Abolition or Maintenance?

French and British Policies towards Vietnamese and Malay Traditional Education during the Last Decades of the Nineteenth Century*

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[*Abstract*]

At different times in the 19th century, the Straits Settlements and Cochinchina were both colonies that the British and the French captured the earliest in their process of invasion of Malaya and Vietnam, respectively. This study examines the transitional stage from the traditional school system to colonial school system in the Straits Settlements and Cochinchina. This could also be considered an experimental stage for building later education systems in their expanded colonies, namely British Malaya and French Indochina, from the closing decades of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. This study, exploiting various sources and applying the comparative approach, identifies the factors that affected the different attitudes and choices of policy towards traditional education models of indigenous communities (the Malays and Vietnamese) pursued by the British in the Straits Settlements and the French in Cochinchina.

Keywords: traditional education, colonial education policy, French Vietnam, British Malaya, 19th century

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Ⅰ. Introduction

In the capitalist system, Britain, with the most spectacular economic development and most lasting consolidated power, had become the world's leading industrial power and the greatest empire. France always followed Britain as the second imperial power. For their parts, owning special strategic positions in Southeast Asia, since the glorious time of international maritime trade, Malaya and Vietnam had been noticed and was ultimately conquered by Britain and France in the era of imperialism.

When the need to establish colonial rule in the colonies became stronger, education immediately became a decisive factor in the success or failure of colonization. On the one hand, to colonize indigenous intellect, the metropolitan powers shaped and guided educational policies in their colonies. On the other hand, pre-colonial societies of Vietnam and Malaya inherently consisted of traditional education models with different characters and levels. The transitional stage from traditional school system to colonial school system was interesting to observe, considering the debates among the French and British colonial officials and educational experts on their policies towards traditional education and the establishment of modern colonial education. There were also debates on organizing the transition of language of instruction. In French Vietnam, the French were unanimous that Confucian education needed to be abolished entirely and immediately; however, there were opposite views about Quốc ngữ (a Vietnamese writing system employing Roman alphabet letters) and the French language. Meanwhile, in British Malaya, administrators quickly reached a consensus on the maintenance of the traditional education system of the Malays in the vernacular Malay language.

It is necessary to investigate both sides, metropolitan powers and colonial countries, to examine the factors that affected and governed different policy choices for indigenous traditional education of the French in Vietnam and the British in Malaya. The fact was that despite certain similarities, colonial education policies were very diverse because they were products of different colonial powers. Similarly, Vietnam and Malaya, before the arrival of colonial

powers, were quite dissimilar in ethnic group structure, culture, and religion, especially in the traditional education model. Basing on updated data and applying the comparative approach, this article argues that the colonial goals and motives of the French and the British determined their attitudes and policies for indigenous traditional education, but the characteristics of the traditional education systems of indigenous peoples should also be considered a crucial factor.

Ⅱ. The French's determination in abolishing Vietnamese traditional education

Prior to the French intervention in Vietnam, there had long existed a traditional education system called Confucian education. Although Confucianism was disseminated to Vietnam shortly after the Christian era, and following the Chinese invasion and colonization of Vietnam during the first millennium, it was only from the 11th century onwards when Vietnamese feudal dynasties began to be seriously interested in this ideology. In 1070, Emperor Lý Thánh Tông of the Lý Dynasty (1010-1225) built the Temple of Literature (*Văn miếu*) in Thăng Long (present-day Hanoi) to promote education among the people. In 1075, the first examination was held for scholars entering mandarin bureaucracy. One year later, the Emperor set up the Imperial College (*Quốc tử giám*) to teach Confucianism to children of royal and noble families. The Imperial Academy (*Hàn lâm viện*) was established to spread Confucianism. The following dynasties maintained the Confucian educational and examination system. By the beginning of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1945), Neo-Confucianism was fully adopted and became the official ideology of the dynasty. Education and examinations were widespread throughout the country. Consequently, literacy rate was higher than that in the previous dynasties, although only a tiny percentage of the candidates succeeded in their exams.

It is well-known that Vietnamese Confucian education, a field of the superstructure, contributed to making Vietnam a civilized country with many outstanding cultural scholars. But it was

Confucian education itself, by the mid-19th century, which gradually weakened the country. Highly appreciating Confucianism, the Nguyễn Emperors did nothing to prevent the harmful elements of Confucianism and Confucian education like dogmatism, frivolousness, conservativeness, and backwardness. There was no significant effort to innovate the curricula and syllabi, to modify and to improve teaching and studying methods, and to enrich the contents of education and examination, though there were appeals by some Confucian intellectuals for educational reforms, like Nguyễn Trường Tộ, Đặng Huy Trứ, and Nguyễn Lộ Trạch. Thus, upon encountering Western civilizations, Vietnamese Confucian education immediately exposed its powerlessness (Whitmore 1984; Đào Duy Anh 2014; Doumer 2015).

Meanwhile, with the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870, France focused on two crucial goals, namely colonial expansion and the civilizing mission. Unlike the Second Republic's policy which focused more on "sword" and "plow," the Third Republic prioritized "book" and "school" (Brooks 2016: 2). Republicans desired to transform military rule to civil rule, the conquest by force to the conquest of the hearts and minds of the colonized by education. In other words, if the Third Republic used the civilizing mission to justify their colonial enterprise, education and school emerged as the most decisive factor. Based on the principle of universality, the French assimilationists strongly believed that disseminating the French language and culture through education would help France to succeed in its civilizing mission. Education and colonization, two major projects of the Third Republic, not only combined strongly but contained political conspiracies. In his speech before the French Chamber of Deputies on 28 March 1884, Jules Ferry, Prime Minister and Minister of Education, believed that the policies of colonial expansion have the duty to civilize the inferior races (Ferry 1884: 199). Generally, French colonialists, assimilationists, and educators believed that education was the vector that directed colonial subjects to the modern world and contributed to making their colonies a part of the French family (Lý Tường Vân 2020: 33-52). The problem was that the foremost French colonial conquest in West Africa—the place for experimented

projects of civilization and assimilation—was considered unsuccessful in the second half of the 19th century. The question is whether the previous failure experience of the French in West Africa was repeated in Vietnam.

