groundbreaking research on this colonial territory, conquered by the French from 1858 and including one colony, Cochinchina in the South, and four protectorates—Annam, Tonkin in the East and Cambodia and Laos, in the West—until the proclamation of the independence of Vietnam on the 2nd of September 1945. With *La Colonisation des Corps*, François Guillemot and Agathe Larcher-Goscha considered the impact of French colonization on Vietnamese bodies. By so doing, they echoed a larger interest within the field of colonial and imperial studies and stimulated scientific but also socio-political debates from the early twenty-first century,⁷ aiming to show how colonial subjugation dominated and transformed colonial bodies⁸. In addition, some scholars have underscored the physical effects of imperial migration and colonial settlement, first through the case of European travels towards the colonies.⁹

(Paris: L'Harmattan 2002), 117–135; Hoàng Văn Tuấn, “L'enseignement supérieur en Indochine” (PhD diss., Université Paris-Saclay, Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines 2016).

⁷ See for instance, the debates that followed the publication, in France, of the collective book entitled *Sexe, race et colonies. La domination des corps du xve siècle à nos jours* in 2018. See for instance: Elara Bertho, “Déconstruire ou reconduire. À propos de l'ouvrage Sexe, race & colonies,” *Cahiers d'études africaines* 237 (2020): pp. 169–180.

⁸ Jean-Paul Callède, “La problématique du ‘contact’ et l'enjeu du corps en situation coloniale selon René Maunier,” *Hommes et migrations* 1289 (2011): pp. 10–18; Sophie Dulucq, Caroline Herbelin, Colette Zytnicki, “La domination incarnée. Corps et colonisation (xixe-xxe siècles),” *Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 22 (2016); Sara Legrandjacques, “Le corps étudiant à l'épreuve de l'Empire,” in *Corps en crise, crise(s) du corps*, ed. Tom A. Heron, Marine Galiné (Reims: Presses universitaires de Reims 2018), Mathieu Marly, Stéphanie Soubrier, “Lire les corps au combat. Race, classe et grade sous la plume des officiers français (Maroc, 1912–1913),” *Genèses*, 123 (2021). In 2019, an international conference was also organized in Paris: *L'Europe et la différence des corps. Interactions ordinaires en context imperial*, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, November 21–22, 2019: <https://sirice.eu/agenda/l-europe-et-la-difference-des-corps>.

⁹ Mark Harrison, “‘The Tender Frame of Man’: Disease, Climate, and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies, 1760–1860,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* vol. 70 n°1 (1996): pp. 68–93; Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies. American Tropical Medicine, Race and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham-London: Duke University Press 2006; Guillemot, Larcher-Goscha, *La colonisation des corps*, Paris: Venémiaire 2014), pp. 288–291.

Focusing on a specific group of actors—the students—my work stresses the complementarity between the mind and the body in the educational process, be it conscious or implicit. I will demonstrate how academic migration transformed the students' bodies while its first goal was the acquisition of intellectual knowledge. I will therefore question the students' agency regarding their own bodies but also its use and perception by other actors, like the *Comité Paul-Bert* in the 1910s. In this manner, I also offer an imperial and transnational look at colonial education in Indochina, stressing Hanoi's role as an educational hub of training, whose purpose was transforming Asian youth during the first four decades of the twentieth century. To do so, I mobilize a great diversity of primary sources, including official correspondence, journals, and photographs, kept in different archival centers in both Vietnam and France. Altogether, this material emphasizes the political and social use of bodies by the students themselves, through their westernization or its rejection, within or outside of the colony. However, these bodies could also become an obstacle to intellectual training, reinforced by racial and racist considerations inherent in colonialism. Therefore, physical features were negotiated by both students and external actors throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

In-Between Bodies: A Matter of Westernization

In the early 1900s, the French rulers started to establish a few educational institutions in Hanoi, in Northern Indochina.¹⁰ In so doing, they did not aim to offer university training similar to the metropolitan one but wanted to instruct useful auxiliaries able to participate in the development of their colonial territories. In 1902, the first higher school founded in Hanoi was dedicated to medicine and highlights the colonizers' concern regarding the corporal health of the Indochinese population. Students had to assimilate Western knowledge to help the European medical staff. Five years later, in 1907, the first opening of the Indochinese University, still focusing on practical and useful training, confirmed this westernization of education, targeting an Asian audience, not limited to the Indochinese. Its mission was to "spread in the Far East, through the use of French, European sciences and methods."¹¹ It also transformed the students' bodies, whether they came from Indochina or from other Asian territories. For Chinese students, westernization was first and foremost a way to reject and criticize the imperial power

¹⁰ Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice ?*, 117–135; Hoàng Văn Tuấn, "L'enseignement supérieur en Indochine," 164–170; Sara Legrandjacques, "Voies étudiantes," 167–171.

¹¹ National Archives of Vietnam – Center n°1 (NAV1), *Résident supérieur du Tonkin* (RST), file 73 471, quoted by Hoàng Văn Tuấn, "L'enseignement supérieur", 126–127.

in China rather than an adhesion to a French community. They consequently faced colonial authorities in Indochina who planned to use French knowledge to increase their influence over the neighboring empire, competing with other Western powers. Here, physical issues, i.e., how the students were clothed and had their hair styled, reveals the multiple—and then, non-binary—social and political meanings associated with westernization.

