

WHO HOLDS THE MIRROR? THE CREATION OF AN IDEAL VIETNAMESE  
WOMAN, 1918-1934

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the conception of two different ideal archetypes for Vietnamese women during the late colonial period, from 1918 until 1934. I use women's newspapers (primarily *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*) and other contemporary literature to first trace the creation of "historical" Vietnamese heroines in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Second, I examine the creation of a cosmopolitan international woman who demonstrated Vietnamese women's encounters with the broad concept of "modernity." With these two archetypes, writers targeted women and communicated differing idealized feminine traits to emulate. With Vietnamese heroines, advocates wished to promote an invented tradition that emphasized women's duty to the potential nation of Vietnam and, further, pushed women to commemorate women such as the Trung Sisters or Lady Triệu. Within the context of the cosmopolitan New Woman, Vietnamese writers looked to international news to find exceptional women whom Vietnamese readers should emulate. Importantly, Vietnamese women came to endorse both of these ideals through their own writing. The formation of two differing feminine models demonstrates Vietnamese women's engagement with historical time and global space to promote what they perceived as ideal feminine traits. Additionally, these two models show a growing Vietnamese engagement with global trends and international news, as well as rising nationalism within Indochina.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1934, a young journalist who wrote for *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* (Women's News), named Nguyễn Thị Kiêm, set out on a speaking tour of central and northern Vietnam. Kiêm ended in Hanoi, addressing a large group of people at AFIMA.<sup>1</sup> Though Kiêm paid heed to Vietnamese cultural norms of the day and brought her father along for her tour, the wider community of the Vietnamese press, and men in particular, soundly criticized her for this display of independence and “immoral” conduct.<sup>2</sup> In a show of solidarity, the head publisher of the newspaper Kiêm wrote for, Nguyễn Đức Nhuận, wrote an article in Kiêm's defense.<sup>3</sup> Nguyễn Đức Nhuận addressed Kiêm's critics, stated that she was representing the newspaper on said speaking tour, and went so far as to declare, “we can criticize a woman's private life as long as we also criticize men.”<sup>4</sup>

In his book outlining Vietnamese intellectual culture of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, David Marr identifies Nguyễn Thị Kiêm (as well as a select few women such as Phan Thị Bạch Vân), as part of a group of “young radicals” who seized Nguyễn Đức Nhuận's newspaper and took the periodical in an intellectual and creative direction that Nhuận would not have. This forced Nhuận to “go along” with their radical interests.<sup>5</sup> Kiêm's colleague, Phan Thị Bạch Vân, outside of writing for *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, wrote novels and owned a publishing house specializing in literature written by women. French authorities closed her

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<sup>1</sup> AFIMA - also known as Association pour la Formation Intellectuel et Morale des Annamites or Hội Khai Trí Tiến Đức in Vietnamese. From: Mme Nguyễn Đức Nhuận, “Con gái đi xa,” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* October 1934, 9.

<sup>2</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 214.

<sup>3</sup> David Marr describes Madame Nguyễn Đức Nhuận as “the primary organizer and supervisor” of *PNTV* who was “backed financially by her husband, a major Saigon importer, wholesaler, and retailer.” From: David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 221.

<sup>4</sup> Mme Nguyễn Đức Nhuận, “Con gái đi xa,” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* October 1934, 9.

<sup>5</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 224.

publishing house in 1930 for unknown reasons.<sup>6</sup> Though Marr's assertion that Nhuận's paper had been overtaken by insubordinate young women may have some merit, it is more likely that Nhuận simply agreed with their ideas. It is unlikely that Nhuận would have written that article in Kiêm's defense if she had not, in some way, sympathized with Kiêm's articles discussing women's rights and leftist politics.<sup>7</sup> Nhuận had, after all, some control over her own newspaper as the lead publisher.

What this anecdote first and foremost represents is that there existed a small but active community of female Vietnamese writers during the late colonial period. Though the women within this community did not agree on many issues, they were not as fragmented as some scholars have believed, but often supportive of one another within and outside of print. Although, their numbers were small enough that they did not completely control *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* (men wrote for and were present on the newspaper's editorial board), but there is proof of their existence within a number of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*'s articles.

The women within this community were frequently connected to one another and to the other newspapers operating at the same time period, in urban centers like Saigon and Hanoi. Some women, such as Nguyễn Thị Kiêm, wrote for multiple newspapers. Furthermore, they were connected beyond the confines of French Indochina, to communities of women around the world. This project will discuss these connections in more depth in later sections. To address Marr's assumption that *PNTV*'s radicalism came as a result of a takeover by the young women, *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* did print some rather nationalist articles before and after Kiêm and Vân began to contribute; yet, for the most part, the paper outlined topics that would have been of interest to

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<sup>6</sup> "Nữ lưu thư quân bị đóng cửa: Cô Phan Thị Bạch Vân bị giải ra tòa án" *Hà Thành ngộ báo* no. 753 (February 12, 1930).