While debating over educational reform in France, the French colonists also began to discuss educational policy in Vietnam. Yet, the implementation of educational policy in Vietnam depended on their military advances for conquest. After their attack on Đà Nẵng in 1858, the French completed their conquest of Cochinchina in 1874 after a treaty that recognized the full sovereignty of France over Cochinchina. The remaining parts of Vietnam were occupied and divided into Tonkin and Annam. The Harmand Treaty (1883) and the Patenôtre Treaty (1884) formed the basis for the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin and for French colonial rule in Vietnam during the next seven decades. In 1887, the French annexed Laos and Cambodia and established the so-called Indochinese Union, which at that time consisted of the colony of Cochinchina and the four protectorates of Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos. On that basis, France established a model of governance in Vietnam, as well as the Indochinese Union, according to the French Constitutional Laws in 1875, in which the President of France was in charge of legislation over the colonies. Hence, the colony of Cochinchina would be at the forefront of the process of building the education system in French Indochina.

While pacifying Cochinchina, the French realized that they had to deal with the Confucian education system. Therefore, to make their rule effective, it was necessary to quickly develop a new regime of education for indigenous people. The pre-colonial Vietnamese society was not entirely savage, inferior, or half-civilized as the colonists often described. Vietnam was certainly an exceptional case. Governor General of Indochina J. Marie de Lanessan had to admit in 1891 that there are very few countries, including civilized ones, in which learning is highly appreciated as much as in Vietnam. It can be said that every Vietnamese village has its schools. Pierre Pasquier, with 37 years working in Vietnam and Indochina, also wrote that very few people were illiterate, and even in rural areas, the miserable people could still read and write several hundred

words (Nguyễn Xuân Thọ 2018: 541).

It is worth mentioning that, besides the official Vietnamese language, Vietnamese people possessed two writing systems, namely *chữ Hán* (Classical Chinese or Confucian script) and *chữ Nôm* (Nôm script, a native Vietnamese script deriving from Chinese characters), not to mention *Quốc ngữ* (a Romanized Vietnamese writing system created in the late 16th century). Even though Quốc ngữ was easy to learn, it was the means for missionaries to spread a new religion, so it was not widely used by the Vietnamese. According to David Marr, Vietnamese teenage students patiently memorized up to a thousand poems, a hundred or more poetic essays, and perhaps fifty dissertations or commentaries (Marr 1971: 78). Marr also states that before the French invasion, up to twenty-five percent of Vietnamese over fifteen years of age were able to decipher several hundred Chinese and Nôm characters (Marr 1981: 34). Thus, efforts to colonize or civilize the indigenous intelligentsia through the French education model would be directly and strongly challenged.

Basically, the shift from military rule to civil rule in French Cochinchina took place in 1879, when the civilizing mission became an official mission. The ideal of assimilation, more than ever before, mainly focused on the issue of language, as it was basically unresolved since the occupation was completed in 1867. Before and after 1879, the very first issue that faced most French leaders was how to *de-Sinicize* the Vietnamese language as soon as possible, in order to transfer Vietnam under Chinese cultural influence to one under French cultural influence. It was, therefore, necessary to completely cut off all connection with Confucian script and Nôm script. The issue of Gallicization of schools had to be conducted immediately with the French language as the sole medium of instruction, together with French literature and moral standards of the French Republic. In 1864, the French admirals promulgated Order No. 60 relating to the development of Quốc ngữ, as the French language could not yet be taught immediately and permitted the short-term use Quốc ngữ as a bridge to studying French.[1] That

[1] Unlike Confucian script and Nôm script, which required extensive study and practice to master, the advantage of Quốc ngữ was that it was easy to read and write. The Vietnamese people could learn their own language in a few weeks instead of years. *See:* Ordre N° 60 du 16 juillet 1864.

project, however, immediately triggered a very fierce debate in both metropolitan France and its colony (Aymonier & Roucoules 2018). Some French administrators objected to Quốc ngữ because they claimed that the development of Quốc ngữ meant the Vietnamese people would have an independent modern language and writing, not to mention that it could result in many political implications. They were persevering in using French as a primary tool of assimilation despite knowing it was a long-term and extremely difficult process.

E. F. Aymonier, a former Resident of Cochinchina, then the Director of the Colonial School in Paris from 1889, represented the anti-Quốc ngữ group. He strongly opposed the de-Sinicization by Quốc ngữ and advocated de-Sinicization by the French language. His deep concern was that the de-Sinicization by Quốc ngữ was no different from Vietnamization of a modern national language (Aymonier & Roucoules 2018: 62-63). Therefore, Aymonier had a firm faith in teaching the French language directly to the native, both intellectuals and ordinary people, because that was the most reliable, effective way to achieve the goal of de-Sinicization and turning the Vietnamese into Asian Frenchmen even if that was the difficult, long-term process. He was also aware that granting the people of the colony the French language would be very dangerous. Aymonier emphasized that in the formal education program, Confucian script, which was taught to the remotest villages, must be replaced by the French language of the conqueror. He believed that within just three generations, a New France would naturally develop in Asia (Brooks 2011: 11).