A Queue Affair: Chinese Students in Hanoi in the Early 1900s

Chinese students started to enroll at Hanoi higher educational institutions in 1905. In 1902, decrees organizing the higher school of medicine started to promote Asian recruitment, reinforced by the founding of the Indochinese University. These colonial initiatives echoed a Chinese demand, coming from a handful of mandarins wanting to provide their sons with French education.¹² However, the first Chinese recruits often lacked a good command of French, preventing them from taking advantage of their stays in Hanoi. A preparatory school was accordingly organized in the colonial capital city, under the name “École Pavie”, and welcomed young men from the neighboring Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guangdong from January 1905. Strongly monitored by both colonial authorities and Chinese officials, these students were voluntarily kept away from their Indochinese classmates. This physical separation was undoubtedly reinforced by their specific clothing and hairstyle, unusual in 1900s Indochina: the hair around their heads was shaved except for a long tail hanging down their backs and they wore long Manchurian dresses.¹³ This specific look underscored their belonging to the Chinese Empire, dominated by the Qing, a dynasty coming from Manchuria, in North-East Asia. In 1644, Shunzhi, the first Qing Emperor (1644–1661), settled in Peking and issued a head-shaving edict, first targeting former Ming officials and soldiers, but rapidly extended to the rest of the population.¹⁴ This rule facilitated the recognition—and so, the repression—of opponents to his new power: any transgressor could be sentenced to the death penalty. Associated with legislation on clothing, it was still in effect in the early twentieth century when the first ten Chinese candidates left Yunnan for Hanoi. However, this hairstyle became a matter of concern for

¹² NAV1, *Gouvernement général de l'Indochine* (GGI), file 4 820: “Letter from the acting deputy consul for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Yunnan to the Governor General in Indochina, 19 June 1904”.

¹³ Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press 2003); Nora Wang, “En Chine: l’affaire de la natte,” in *Histoire du Poil*, ed. Marie-France Auzepy, Joël Cornette (Paris: Belin 2003): 174–197.

¹⁴ Michael Godley, “The End of the Queue: Hair as Symbol in Chinese History,” *East Asian History*, no. 8 (December 1994): 56.

the colonial authorities only a few weeks after the opening of the *École Pavie*. In a letter addressed to the Superior Resident for Tonkin on April 24, 1905, the Education Inspector in Indochina regretted that “two additional students cut their queues” raising to five the number of “rebels”. In October, the school’s director, Charles Maybon, notified in its monthly report that “six students have short hair”, including a new student, Tchang-Yi-Chou, who argued that he cut his tail with the consent of his family.¹⁵ At this point, “most students were preferably wearing western clothes.”¹⁶ Here, the westernization of Chinese bodies is obvious, blooming during the students’ educational experience abroad. If practical arguments were sometimes mobilized by both the students and educational authorities—Western clothes were more convenient for physical training¹⁷—this transformation was seen as political and rapidly became a matter of concern for public authorities in Indochina and in China. In April 1905, the Superior Resident for Tonkin’s reply to the Education Inspector stressed that hairstyle remained a private matter but, at the same time, he commanded the school staff not to encourage queue-cutting.¹⁸ Two months later, Maybon instructed to reserve khaki clothes for gymnastics classes only, as requested by the Chinese viceroy.¹⁹

This political interest in clothing and hairstyle was neither surprising nor exceptional at the turn of the twentieth century. Queue-cutting was already a tool for political opposition in the nineteenth century: between 1850 and 1864, the Taiping Rebellion’s members had let their hair free or hidden it under red turbans.²⁰ At the end of the century, Chinese reformists and republicans started to cut their hair too, especially after the humiliating Chinese defeat against Japan in 1895. This corporal change was then a symbol of the break with the traditional political power embodied by the Qing dynasty but also an attempt at westernization. More and more Chinese were traveling abroad and sometimes suffered from mockery regarding their “pigtails” or traditional dresses.²¹ Queue-cutting became quite common on one’s way to Europe or the United States as an effect, among others, of the meeting with the West. In that context, several Chinese students seem to follow this trend soon after their arrival in Hanoi. However, their experiences give a new dimension to westernization by including a colonial territory located in Asia, and neighboring China. The Frenchification, wished by the students’ families, rather than being only

¹⁵ NAV1, GGI, file 4 821: “Report, October 1905”.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ NAV1, GGI, file 10 149: “Letter from the Superior Resident for Tonkin to the Education Inspector, April 24th 1905”.

¹⁹ NAV1, GGI, file 4 821: “Report, June 1905”.

²⁰ Michael Godley, “The End of the Queue,” 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

intellectual, became also corporal, and reflected the Chinese youth's rejection of the tradition, if not their politicization.²² In other words, the sources depict Hanoi as a place where the search for modernity became more radical, infused with a rejection of the Qing.

Stressing the students' agency, the case of the *École Pavie* also reveals the French paradoxical position regarding those physical changes. In April 1905, the Superior Resident's note was crystal clear:²³ colonial authorities were anxious to disconnect French knowledge from French behaviors. Here, the involvement of the administrative head of Tonkin underscores a political mission, exceeding educational objectives. Through the foundation of a specific school guaranteeing access to Western knowledge, public authorities aimed to strengthen their diplomatic influence over China, as Charles Maybon confirmed in his 1906 report:

If France, as an Asian power, must continue to follow the policy towards China that she inaugurated several years ago, that is to say if France judges that she must always set herself up as the guardian of the independence and integrity of the Great Empire of which she is now a neighbor, she cannot remain indifferent to the movement of renovation which, in this Empire, is gaining more and more importance, little by little, even in the entourage of the Sovereign. She cannot, on pain of seeing her influence diminish, fail to play her role in the elaboration of new ideas, of new forces which are preparing China for a future which many are worried about.²⁴

From that angle, queue-cutting and Western clothing threatened these diplomatic relations, making the French anxious about offending their Chinese counterparts. They risked losing their influence over their Asian neighbor in a context of imperial competition against other Western powers and Japan, all developing educational facilities for Chinese students, in China or abroad.²⁵

Nevertheless, this diplomatic anxiety did not last long and seemed to vanish as early as the end of 1905. When, in October 1905, Maybon mentioned new hair cuttings, he stressed family consent rather than repressive attempts. In January 1906, he reported a visit from a Chinese educational inspector, T'cheng Yong Tchang; when asked about the necessity to prevent queue-cutting, the Chinese representative

²² A few years later, some students from the *École Pavie* circulated anti-Qing and anti-French publications in Hanoi, confirming this politicization: NAV1, GGI, file 4 815.

²³ NAV1, GGI, file 10 149: "Letter from the Superior Resident for Tonkin to the Education Inspector, April 24th 1905".

²⁴ NAV1, GGI, file 10 152: "Report by Charles Maybon, February 8th 1906".

²⁵ Eric W. Maeder, "Aux origines de la modernisation chinoise: les étudiants chinois au Japon," *Relations internationales* 26 (1981) 162–166. See also: NAV1, GGI, file 10 152: "Notes for Marseille's Exhibition"; ANOM, GGI, files 44 153 and 44 154.

replied that the question was not as important as it used to be because “the practice of dressing in European style was spreading in China and that students had to be allowed to do as they please when they had their family’s permission.”²⁶ After this statement, concerns about the Chinese corporal habits disappeared from official archives, confirming the French authorities’ political opportunism and their semi-passivity regarding those questions.

Reaching the West: From Indochina and Beyond

The Chinese students’ bodies were highly political and revealed both national and diplomatic issues associated with academic migration between China and Hanoi. However, this Indochinese city was first and foremost a place of study for colonial students, mostly Vietnamese. As early as 1902, about 375 applications were sent to the higher school of medicine for only 30 available seats.²⁷ A good command of French was then mandatory to acquire Western medical knowledge and *savoir faire*; it remained a prerequisite—and sometimes, an issue—in any colonial higher school until independence.²⁸ On the contrary, the corporal westernization of the students’ bodies remains difficult to grasp through the available material and does not seem to raise any special issue among the colonial community. Wearing Western clothes, e.g., a three-piece suit, was not, in fact, something unusual for members of the colonized urban elites.²⁹

The lack of primary sources dealing directly with the students’ bodies entails some methodological difficulties for historians willing to scrutinize their corporal experiences. It also confirms the absence of a real political interest in this matter. Here, the use of photographs is even more valuable as it captures a specific image of the students, i.e., of how they looked, physically speaking. Yet, one must keep in mind the limits of these snapshots and consider the contexts of production:³⁰ the

²⁶ NAV1, GGI, file 8 858: “Report by Charles Maybon, January 3, 1906”.

²⁷ Laurence Monnais-Rousselot, *Médecine et colonisation. L’aventure indochinoise, 1860–1939* (Paris: CNRS Éditions 1999) 278, quoted in Legrandjacques, “Voies étudiantes”, 169.

²⁸ On that topic, see: Trinh Van Tao, “L’enseignement du français dans le secondaire et le supérieur au Vietnam de 1918 à 1945: un état des lieux,” *Documents pour l’histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde* 25 (2000): 46–53; Sara Legrandjacques, “Délir la langue? Enseignement supérieur et enjeux linguistiques en Indochine française dans la première moitié du xx^e siècle », *Relations internationales* 188 (2021/4): 27–41.

²⁹ Guillemot, Larcher-Goscha, *La colonisation des corps*, XX.

³⁰ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London : Reaktion Books 2001); Ilse About, Clément Chéroux, “L’histoire par la photographie,” *Études photographiques* 10 (2001): 8–33.

two collections of photographs mobilized below were official snapshots, taken to promote educational or para-educational institutions located in Hanoi. The first selection is related to the *Foyer des étudiants annamites* (FEA) established in 1922 to accommodate Vietnamese—without excluding Cambodian and Laotian—students;³¹ the second is drawn from the *Annales de l'Université indochinoise*, a collection of papers on the Indochinese University, published in 1933 by colonial authorities.³² All together, these photographs expose the westernization of the Indochinese students' bodies, at least partially.

In 1923, about thirty students posed before the entrance of the FEA, alongside its director and founder, Paul Monet. Seventeen among them were wearing white European suits, embellished with either a tie or a bow tie. The others wore long dresses over large white trousers and traditional flat hats. More surprisingly, two of them sported colonial helmets. If we cannot guess those young men's motivations, we can still understand that wearing European clothes was neither unusual nor compulsory for the FEA's residents. Another shot taken in the *Foyer's* meeting room³³ confirms this heterogeneous mix between European and Vietnamese clothing among the residents, in contrast with the Asian decoration of the building. The student's agency regarding clothing appears to be evident, especially as the FEA's byelaws remained quite vague: they only stated the possibility to expel, temporarily or permanently, "any member whose behavior, outfit or words would be judged, by the Committee, harmful for the honorability, credibility, or interests of the Foyer."³⁴

In Hanoi University's *Annales*, two photographs display a few Indochinese students: the first depicts one young Indochinese resting in his room, wearing a large white suit yet hardly distinguishable; more importantly, the second echoes the FEA's photographs by showing four students near a villa in Đồn Sơn, a coastal city east of Hanoi where some university students rested in Summer. In this picture, all of them wear Western suits and three of them hold a walking stick.

Although it is still difficult to determine whether those Indochinese adopted French fashion before or during their studies, these photographs highlight the westernization of colonial bodies and, especially, of an educated urban youth. From

³¹ Legrandjacques, "Voies étudiantes", 397–400. Photographs are kept at the DEFAP Library in Paris and also available online: <https://defap-bibliotheque.fr/expositions/des-protestants-francais-en-indochine/le-foyer-des-etudiants-et-leglise-annamite/>. The author would like to thank Prof. Rebecca Rogers for indicating these sources.

³² Gouvernement général de l'Indochine – Direction général de l'Instruction Publique, *Annales de l'Université de Hanoi (Tome 1)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient 1933).

³³ This photograph, entitled "Foyer des Étudiants Annamites: Salle de Réunion (Meeting Room)" is available online through the aforementioned link.