By contrast, E. Roucoules, former Principal of Chasseloup Laubat School in Saigon and Vice President of Indochina Research Association, represented the pro-Quốc ngữ group. Roucoules said that any measure, before put into effect, needs a transition. He reinforced his argument that the dissemination of French, a writing that was completely different from that of the colonized, had to get through a transitional period with Quốc ngữ, the same Latin-based script. Roucoules reiterated that the missionaries developed Quốc ngữ to serve the purpose of introducing religious texts to a broader population, including the lower class, and the advantage of Quốc

ngữ was that it was easy to learn. Quốc Ngữ, he noted, also helped to integrate into everyday language many French words that have no equivalents in Vietnamese. Hence, using Quốc ngữ, as he proposed, had the immediate advantage of not being cut off with the past of the colonies. Quốc ngữ would be a medium for the slow but firm and necessary process of introducing the French language. He finally acknowledged the dissemination of the French language and especially the expansion of French influence are our deepest wish and highest expectation. (Aymonier & Roucoules 2018: 123). Although a series of circulars and decrees was issued by the colonial government to force the elimination of the Confucian script system and its replacement with Romanized script (including the French and Quốc ngữ) in official administrative documents,[2] the reality was that not many Vietnamese mastered Quốc ngữ let alone the French language. They still spoke Vietnamese, continued to use Confucian script and Nôm script in their daily life as well as in their study at village schools. The colonial school system was still run by the French administrators who could not speak or write the local language or even Quốc ngữ.

With the motto of everything should start from school, the French authorities were very determined to abolish the traditional schools of the Vietnamese. On the one hand, they closed all of the schools that used Confucian script or Nôm scipt, and cancelled the Confucian exams in Cochinchina in 1864. However, only a few schools were newly formed, such as Collège des interprètes (Décision No 89 du 8 mai 1862), École Normale coloniale (Décision No 126 du 10 juillet 1871), and Collège des Stagiares (Arrêté No 202 du 29 août 1873). In the 1860s and 1870s, the French-style schools in Cochinchina had only a function of supplying a small number of interpreters, teachers, and junior officers for the colonial administration and civil organizations.

In November 1874, Admiral Dupré decided to reorganize the education system of Cochinchina (Décision du 17 November 1874).

[2] Successive decrees in the years of 1874, 1878 and 1880, for instance, defined the replacement of the Confucian script with *Quốc ngữ* (from 1878, especially from 1882 with the French) in all official documents; and encouraged and rewarded the mandarins at the villages if they could write official documents in *Quốc ngữ*.

This system was declared to comply with the provisions of the national education in France. The restructuring of the system of public schools in Cochinchina was aimed at directing the education in the French's orbit, ensuring the schools became the foundation for spreading the French language and culture. On that basis, assimilationists would change the Vietnamese spirit and draw the Vietnamese to follow the French way, and keep Vietnam under the sphere of French influence. The first civil Governor of Cochinchina, Le Myre de Viliers (1879-1882), was an extreme enthusiast of the Gallicization enterprise. He supported the drastic abolition of traditional schools as well as of the Confucian script and Nôm script, the establishment of Franco-Vietnamese schools that used only the French and Quốc ngữ as media of instruction, the application of French education norms to the newly-formed schools, and the further limitation of the activities of missions in education. In 1879, the Service of Public Instruction was established, which issued a decree on organizing Franco-Vietnamese education programs, following the French model but for Vietnamese students. According to this decree, the establishment of new schools required permission from the government (Part I), education and certification of teachers by the government (Part VI, VII), a government curriculum system for schools, and the exclusivity of French as language of instruction (Part V) (Arrêté No 55 du 17 mars 1879).

However, the French Government failed in recruiting local students to the Franco-Vietnamese schools. According to official statistics in 1886, out of a total of 820 schools and 27,473 students in Cochinchina, 326 Franco-Vietnamese schools enrolled 15,410 students. Attendance rate in public schools was less than 1%, considering that Cochinchina population was approximately 2 million. In contrast, the number of Confucian schools reached 426, serving 8,496 students. Confucian schools therefore accounted for more than half of the total schools and their number of students made up one third of the total.[3] While the colonial government was

[3] Public schools ranked from low to high are cantonal schools (écoles cantonnales), district schools (écoles d'arrondissement), and provincial schools (écoles provinciales). It should be noted that, although the Confucian schools were forced to close, they were still maintained in rural areas. Moreover, there were 68 religious

unable to control these schools, they turned them into private schools (together with the religious schools). Additionally, compared with the statistics of Franco-Vietnamese schools in 1902, the number of students decreased to 4,901 in the total of 172 schools.[4]

The public schools in Cochinchina for indigenes reduced rather significantly in number. This led to a sharp decline in literacy rate in Cochinchina during the first 30-50 years of the French rule, as Confucian script faded. Most Cochinchinese received no education based on the French models whatsoever. Trịnh Văn Thảo criticized the triviality of the Franco-Vietnamese schools and compared the vigorous vitality of traditional Vietnamese schools in Cochinchina to "a phoenix resurrected from the mass of ashes as the schools were strongly attacked and obstructed." In general, the presence of French schools until the early 20th century was described as follows: at least in Indochina, Jules Ferry's schools never dominated; the French educational model had always been at a disadvantage as compared with the traditional education model; the French policy of education in Indochina clearly had the intent to compete with Confucian schools as if the future of colonialism depended on it (Trịnh Văn Thảo 2009: 19-20).