³⁴ National Archives of Vietnam – Center no. 2, Nam Dinh Residence, file 1 201: "FEA byelaws, 1922".



Figure 5.1. *Indochinese Students at the First Congress of Indochinese Students in France, September 1927.* FR ANOM. Aix-en-Provence (ANOM, SLOTFOM V/1)—Tous droits réservés

1936, the *Association générale des étudiants de l'Université indochinoise* (AGEI), Hanoi University's student union, published a journal entitled *Le Monôme*, i.e., "the student parade". Several of its covers displayed drawings representing some Indochinese young men and women, undoubtedly enrolled at Hanoi University. Men in black suits were then standing alongside women in *áo dài*, the Vietnamese traditional dress brought back into fashion in the early 1930s. This stereotypical representation of student bodies combined tensions between tradition and modernity, the West and the East, with gender. While women supposedly embodied an Indochinese heritage,³⁵ men were represented as acculturate colonial citizens, benefiting from Western culture through their academic stays in Hanoi. Together, they perform a cosmopolitan identity, mixing Asian and European cultures.

³⁵ On the new use of the *áo dài* in the 1930s, see: Nguyen Van Huy, *La société vietnamienne face à la modernité. Le Tonkin de la fin du XIXe siècle à la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: L'Harmattan 1995).

Beyond the success of Hanoi University, many Indochinese students associated access to Western knowledge with educational sojourns in Europe since the last decades of the nineteenth century. Their European enrolment steadily grew during the first half of the twentieth century, reaching its apex in the Interwar years. Once again, primary sources do not reveal much about the westernizing effect of this educational migration, but the few available photographs consistently show young men wearing European suits, whether they came from Vietnamese provinces or from Cambodia.³⁶ In 1926, the first congress of Indochinese students epitomizes this westernization, gathering young men posing in their black outfits at Aix-en-Provence's Lycée Mignet³⁷ (Fig. 5.1). Here, we must not ignore the official dimension of this photograph: it may highlight the students' will to represent themselves as equal members of a larger French student community. Westernization could be strategically used by the students and it still remains difficult to seize their looks on a daily basis.

Clothing considerations were perceived as the tip of the iceberg of a westernization in progress that prompted many discussions and criticisms in Indochina. In 1932, Nguyễn Trường Tam, under the *nom de plume* Nhất Linh, published a cartoon in his satirical journal *Phong Hoá* (Fig. 5.2).³⁸ It represents a mother and her son meeting in Saigon's port: the young man, wearing European clothes, is back from France after his graduation—his suitcase gives his name, Lê Lãng, and title, *docteur en lettres*, i.e., holder of a PhD in Arts. His walking stick, hat and suitcase emphasize his sophisticated style. In contrast, the mother wears a traditional Vietnamese dress. She addresses her son in Vietnamese and expresses despair and confusion when he replies in French. This drawing highlights a specific issue associated with this "France-return", called *déclassement*—i.e., social downgrading. Westernized students back in Indochina neither fit in their original societies anymore, distinguishing themselves from their Indochinese kin, nor were they able to integrate in the colonizers' community, suffering from colonial hierarchies aimed at excluding local populations. *Déclassement* was both feared by public authorities and condemned by Indochinese intellectuals and activists, as illustrated by *Phong Hoá*'s cartoon, disconnecting the educated youth from the people when its mission was to represent and act for its freedom.

³⁶ For instance, see Roem's portrait in: *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Roem* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

³⁷ ANOM, SLOTFOM, file V/1: "Journal des étudiants annamites, 1927".

³⁸ This drawing has been reproduced and translated into English in: Greg Lockhart, "Broken Journey: Nhất Linh's 'Going to France'," *East Asian History* 8 (December 1994): 81.



Figure 5.2. “The Return of the Sophisticate”. *Phong Hóa* 10 (August 18, 1932): 10.

“My dear son, while you’ve been away studying four years overseas, your father has died. I’ve been alone here dreaming all the time of your return.”

[Son (in French):] “Dear Mother, dear Mother, cheer up, I am back.”

[Mother:~] “Oh dear God! Has my son gone mad? Poor boy! This is your mother!”³⁹

It remains difficult to estimate the extent and degree of the Indochinese youth’s westernization and the social and political ideas associated with it. However, it is necessary to highlight some cases of anti-Western opposition, potentially illustrated by some migrating students’ corporal habits. At the beginning of the twentieth century, military training of Vietnamese recruits developed in Japan, impelled by Phan Bội Châu, an anticolonialist member of the traditional elite. He rejected European domination, and so, European education, and considered the

³⁹ The mother’s lines were translated by Greg Lockhart: Lockhart, “Broken Journey”: 81; the son’s lines were translated by us.

newly modernized Land of the Rising Sun as a convenient training alternative.⁴⁰ At that time, nationalist and pan-Asian ideas flourished in Japan through the circulation and meeting of local and foreign intellectuals.⁴¹ Influenced by those Japanese and Chinese reformists, Phan consequently organized a movement called *Đông Du*, “Going East” and recruited Vietnamese youth from French Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. Obviously, these students sent to Japan between 1905 and 1908 had to reject any attempt of Europeanization as they were learning to fight against the French. They lived together and frequently wore military uniforms, some of them joining military schools.⁴² They had to participate in developing a collective sense of belonging while stressing discipline and order traditionally associated with military training. A few decades later, in the late 1920s, the enrolment of Indochinese trainees at military academies in China, especially Whampoa located near Canton, included similar requirements. Students were welcomed as military cadets, wearing uniforms and rifles.⁴³ In so doing, their bodies reflected a potentially violent nationalist opposition to Western domination cultivated outside of European colonial rule that nonetheless relied on westernized military codes.