After nearly half a century of rule, it became clear that the French encountered a stalemate and made no progress in spreading their language and developing the colonial schools. The goal of eliminating Vietnamese traditional education and culture in Cochinchina generally failed. Less than a generation since the end of the 1870s, the replacement of the Confucian script with the Quốc ngữ was achieved (Milton 1969: 102). More and more Vietnamese were aware of the convenience and significant benefits of Quốc ngữ. They studied and used Quốc ngữ as a medium for communication and literary composition, especially for political purposes. Although the Europeans introduced the Romanized script, the Vietnamese improved, upgraded, and perfected Quốc ngữ, which was officially adopted as a national writing system in 1909. Nowadays, Quốc ngữ

schools with 3,567 students (Annuaire de la Cochinchine pour l'annee 1886: 113).

[4] No church school nor Confucian school was on the list of statistics because these schools were classified as belonging to the private school system (Annuaire général de l'Indochine 1902).

is a standard script in Vietnam, as foreseen by Aymonier.

Until the last years of the 19th century, the French and Franco-Vietnamese schools were never the ideal options for Vietnamese students, especially those in rural areas. First, the Vietnamese people were endowed with a tradition of studiousness; more than anyone, they were aware of the importance of knowledge. On the one hand, they realized that under the French rule, education was a requisite for prestigious jobs. On the other, they recognized that the colonial education system had always been selective and elitist, especially at higher levels. That meant education only focused on a small group of people.

The other problem was that French educators were always torn between the assimilationist perspective (maximum teaching) and the colonial perspective (minimum teaching). Therefore, almost all were half-educated ones, especially the commoners; even the qualified and highly-trained Vietnamese received limited employment opportunities. Obviously, obtaining the French education was quite impractical if they, in the end, had to return to their village and continue to be a farmer. In that context, traditional Confucian schools were always available and convenient for almost all rural students. These charged much cheaper fees that continued to attract more attendance.

Finally, due to such aspects as the resistant attitude of the Vietnamese to French colonialism and loyalty to their language (Vietnamese), culture (Confucianism) and traditional education (Confucian education), it was obvious then that, in Indochina, things would never go as planned; this was while in other colonies, the cultural order followed the political order, and gradually "civilization" became the evidence of the legitimacy of the empire. In Indochina, the cultural "graft" hardly worked, and new schools developed so slowly that those who were in authority, even the superiors, had to openly question its benefits (Trịnh Văn Thảo 2009: 10).

After the failure of the extreme, hasty, and arbitrary Gallicization of schooling (Trịnh Văn Thảo 2009: 57-58), the French-style schools were adjusted to something more adequate by

many French authorities like Marie de Lanessan, Gustave Dumoutier, and Henri Gourdon. These adjustments were carried out after the establishment of the Indochinese Union, based on the cooperation with the traditional schools rather than resolutely eliminating them as their predecessors did in the South. However, these schools were still not welcomed by the Vietnamese in both Tonkin and Annam. Besides, the upsurge of nationwide anticolonial sentiments, whose vanguards were Vietnamese teachers and students in indigenous schools, together with many other political problems arising at the turn of the twentieth century, led Governor-General Paul Beau to arrive at a decision: to reform colonial education in 1906.

Ⅲ. The British adaptational approach and the maintenance of indigenous Malay traditional education

After losing its colonies in North America in 1776, the British turned their attention to Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. With the Dutch and French powers fading in both Europe and Asia, the British took on Penang in 1786, Singapore in 1819, and Malacca in 1824 with ease. The Straits Settlements was considered a prosperous commercial center that attracted many traders and laborers from Europe, China, India, the Middle East, and from neighboring countries and the Malay states. It was a melting pot of cultures.

Rapid population growth was a phenomenon that influenced the British policy of educational development in the Settlements. From being a desolate place in 1786, Penang grew a population of 58,000 in 1858; the population of Province Wellesley increased from 6,000 in 1820 to 61,000 in 1850; the population of Malacca also increased from 31,000 in 1826 to 68,000 in 1860; and Singapore grew from 10,000 in 1824 to 81,000 in 1860. Overall, by 1860, the population of the Straits Settlements was approximately 273,000 people. Another noticeable feature of the Settlements was ethnic diversity among multiple ethnic groups such as the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others (British, Europeans, Euro-Asians, Asians, etc.) By 1860, there were approximately 136,165 Malays, 96,306 Chinese,

28,129 Indians and 7,164 Europeans (Mills 1961: 8, 23). This plural society later influenced British educational policy (Wong & Gwee 1980: 2).

In the early years, the British neglected the Straits' education. Thus, education was diverse among the immigrants. The Chinese wholeheartedly followed the traditional Confucian school model with textbooks and teachers imported from China. The Indian immigrants were educated by the plantation owners. The British later invested in English-medium schools such as the Penang Free School (1816), Malacca High School (1826), Singapore Free School (1834)[5]; and the other religious schools opened during the following decades (Chelliah 1960: 36-42).

These English schools, both secular and religious, served boys and girls of all races with low fees. The students were educated to read and write in English and do basic arithmetic. Although these religious institutions had declared, from the start, not to impose Christianity on anyone, the Malay Muslims not only denied but also strongly resisted them for fear of Christian conversion. Abdulla bin Abdul Kadir, a Malay school teacher at that time described: "Many times I was asked by the missionaries to persuade Malay children to go to school and learn reading and writing, both in Malay and in English. But because of their ignorance and their belief that they would be introduced to English ways they were reluctant to come, thinking that they would be forcibly compelled to embrace Christianity… They grew suspicious of me, believing as they did that I wished to do them harm, and in their hearts they began to hate me. Behind my back, they went to rouse my father, urging him to stop me going to learn English and saying: 'in a short while he may follow English beliefs and lose faith in his own religion.' My father was angry and stopped me, saying: 'I do not wish you to go and learn to speak and write English, for not a single Muslim does so'" (Wicks 1980: 172).

In contrast, the immigrant Chinese gave the most robust support to Western education. In the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, some of these missionary

[5] "Free" in this context means open to all races and classes without cost.

schools were closed, while others were taken over by the British government. In the context of the diverse school types of the ethnic groups, the British East India Company officials, and even British government administrators (since 1867) did not intend to establish relationships between different races in the Settlements through a standardized education system. The British point of view was that education should take into consideration each group's role in society. Therefore, maintaining the different types of schools was synonymous to each ethnic group being educated in its own language. That contributed to preserving the racial status quo and the ease in identifying the groups with their various economic activities, specifically, the Malays with field cultivation, the Chinese with the mining industry and commerce, and the Indians with real estate and plantation (Andaya 1994: 226).

The issue of education for the Malays was not as simple as imagined. Malay education was merely religious without any secular knowledge. This education model had been conducted almost simultaneously with the process of receiving and spreading Islam in the Malay Peninsula. Wilkinson noted that the foundation of the traditional Malay education was not reading, writing, arithmetic, or occupational skills, but the sacred text, the Koran (Wilkinson 1957). In the early 19th century, there was no Malay vernacular school on the Malay Peninsula, and in the early Straits Settlements, there were not any indigenous schools teaching in the Malay language either (Wicks 1980: 176-177); although in some Quranic classes, Malay children were taught a little Malay language and skills to serve daily life in the village. (Stevenson 1975: 15-18; Loh 1975: 11-12; Lý Tường Vân 2016: 371-373). The Malay Muslims rejected Western, Chinese, and Indian education to remain loyal to their Islamic teachings. In such a situation, the EIC officials became increasingly aware that providing secular education to the indigenous Malays was essential.

As early as 1830, there rose in British India a controversy between the *Orientalists*, who favored the conservation of traditional native knowledge, and those who advocated the *Anglicization* of indigenous intellect (Lynn & Martin 1999). In fact, right after the founding Singapore in 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles embarked on the development of education for its residents by establishing the Malay

College and Singapore Institution. He not only appreciated the language, literature, laws, and customs of the natives, but allowed the Malays to receive modern education in their own language; he even encouraged Europeans to learn the native language to be familiar with native culture (Raffles, 1991: 75-86). Contrary to Raffles, Thomas Macaulay, the Chairman of the Committee on Public Instruction and an Anglicist, argued in 1835 for the superiority of the English language: "English is better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic… we must do our best to form Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and intellect" (Bureau of Education 1965: 107-117).[6] Reverend James Mackay, Secretary of the Penang Free School Committee, called for the English language to be promoted as a common language and a medium of instruction in schools.[7]

Despite all controversies, the EIC officials maintained that the native children read and write in their own language rather than English. As a matter of fact, in the 1850s, the issue of education for the masses began to be floated by the Court of Directors of the EIC, with the primary objective of providing elementary education in the vernacular of the indigenous population, especially in the rural areas. The Governor of the Straits Settlements, on the one hand, accepted the general principles, but on the other did his best to adapt them to local conditions (Chelliah 1960: 21-22). In 1855, a Malay school was opened in Penang, and two others were established in Singapore in 1856. In 1863, three Malay schools were started in the province of Wellesley. These schools faced the same situation as with the English-medium schools, which faced financial difficulties adverse reaction from the Malays. This tragic situation of Malay vernacular schools was commented on by Governor Cavenagh: formal educational provision in the Straits Settlements

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[6] This document led to the issuing of a resolution by the then Governor General of India, Lord Bentinck in March 1835, declaring that English literature and language be taught to the natives of India. For more information, *see*: https://archive.org/details/Minutes_201311/page/n2/mode/1up (Accessed May 15, 2020).

[7] He argued strongly that English was a "living language" as well as "the key to the treasures of modern literature and science." In February 1868, he proposed to the Colonial Office that the medium of instruction in the public educational system in the Straits be the English language (Wicks 1980: 181).

had reached a critical impasse at mid-century (Peter Wicks 1980: 180). As such, from the 1850s onwards, there existed parallel school systems in the Settlements: one teaching in the vernacular, including the Malay schools established by the British; and Chinese and Tamil schools set up by their respective communities—one teaching in English, which provided primary education for the mixed urban population.

The three-year stage from 1867 to 1870 was a critical transitional stage of education in the Settlements. For the first time, the British government in the Straits Settlements and the Colonial Office discussed many issues related to indigenous education, such as the plural society of the Settlements, the adequacy of the formal educational provision, the necessity of expanding vernacular education, the appropriate medium of instruction for primary education, and the issue of teacher training and the teacher recruitment, etc. In addition, there was an emerging factor that greatly affected the government of the Straits Settlements in making educational policies—the Elementary Education Act, passed in Britain in February 1870 and set up the network of elementary schooling for all children, whether boys and girls, especially impoverished children between the ages of 5 and 12.[8] It is worth emphasizing that in Britain, until the first three-quarters of the 19th century, there was no concept of government duty to promote mass education. Therefore, this Act, together with the previous proposal by the Court of Directors of EIC, reaffirmed the responsibility of the British government in providing education for its colonies, first and foremost the indigenous people.

It was time for the government to intervene in the education of the Malay using the British stance: the Malays were primarily agriculturists and fishermen, but the new Malay generation had to be more intelligent than their parents in order to participate more effectively in the new colonial society. In December 1870, the first Colonial Governor Harry Ord and the Straits Settlements' Legislative

[8] The Act was passed partly in response to political dynamics, such as the need for an effective education system for social control through education, as well as demands from industrialists for the educated population because they feared Britain's competitive status in world trade and manufacture was being threatened.