Corporal Weaknesses: Health, Race, and Education

The bodies of Indochina’s academic migrants, whether through inbound or outbound migration, could be used as cultural and political standards in order to rebel against a national—China—or a colonial—the French—enemy. Clothing and hairstyles sometimes symbolized and suggested modernity, or its rejection. Often observed through the eyes of external actors, these corporal issues stressed the students’ agency too, i.e., their ability to choose and negotiate how their bodies

⁴⁰ Nguyễn Thế Anh, “L’élite intellectuelle vietnamienne et le fait colonial dans les premières années du XXe siècle,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 268 (1985): 291–307; Vĩnh Sinh (ed.), *Phan Bội Châu and the Đông-du Movement*. (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies 1988); Yves Le Jariel, *Phan Boi Chau (1867–1940) Le nationalisme vietnamien avant Ho Chi Minh* (Paris: L’Harmattan 2008); Sara Legrandjacques, “Go East! 1905 as a Turning Point for the Transnational History of Vietnamese Education,” *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* vol. 8 issue 2 (2020): 101–114.

⁴¹ See for instance: Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press 2007); Steven Peng-Seng, “Le panasiatisme en Asie: une construction de l’identité asiatique et japonais, 1900–1924” (MA dissertation, Université de Montréal 2014).

⁴² Legrandjacques, “Go East!”: 108.

⁴³ A picture of some Vietnamese recruits in China is available in: ANOM, SLOTFOM, file III/10: “‘Secret’ picture of Vietnamese military students at Whampoa Academy, 1927–1928”.

represented their inner selves. Escaping from their usual environment, the students could reinvent themselves and put on a performance. They therefore reveal an in-between space that complicates the generally admitted binary perception of colonial bodies. However, student mobility did not escape from stereotypes and prejudices regarding the colonized population's physical abilities. Their presumed weakness was taken into account by individuals and organizations involved in their educational sojourns in Europe. At the same time, their European experiences could become a lever for the development of physical education in South-East Asia.

Bodies at Risk

Historians have stressed the effects of overseas circulation and colonial settlement on Western bodies. The colonies' climate and environment were often deemed dangerous, justifying preventive measures fueled by colonial anxiety. On the contrary, scholarship has remained quite silent about the corporal impact of migration from Indochina, especially when the colonized joined the imperial metropole. Yet, this issue appears, albeit quite implicitly, in several sources related to Indochinese sojourns in France at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1907, the *Alliance française*, a non-governmental association promoting French culture all over the world, established the *Comité Paul-Bert*, a committee dedicated to the patronage of Indochinese pupils and students sent by their families to the French metropole. Its mission encompassed each step of the migrating experience, from the organization of the departure to the trip back, including the sea journey, the admission at a French institution and school holidays too. Above all, its regulations, officially published in 1909, warned of the danger of traveling abroad for the Committee's young *protégés* and *pupilles*: they "must be in good health" before boarding and "their arrival in France had to occur between May 1 and September 1."⁴⁴ The students had to arrive during summertime, when the weather in France was sunny and warm and so, close to the Indochinese climate, because "it was dangerous to send young Indochinese during Winter."⁴⁵ In the same vein, an official medical check-up was compulsory to apply for the Committee's support in order to prove that "the child could bear the French climate" and was not suffering from any organic or contagious disease. A few paragraphs later, the

⁴⁴ ANOM, GGI, file 2 568: "Regulations of the Comité Paul-Bert, 1909".

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

committee's secretary issued instructions regarding the journey itself, including clothing advice:

He must be equipped with enough cloth and personal effects made of cotton for a twenty-five-to-thirty-day trip. He must also possess, even during Summer, an outfit made from serge or flannel and a woolen overcoat or cape.⁴⁶

Once in France, the *Comité's* representatives endeavored to accommodate some of their *protégés* in southern localities: in March 1909, ten were living in the southern half of France. For instance, Rœum, a seventeen-year-old Cambodian, settled in Saint-Pons, a small city located in Hérault, between Montpellier and Toulouse.⁴⁷

Similar preventive measures were taken by colonial authorities bestowing scholarships upon carefully selected students. On December 1, 1924, new rules were adopted by the Government General in Indochina concerning the allocation of grants for metropolitan studies. Article 7 listed the documentation required to apply and included a doctor's certificate delivered by a local Health Board (*Conseil de santé local*) justifying that the applicant was not suffering from "any disability or disease unsuitable for a sojourn in France and particularly, in the province chosen by the applicant."⁴⁸ Medical check-ups remained mandatory, issued by practitioners validated by public authorities. By guaranteeing that the students could put up with the metropolitan environment, colonial officials were not only protecting their subjects. They also wished to ensure their financial investment since the scholarship-holders had to use expertise acquired abroad to contribute to the colonial project.

Bodies should not prevent students from completing their metropolitan training. Nevertheless, these attempts were not enough: in 1910, the *Comité Paul-Bert* noted with regret the death of one of its *protégés*, Duong, originally from Haiphong. This young man was preparing the entrance examination for the *École des Mines*, a prestigious engineering institution based in Paris. He caught tuberculosis during his metropolitan stay and passed away after two months of illness. Right after this tragic loss, the committee decided to strengthen its measures of control and protection both in Indochina and in the metropole. They accentuated medical examinations before the departure, including a follow-up inspection issued by the Indochinese Health Board. In France, the committee urged for a close monitoring of its pupils.⁴⁹ Despite this, two other students affiliated to the *Comité Paul-Bert*,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Rœum* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

⁴⁸ *Journal officiel de l'Indochine française* (December 1924) available in ANOM, SLOTFOM, file I/2.

⁴⁹ ANOM, GGI, file 2 572: "Note from the Comité Paul-Bert, 20 December 1910".

Nguyễn Văn Đáng⁵⁰ and Khatanarak Roun Røum,⁵¹ died of illness, respectively in 1912 and 1913.

These deadly experiences were not common at the time: most students were able to come back to their homelands safely, whether they succeeded in graduating or not. Individual files, composed of correspondence between the students or their families and the colonial administration, hardly mention medical emergencies. More surprisingly, young men engaged in metropolitan studies sometimes used physical arguments to negotiate their educational stays. After a first stay in Paris, at the *École Coloniale*, in the early 1900s and a few years of practice as medical officer in Indochina, Lê Van Chinh enrolled at the Paris faculty of medicine in 1910, thanks to the Government General's financial support. Shortly after his arrival, he requested from the *Groupe de l'enseignement indochinois en France*, an official organization monitoring and advising Indochinese students in the metropole, the authorization to move to Marseille and to seek admission at the *École d'application du service de santé*, a practical school training military doctors. In his letters, he described both his lung disease and the advantages of settling in a southern city where he already knew some inhabitants. Julien Fourès, head of the *Groupe de l'enseignement indochinois*, underscored Lê Van Chinh's "fear of cold"⁵² when he asked Dr Régner's point of view, a physician in charge of supervising Indochinese medical students sent to the Paris faculty of medicine. Despite this, Régner rejected Lê Van Chinh's first request. After many additional letters, some aggravated symptoms and a new diagnosis, the student was eventually allowed to join Marseille in April.⁵³ If the story does not disclose, for now, if Lê Van Chinh joined Marseille—he actually graduated in colonial medicine in Paris a few years later—his experience highlights agency and the ability to negotiate with public authorities about metropolitan training.

Diseases and epidemics continued to disturb educational paths in the metropole during the Interwar years. The Indochinese were victims, among others, of tuberculosis, flu, and even scarlet fever. In 1924, the erection of a sanatorium, named *sanatorium des étudiants*, started at the Petites Roches, near Grenoble.⁵⁴ If the history of the sanatorium and especially, of its links with Asian students, still needs to be written, correspondence between the Ministry of Colonies in Paris and the Government General in Indochina confirms the important role this new

⁵⁰ *À la mémoire de Nguyen Van Dang* (Tours: Imprimerie E. Arrault et Cie 1912).

⁵¹ *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Roeum* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

⁵² ANOM, GGI, file 2 564: "Letter from Julien Fourès to Dr Régner, February 20, 1910".

⁵³ ANOM, GGI, file 2 564: "Letter from the Minister of Colonies to the Governor General in Indochina, April 1910".

⁵⁴ ANOM, GGI, file 51 520: "Letter from the Minister of Colonies to the Governor General in Indochina, March 12, 1926".

institution could play for South-East Asian graduates-to-be following its opening in 1933. Despite the impossibility for the AGEI, Hanoi University's student union, to fund this new sanatorium, Indochinese were still welcomed. In the meantime, initiatives developed in Paris too, gathering between 130 and 180 students—primary and secondary pupils excluded—in the Interwar years:⁵⁵ in 1932, two residents from the *Maison des étudiants de l'Indochine* (MEI), one of the *Cité universitaire de Paris* (CUP)'s student residences located in the fourteenth *arrondissement* of Paris,⁵⁶ succumbed to tuberculosis. Roger Bauduin de Belleval, the MEI's second director, reacted by organizing a preventive medical service of the Cité, stressing the “specific situation of the Indochinese students” because of their “weak constitution, their difficulties to adapt to [French] climate and the severe restrictions owed to the economic crisis.”⁵⁷ Before delving into these racial and racist considerations attempting to justify the high Indochinese sick rate, the novelty of this initiative needs to be discussed. Historians have recently shown that a university medical service was already in the planning stage during the previous decade.⁵⁸ In April 1931, some duty doctors were appointed at the Cité; three years later, Dr Pélissier ran a complete medical service visited by 114 members of the MEI in 1934–1935.⁵⁹ The residence was then accommodating 47 Indochinese and 64 French citizens.⁶⁰ If we don't know anything of the identities of these patients, academic migration still reveals social and medical issues beyond the intellectual objectives traditionally attached to metropolitan sojourns.

⁵⁵ McConnell, *Leftward Journey*, 52–53; Legrandjacques, “Voies étudiantes”, 514.

⁵⁶ Sara Legrandjacques, “Des colonisés à la Cité. La Maison des étudiants indochinois à la Cité universitaire de Paris (1927–1939),” *Traverse. Revue d'histoire* 1 (2018): 85–96; “Going West. Indochinese Students and the Shaping of Identities at the Maison des Étudiants de l'Indochine, late 1920s–early 1970s,” in ed. Dzovinar Kévonian, Guillaume Tronchet, *International Student Migration to France in the Twentieth Century. The Cité internationale universitaire de Paris Experiment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

⁵⁷ Archives Nationales (France), 20090013/1044 quoted by Brigitte Blanc, Philippe Ayrault, *La Maison des étudiants de l'Asie du Sud-Est* (Paris: Régions Île-de-France 2015): 5.

⁵⁸ Didier Fischer, Robi Morder, « La santé des étudiants à la Cité internationale universitaire de Paris. Entre ardente nécessité et obsolescence de circonstance » in Dzovinar Kévonian, Guillaume Tronchet (dir.), *Le Campus-monde. La Cité internationale universitaire de Paris de 1945 aux années 2000* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes 2022) 287–306.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Archives Nationales (France), AJ/16/7042: “Minutes of the MEI board of directors, 1935”.

Outside the Classrooms: An Imperial Promotion of Physical Education

The supposed inadequacy of Indochinese physical characteristics evoked by Bauduin de Belval in 1932 was nothing new in the interwar years.⁶¹ In that context, some students assimilated those stereotypes and started to promote physical education to fight their supposed physical weakness. In 1918, Nguyễn Qui Toản and Trinh Van Hoi solicited the Superior Resident for Tonkin regarding the establishment of a school dedicated to physical education in Hanoi.⁶² The institution opened a year later and welcomed 152 sportsmen-to-be in December 1919.⁶³ Despite lesser enthusiasm in the following months, the school remained active in the 1920s and 1930s. Meanwhile, Trinh Van Hoi developed scientific research about food, and especially rice, in order to find the causes of the Vietnamese corporal “weakness”.