Council conducted a survey on the state of education in the colony. The 1870 Report, commonly known as the Woolley Report (named after the Chairman of the Committee), was considered the first official document of the British colonial government on education in the Straits Settlements (Wong & Gwee 1980: 11-14). From then on, the Malay vernacular schools came to be monitored by the government, known as Government Malay vernacular schools. To officially manage the education of the Straits Settlements, the Department of Education was established in 1872, with emphasis on the appointment to the post of a new Inspector of Schools.

According to the report, "the state of Education in the Colony has been and is in a backward state," and the progress of education has been "slow and uncertain" because of "the indifference of the different races, more particularly the Malays." Looking at the minor schools in the Settlements such as the Vernacular Schools, the Committee's opinion was that they have "hitherto done little to no good." In almost every instance, the sole object "aimed to teach the boys to read a few chapters of the Koran, supplying no general knowledge," while the education of females has been very much less satisfactory (Wicks 1980: 179-180). Therefore, the Committee's opinion was to improve existing institutions and schools through gradual efforts to place them on a more satisfactory and improved basis. The Committee supposed that any violent changes at present might tend to retard instead of promote education (Wong & Gwee 1980: 12-13). In their plan to extend Malay vernacular schools, the Committee emphasized that "whether he be Chinese or Malay, can make no real progress in Education until well grounded in his own language." They made it clearer that "it means not schools where Malay children are taught a few verses of the Koran, but schools where Malay children will be educated in their mother tongue… and in Roman character" (Wong & Gwee 1980: 14).

In December 1872, A. M. Skinner, the first inspector of schools, embarked on a new experiment by re-establishing the Malay vernacular schools "upon the basis of the Koran classes." The main features of these schools were that the Koran might be taught in the school, but the teaching of Koran was only secondary to the primary object of instructing in the Malay language. Thus, the

morning lessons were devoted to the instruction of reading, writing, and arithmetic in the Malay language, while the Koran sessions had to be conducted in the afternoon (Chelliah 1960: 62-64). Although education was free and the government provided books, it was arduous to convince the Malays about the benefits of secular education, more precisely semi-secular education. The low attendance rate of Malay children in schools forced the Government to implement the policy of compulsory education in the late 1880s and early 1890s. As a result, between 1872 and 1892, the number of Malay schools in the Settlement rose from 16 to 189 and the number of pupils measured by average attendance rate increased from 427 to 5,826. Following the success of Malay boys' schools, vernacular schools for Malay girls were first opened in 1885; there were 7 schools in 1886, and the number increased to 16 schools in 1892. The number of pupils by average attendance rate grew from 315 to 671.[9]

The British's attitude towards English-medium education for the Malays was manipulated carefully, though at that time such education seemed trivial to majority of Malays. In the late 19th century, the ongoing political instability in India made the government in the Settlements more alert. It was the lack of control in the development of English-medium education in India that formed the Indian intelligentsia who embraced western nationalism with enthusiasm. They played an important role in the nationalist struggle against the British rule. Colonial administrators regarded this as the biggest blunder in their rule in India and did not want it to be repeated in the Straits Settlements. As such, the lessons from India also reminded the British authorities to make every effort to restrain providing high-quality education for the indigenous peoples and prevent potential threats from the opposition of the new intellectual class. For instance, Lord Mayo, Viceroy of India from 1869 to 1872, argued against the provision of English-medium education for the Babus in Bengal: "the more education you give them, the more they will keep to themselves and make their

[9] "Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the system of Vernacular Education in the Colony" (The Isemonger Report, 1894) (Wong & Gwee 1980: 20-21).

increased knowledge a means of tyranny" (Loh 1975: 3). In the meantime, a Malay nobility of Raja Chulan, openly supported the British stand by arguing: "history taught us that under-education is not so serious an evil as over-education, especially education of a kind that does not provide the means to keep its young occupied" (Maauruf 1988: 57).

The statements of Frank Swettenham, a person who had a long imperial career in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, were perhaps the best illustration of this standpoint. He expressed his fierce opposition to the provision of English-medium education for the Malays: "the one danger to be guarded against is to teach English indiscriminately. It could not be well taught except in a few schools, and I do not think it is at all advisable to attempt to give to the children of an agricultural population an indifferent knowledge of a language that to all but the very few would only unfit them for the duties of life and make them discontented with anything like manual labour" (Stevenson 1975: 57). He added, "I am not in favour of extending the number of English schools except where there is some palpable desire that English should be taught." His later statement further identified the political reason for the provision of English-medium education: "Whilst we teach children to read and write and count in their own language, or in Malay, the *lingua franca* of the Peninsula and Archipelago, we are safe." (Stevenson 1975: 58)

That personal view later became the stance of the colonial government as F. Swettenham gradually took important positions in the colonial administration system. Beginning as a cadet in the Straits Settlements Civil Service, owing to mastering the Malay language, culture, and people, he became influential as an intermediary during the period of British intervention in the 1870s. From 1896 to 1901, he served as Resident-General of the Federated Malay States; and from 1901 until he retired in 1903, he served as High Commissioner of Federated Malay States and Governor of the Straits Settlements. More importantly, a preferable perspective of changes in the colonies, if any, would thoroughly state that changes had to take place by evolutionary processes, which would allow for the maintenance of continuity. Order and stability could only be

maintained by avoiding massive disruptions and fluctuations. The colonial education policy had to ensure this continuity. Excessive education, especially English education for the Malay masses, would be viewed as sharp breaks from their past.