In a paper published by *L'Asie française* in February 1922, André Salles, a former French explorer and photographer, described Hoi's use of his intellectual knowledge to develop his physical abilities.⁶⁴ This inverted perception of the body/intellect relationship—the latter becoming a tool for the former—was fostered by academic migration and new educational experiences abroad. In the early 1910s, Trinh Van Hoi and Nguyễn Qui Toản were both students in France, supervised by the *Comité Paul-Bert*. Toản joined Châlons-sur-Marne's *École Normale*, training future teachers while Hoi settled in Lyons where he was admitted to a tanning school affiliated to the school of chemistry within the local faculty of sciences. Their metropolitan curricula highlight how these two men were able to develop initiatives related to the Indochinese bodies once back in the colony, combining Toản's pedagogical skills with Hoi's interest in scientific research. Above all, their common interest in physical education emerged in France too. During Summer 1913, the *Comité Paul-Bert* sent them, with ten other Indochinese *protégés*, to Reims' *Collège des Athlètes*, a physical training center founded the same year in a local park. The *Comité's* promotion of sports was not exceptional then as their pupils often joined different sports clubs: before his death in 1913, Rœum was considered as a “real sports lover”, registered in every sports club in the Saint-Pons' area, including gymnastics and soccer.⁶⁵ However, Reims' institution distinguished itself by standing as the cradle of Hebertism (*hébertisme*), a new method of physical education developed from

⁶¹ Guillemot, Larcher-Goscha, *La colonisation des Corps*, XX.

⁶² Agathe Larcher-Goscha, « Sports, colonialisme et identités nationales: premières approches du ‘corps à corps colonial’ en Indochine (1918–1945) », in ed. Nicolas Bancel, Daniel Denis, Youssef Fates, *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie. La jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940–1962* (Paris: La découverte 2003) 13–31.

⁶³ André Salles, “L'évolution physique des Annamites,” *Bulletin de l'Asie française* (February 1922).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Roeum* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

1910 by Georges Hébert. Hebertism linked the body and the mind, suggesting that their respective well-being was deeply connected, and its followers considered that being strong was synonymous with being useful. Unfortunately, no additional details are available on the Indochinese recruits' activities during the 1913 Summer break; in spite of that, Hebertist principles seemed to convince Hoi and Toân who circulated them in Indochina through their school of physical education. According to them, physical education had to improve the Indochinese—and especially, the Vietnamese—bodies and encompassed a social, and even nationalist, dimension: as demonstrated by Agathe Larcher-Goscha, some Vietnamese started to associate physical education and nationalism in the 1920s in order to shape a strong—both physically and spiritually—Vietnamese people.⁶⁶

Here, bodies became highly political again, illustrating Vietnamese patriotism, and colonial authorities supported the establishment of a school of physical education in Hanoi. In 1918, the Superior Resident of Tonkin himself provided the institution with a site located in the southern area of the city, less polluted and well-connected to the rest of the city thanks to a tramway line.⁶⁷ Additionally, funding came from colonial businessmen: quite ironically, Auguste-Raphaël Fontaine, the owner of the Indochinese distilleries, offered fifty piastres for the construction of a playground.⁶⁸ If Europeans had suspiciously looked at the politicization of Chinese bodies in the 1900s, they seemed to consider the new school as a way to strengthen their associationist policy with the Indochinese population. Their involvement was also fueled by racist prejudices on the supposed weaker Asian bodies and on the so-called European “civilizing mission” towards colonial populations.

If student mobility participated in reshaping the Indochinese perception of their own body right after the Great War, this impact of metropolitan sojourns appears actually quite limited in the Interwar years. Few students engaged in physical training while in France and no specific actors, other than the *Comité Paul-Bert*, seemed to really attach importance to sports. When the MEI was planned in 1927–1928, not a word was uttered about physical development. Only a ping-pong room was established within the walls of the new student residence. Although the participation of colonial students in metropolitan sports, especially of Indians within university clubs, is well-known,⁶⁹ historians still need to take a closer look at this phenomenon in the French Empire. Conversely, scholarship has already

⁶⁶ Larcher-Goscha, « Sports, colonialisme et identités nationales ».

⁶⁷ Salles, “L'évolution physique des Annamites”.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Paul R. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men. British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2005): 216–223; Sumita Mukerjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities. The England-Returned* (London: Routledge 2010): 82–89.

underscored the spread of sports and physical education in Indochina between the 1920s and the 1940s.⁷⁰ Students enrolled at Hanoi University promoted physical education: almost every issue of *Le Monôme*, Hanoi University student union's journal, promoted physical education with several pages reviewing sporting competitions and praising the benefits of physical training.⁷¹ The first issue even depicts the students as intermediaries between modernity and the Indochinese population, spreading new knowledge and practices related to the body: in 1936, some women students were circulating in the Indochinese countryside to give advice and medicines to the poor.⁷²

The Indochinese youth could still count on the colonizers' support, especially the appointment of a Vichyist Governor General for Indochina, Admiral Jean Decoux, in 1940. The new regime set up by Pétain in the metropole after the French defeat against Nazi Germany was conservative as well as anti-intellectual. As shown by Christophe Pécout, it promoted physical training and outdoor activities.⁷³ In Indochina, Decoux appointed Major Maurice Ducoroy chief officer for Sports and Youth in December 1941: among other things, he facilitated the access to sports premises, i.e., stadiums, for university students in Hanoi.⁷⁴ The Governor General also used the foundation of a new university residence, the *Cité universitaire de Hanoi*, to popularize physical education among the colonial educated elites, whether they be Asians or French. The project included "constructions for the practice of sports and outdoor games."⁷⁵ Consequently, the growing number of students reaching Hanoi during the Second World War, from Indochina or elsewhere,⁷⁶ should train both their intellect and their mind. Each week, a 2-hour outdoor training session became mandatory for each young man accommodated at the Cité.

Last but not least, the establishment of new institutions dedicated to physical education confirmed the new primacy of the body over the mind. It also entailed

⁷⁰ Larcher-Goscha, "Sport, colonialisme et identités nationales"; Brice Fossard, *Les élites indochinoises et les secrets de l'Occident. Sports et scoutisme coloniaux* (Paris: Les Indes savantes 2022). See also the ongoing research by Mickael Langlois: "Les arts martiaux vietnamiens au contact de la mondialisation: l'histoire d'un corps à corps [post-] colonial (1900–1975)" (PhD Diss. UNIL).

⁷¹ Several issues from *Le Monôme* are available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

⁷² Thanh Ba, "La Propagande d'Hygiène dans les campagnes," *Le Monôme* 1 (juin 1936) 13–14.

⁷³ Christophe Pécout, « Les pratiques physiques et sportives au service de l'idéal vichyste: L'exemple des Chantiers de la Jeunesse (1940–1944) » *Sciences sociales et sport* n°1 (2008/1) 5.

⁷⁴ "La pratique obligatoire de la culture physique à l'Université," *Le Monôme* 31 (February–March 1942) 6.

⁷⁵ "Concours d'idées pour la construction de la cité universitaire à Hanoi," *L'Écho annamite* (12 janvier 1942).

⁷⁶ According to *Éducation*, a French journal, Hanoi University welcomed 1528 students in 1944: about 1146 were Indochinese, 371 French and 11 Chinese and "diverse": "Les oeuvres culturelles en Indochine," *Éducation* 7 (1949) 23.

new student migration both in Indochina and in France. On the one hand, the *École supérieure d'éducation physique de l'Indochine* (ESEPIC), imagined by Ducoroy and officialized by a decree on November 24, 1941, was located in Phan Thiét, in Cochinchina.⁷⁷ On the other hand, during Summer 1941, six Indochinese students in France joined the *École des cadres* located in Uriage, a town a few kilometers away from Grenoble, in the French Alps. They were members of a larger colonial group also made of four North Africans, four West Africans, two Malagasy, one Guyanese and one Kanak.⁷⁸ The entire group left Marseille in late July for a one-week stay during which the Vichyist administration of the school combined intellectual work with physical honing.⁷⁹ However, these new institutions failed to attract a great number of trainees: only a handful of Indochinese visited Uriage School in 1941–1942. On the other side of the globe, a few Vietnamese candidates applied for an admission at the ESEPIC. In 1943, despite an important promotion in *Le Monôme*, only twenty-nine of the fifty governmental scholarships for these specific schools were attributed.⁸⁰

Conclusion

On May 24, 1926, O Boun Thian boarded the *André Lebon* at Marseille headed for Saigon.⁸¹ This Cambodian young man had just interrupted his business and industrial studies in Paris due to a sudden illness. If the story does not reveal whether his health suffered from the French climate, as often feared by public authorities and other educational supervisors, his father took a dim view of O Boun Thian's decision. Indeed, he owed money to colonial authorities in Indochina that loaned him not less than 22,000 francs for his educational sojourn in France.

O Boun Thian's academic experience illustrates tensions that existed between the Asian youth's body and mind during the first half of the twentieth century. Multiple European and Asian actors then considered student mobility as a useful

⁷⁷ Commissariat de la République française au Laos, *Bulletin administratif du Laos* 12 (1941) 432; ANV1, GGI, file 17 165: "Creation and Organization of the *Ecoles d'Éducation physique en Indochine, 1941–1944*"; Eric Jennings, *Vichy sous les Tropiques. La Révolution nationale à Madagascar, en Gadeloupe, en Indochine (1940–1944)* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle 2004) 260. See also: Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies 1940–1970* (Lexington: Lexington Books 2008).

⁷⁸ Bernard Comte, *Une utopie combattante. L'école des cadres d'Uriage, 1940–1942* (Paris: Fayard 1991) 253.

⁷⁹ Sara Legrandjacques, "Déroutes étudiantes. Les étudiants indochinois en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (1940–1945)" *Les Cahiers Sirice* 22 (2019/1) 82–83.

⁸⁰ "Au stade de Phan Thiet," *Le Monôme* 36 (December 1943) 3.

⁸¹ ANOM, GGI, file 51 442.

tool for both individual and collective development. When the former contemplated colonial development as a priority, the latter negotiated it, taking into consideration their own careers and upward mobility but also nationalist and anti-colonialist objectives. Promoting Western knowledge and *savoir-faire* in Hanoi or elsewhere, they also took into consideration corporal issues as they wanted to secure their investment on an educated elite-to-be. Acclimatization, new diseases, but also *déclassement* potentially jeopardized intellectual objectives. However, the corporal dangers and consequences of student migration must not be reduced to a binary opposition between the body and the mind. At the same time, youth circulation participated in circulating new ideas and ideologies that could be directly linked to the bodies, like Hebertism from the 1910s. Former Vietnamese students in France played a part in the propagation of physical education in Indochina.

Consequently, while historians frequently scrutinize education in South-East Asia through an institutional lens, this chapter has shed light on the students' agency and involvement regarding the shaping of higher learning within colonial territories. In so doing, it emphasized political embodiments, i.e., how the students' bodies reflected the students' minds—their westernization, nationalization or anti-colonization. While revealing the complexity of this relation to the body, far from a binary approach, it also unveils Hanoi's regional and imperial role as an academic center, turning Chinese bodies into diplomatic subjects. In a nutshell, it gives both a corporal *and* transnational dimension to the history of education. Thus, it paves the way for new research on student migration and higher learning in Asia, beyond a binary separation between the brain and the flesh, the colonized and the colonizer, the imperial and the international.

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