Nevertheless, as the British Empire gradually expanded throughout the Malayan peninsula since the Pangkor Treaty 1874, the need for indigenous administrators working in subordinate posts of Civil Service increased. Would-be administrators were required to be able to use English. However, to avoid "teaching English indiscriminately," the British were very cautious in selecting the most appropriate candidates among the Malay community. The answer was the traditional elites. This choice was extremely judicious because it firstly served British colonial interests. The British expected to build up a class of modernized traditional rulers who would effectively cooperate with the colonial government. On the other hand, association with Malay traditional authorities would provide continuity with the past and also project to the future because British officials came and went, but the indigenous ones remained.

In this way, British influences persisted. Providing English education for and recruiting the Malay elites into the Civil Service, the British wanted to suborn them and make them believe they were an important part of the British administrative system. The British utilized the Malay traditional elites as an instrument to facilitate their colonial rule. The British tapped into traditional feudal relationships of Malay Muslims based on absolute allegiance and obedience to rulers (Swettenham 1942: 48). The British took advantage of those feudal relationships to control the Malay masses by cooperating with the Malay traditional elites. Under this approach, the British controlled the Malay indigenous communities by multiple educational means: an elitist English education for the Malay nobility to pave the way for them to participate in the British Administration; and a rudimentary primary education in vernacular Malay for the masses to maintain their statuses as agriculturalists and fishermen, without bringing them any social-economic changes. This educational policy both preserved the traditional feudal structure of the Malay society and ensured the maximum advantage

for the British (Lý Tường Vân 2019: 49-54).

That seems to be the reason Philip Loh argued that the stability of the Malay social order "required attention to both the apex and the base," and that it was "possible to trace the effects of this dual concern on the British approach to educational development in the Straits Settlements and Malay States from 1874 onwards" (Loh 1975: 7). Moreover, although the British had always maintained a pro-Malay policy, they were still unwilling to educate the Malay princes and the sons of aristocratic families. Among the Malays, even the upper class were not aware of the practical value of secular education, including English education (Andaya 1994: 227). Report of the English education system in the Colony for the year 1902 pointed out the following numbers of boys based on the principle of nationalities who attended the English Schools in 1901: of a total of 20,784 boys between the ages of 5 and 15: there were 242 Europeans; 976 Eurasians; 16,141 Chinese; and 3,422 Tamils. Although children of Malay traditional elites were privileged by the British, there were no attendance statistics. Consequently, the British encountered a problem—the Malays did not meet the requirements of even simple occupations in the British Civil Service (Wong & Hean 1980: 3).

On the whole, there was a "subtle change" in British educational policy, from "non-interference" (or "minimum interference," or "interference as little as possible") for most of the 19th century to interference in the 1890s, with the aim of "freezing the status quo" (Stevenson 1975: 55). This change was so subtle that it was hardly imperceptible. And that was why, again, the British deliberately continued to provide secondary education in the Malay vernacular.

Finally, during the last two decades of the 19th century, an effort, quite surprisingly, was made by the Department of Education in the Settlements in educational development for the Malays in a totally new direction. The Department contemplated converting the purely Vernacular schools into Anglo-Vernacular schools in 1884. Chelliah indicated that instruction activities were done in both languages, Malay and English. Ten years later, the experiment was

reported to have been successful. It was recommended to be experimented in other Malay schools also situated in important centers. However, the British colonists made strong objections based on, among others, the immense cost; the insufficient number of qualified teachers; the impractical results since knowledge of English made Malay students contemptuous to manual labor; or when deemed incapable of using this knowledge to earn a living, they would be declassed and malcontent (Chelliah 1960: 68-69). Once the masses were malcontent, they became threatening to colonial society. This experiment was only carried out at Kampong Glam School, the largest school in Singapore, and had to stop in the last years of the 19th century.

To conclude, one must admit that this new system of education, in terms of form, was an improvement over the traditional education system. However, in essence, it was still a rudimental educational model both in the vernacular and in English. At the turn of the 20th century, while the Malays were increasingly aware of the role of education in their social upward mobility opportunities, it appeared that not much had changed in the educational stance of British authorities since Sir George Maxwell stated his opinion in 1920: "the aim of Government is not to turn out a few well-educated youths, not yet numbers of less well-educated boys; rather it is to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fishermen or peasant a more intelligent fishermen or peasant than his father had been, and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his own lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him" (Wong & Gwee 1980: 2).

Ⅳ. Points of discussion: French Abolition versus English Maintenance

As we can see at different times in the 19th century, the first colonists were the generation that organized the transition from traditional schools to colonial schools. This task was difficult because it took place at a time of political and military instability. This stage could also be considered an experimental stage in which

the colonists showed different manners in dealing with traditional education systems and introducing the new education systems into colonies. In many cases, the motives for introducing a new education system determined colonists' attitudes, through either the adjustment or abolition of traditional education systems. While in French Cochinchina, there was broad consensus that Confucian education be abolished immediately, in British Straits Settlements, the colonists decided that a rudimental form of the Malay traditional education be maintained. Different attitudes of the French and the British colonizers towards the traditional education of the indigenous communities largely depended on their policies. However, the structures and features of traditional education systems of colonized peoples must also be considered. In addition, especially for the Malay Muslims, it is necessary to examine their ethnic and religious characteristics.

Vietnam in general, and Cochinchina in particular, were special cases in the French colonial Empire. Confucian education, prior to the French intervention, was a scholarly education system featuring the vibrant presence of a secular intelligentsia and the studious masses. Meanwhile, the French were very conscious of their "civilizing mission," a mission based on educational foundation together with the idea of cultural universalism and the program of assimilation. Therefore, to disseminate French thoughts and culture to the Vietnamese colony, education had to be the starting point. That was the first and foremost rationale behind the French's decision to abolish Vietnamese traditional education.

Nevertheless, assimilation of the Vietnamese proved to be forceful because, from the beginning, the Vietnamese intellectuals strongly resisted the French manner of brutal intervention into native culture and education (Mumford 1936: 98). The more strongly they were opposed, the more the French were determined to convert the Vietnamese into Frenchmen. The French even felt compelled to completely remove Vietnamese Confucian education system because Vietnamese culture was profoundly influenced by Chinese culture. In the same manner, because of the solid foundation of Confucian script and Nôm script, the French assimilators could not but eradicate these native scripts to spread

the French language in colonial primary schools. Ultimately, the success in educational reform might have met the political ambitions of the authorities in Metropolitan France. That, however, did not mean that the French colonists could export and impose the French educational model and the language on the colony. "The conquest of the spirit is the conquest of power and the edification in the colonial school is nothing other than the continuation of war by other means" (Trịnh Văn Thảo 1993: 170). The French did not win that war, in the end.

The British, unlike the French, did not visualize a so-called greater empire with one nationality made up of colonial peoples of various ethnical origins. They instead aimed for a league of nations united under the King, but each nation pursued an independent development path guided by principles of justice and freedom (Edwin 1941: 328-329). With such idea, British colonial policies, by and large, "do not require wooden uniformity" and were "not according to any doctrinaire or sealed pattern or system" but based upon the factual situation and upon the local conditions, needs and aspirations of the people of the Colony (Whitehead 1989: 268.). It even adapted them with the utmost "elasticity to local conditions" (Whitehead 2007: 161). Consequently, the British approach to colonial education policy was that education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations, and traditions of the various peoples (White 1996: 19). Moreover, a rational approach to education also emphasized that education should have taken in account each ethnic group, especially its role in colonial society. Therefore, in the context of "plural society" of the Straits Settlements where existed dividing lines between racial groups, the British were fully aware that they did not need to use a standardized education system to establish the relationship between different races.

Another aspect is that the Malay indigenous group was the master of their own land but also the poorest and most backward group had to bear the most rudimental education and enjoyed absolutely no presence of a secular intellectual class; whereas the Chinese and Indian were immigrant groups but became the backbone of the Straits Settlements' economy. These local facts were obviously beneficial to the colonists, so the British laissez-faire

attitude towards the education of ethnic groups was considered reasonable. There are many opinions that education in the Straits Settlements had been treated indifferently for decades of the 19th century, which in fact might have been regarded as the result of the British adaptive attitude. The real essence of the British policy of non-interference aimed at preserving the status quo as much as possible by maintaining education in the mother languages of the ethnic groups. From the 1870s onwards, the transformation of educational policy in the Straits Settlements was realized with the policy of interference basically aimed at freezing the status quo for the sake of its further consolidation. The policy of interference especially stressed the maintenance of a rudimentary model of Malay education that was restricted to four years of elementary education, while omitting secondary education, and focused on the three Rs (reading, writing, arithmetic) and basic agricultural and handicraft skills.

The success of this educational policy was highly appreciated by the British colonists since it was the least expensive policy. In addition, it contributed to social control and did restrain the development of greater political awareness among the Malay intelligentsia that would stimulate them to become radical nationalists, which was a phenomenon that many colonial countries, including French Vietnam, were later facing.

Ⅴ. Conclusion

Under the colonial regime, the metropolitan powers shaped and guided their educational policies, creating systems of colonial education that best served the purposes of the colonizers. Since those policies were products of colonialism, to some extent, the education systems shared certain common characteristics. One of the most noticeable similarities was that education in the colonial era was not only quantitatively inadequate; it also had qualitative defects. The metropolitan powers did not fully introduce formal education to their colonies. On the other hand, each educational system in each colony was the product of a specific power, either

the French or the British colonial empire. Therefore, there were fundamental differences between the educational policies of the French in Cochinchina and those of the British in the Straits Settlements.

The French colonial policies differed essentially from those of the British. The French might be classified as formulaic and dogmatic while the British were seen as more opportunistic and pragmatic. The French policies were largely direct, rigid, and violent; when forced to convert the principle of "assimilation" into the principle of "cooperation," the transformation was still fragmentary and full of contradictions. The British policies, on the other hand, were often indirect, flexible, livelier, especially always promoting "adaptability" in all circumstances in her colony.

France and Britain had two very distinct approaches to education in their colonies, depending primarily on how they have colonized their territories. It is factual that, with the approach to empire, French ideology aimed at "assimilation" and "Gallicization" through the imposition of the French education model. Therefore, the French education policy was determined to abolish Vietnamese traditional education. The British were somewhat opposite. They were supposed to have a commercial approach to colonization. The British therefore were interested in restraining the costs of their colonies, which means the costs of colonial education was as low as possible. Besides, if the situation in the Malay colony, including education, were fundamentally in conformity with British interests, it would be inexpensive to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, British educational policy, unlike the French, was not based on a particular philosophy in the style of "assimilation." Thus, the British did not preach a “civilizing mission” of education. For those reasons, the Malay traditional education system need not be abolished.

As for the colonies, in the closing decades of the 19th century, Vietnam and Malaya were different in ethnic, religious and cultural characteristics; their attitudes, as a consequence, were very different when facing colonialism. In particular, the dissimilarity in the features of Confucian education in Vietnam and Islamic religious

education in Malaya have also prescribed very separate ways of adapting to Western secular education. In general, both quickly revealed their limitations when faced with Western culture and civilization. Nevertheless, mainly because of the colonial policies of each empire, the French abolished Vietnamese traditional education, while the British maintained the traditional Malay education.

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