<sup>7</sup> Judith Henchy, "Vietnamese New Women and the Fashioning of Modernity," in Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee eds. *France and "Indochina" Cultural Representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 122.

upper and middle class urban dwellers of Indochina during the late colonial period. More specifically, the paper discussed aspects of modern urban life that would have interested and targeted women, such as recipes, children's health, and news about exceptional women around the world.

This attention towards women's interest may seem self-explanatory, as the paper obviously included women in its title; however, this was a significant occurrence. Beginning with Suong Nguyệt Anh's publication of *Nữ Giới Chung* (Women's Bell) in 1918, and continuing into the 1920s, women began to view themselves as a separate social group with common wants, needs, and responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> Men also began to see women as a separate social group and started to market a variety of health, beauty, and household products to potential female customers. This phenomenon resulted in a number of periodicals, journals, and sections of newspapers dedicated to the interests of women. It also resulted in, and was facilitated by, the discussion of the "Woman's Question," or the place of women in the wider cultural sphere, by men in various forms of printed media.<sup>9</sup> Little scholarship exists discussing the advent of Vietnamese female group interest and consciousness, which undoubtedly helped shape the intellectual mood throughout the 1920s and 30s. Namely, intellectual and consumer interest in women helped create a feminine ideal which did not entirely owe its existence to Vietnamese men, though men were responsible for a significant amount of input. Female journalists helped shaped a model Vietnamese woman who, at times, appeared significantly different from the submissive feminine ideals pushed by male intellectuals and writers.

This thesis deals with the repercussions of this noteworthy phenomenon, specifically the ways in which the small population of women involved in Vietnamese print culture engaged with

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<sup>8</sup> David Marr, "The 1920s Women's Rights Debates in Vietnam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 35 (1976): 371.

<sup>9</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 91.

their newly perceived wants, needs, and responsibilities. I will argue that, between 1918 and 1935, female members of the Vietnamese intelligentsia began to view themselves and other women as part of a distinct and special category, deserving of separate support and attention. This shift in perspective led to the creation of an “ideal” Vietnamese woman who was intimately tied to Vietnamese history, French Indochina, and other women around the world. More specifically, I will be examining a growing phenomenon in which journalists wished to show their readers “mirrors” (*guong*) or “lessons” (*bài học*) through other women that communicated either a “historical” or cosmopolitan ideal. Many different women were subject to becoming mirrors and lessons worthy of a newspaper’s female readership; however, a common theme was an interest in exceptional and singular women who proved themselves worthy of national and international attention.

## **Theoretical Context**

As Benedict Anderson has argued, booming print culture, among other factors, led to a host of strangers feeling connected and unified as part of a national community.<sup>10</sup> This certainly occurred in the Vietnamese context during the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Christopher Goscha has taken Anderson’s concept further and argued that a number of prominent Vietnamese intellectuals saw themselves as “Indochinese,” rather than strictly “Vietnamese” during the colonial period, due to the fact that the French colonial administration pushed them “to think in Indochinese ways,” thus forming connections between Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchine, Laos, and Cambodia that would not otherwise exist.<sup>11</sup> There existed comparable phenomena for Vietnamese women, both within the urban publishing communities to which they belonged and outside of them. Namely, they came

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<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 13.



to regard themselves as connected to women who were not Vietnamese, thus superseding a wholly nationalist outlook. In this thesis, what I would specifically like to propose is an imagined community of women, connected by time and space. By time, I am referring to recent, 20<sup>th</sup>-century perceptions of Vietnamese history and new uses for female historical figures that came about in the late colonial period. By space, I refer to the creation of an ideal Vietnamese woman who possessed aspects of famous and influential women from around the world; she was an amalgam of characteristics, at the same time culturally familiar and foreign, which her creators had taken from a host of historical and contemporary women.

Vietnamese women who published articles in newspapers and periodicals, as well as their own novels and short stories, increasingly tied themselves to idealized women in both historical and global contexts. Vietnamese women began positioning themselves within a created tradition of female excellence, tying themselves to historical heroines and modern “new women” in places like France and the United States. This was a geographic and intellectual break with provinciality, going beyond a new sphere of Vietnamese people perceiving themselves as part of a larger assemblage. This was due to, among other factors, increasing use and modernization of transport services and infrastructure, as well as the consumption of international texts in translation.<sup>12</sup> In a historical context, Vietnamese women in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century responded to reimagined and invented pre-colonial traditions of martial women. At first, women were exposed to the famous Phan Bội Châu’s reimagining of women like the Trung Sisters or Lady Triệu.<sup>13</sup> New emphases were thrust upon historical women and emphasized their devotion to the concept

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 46-7.

<sup>13</sup> Such as in his play, *Tuồng Trưng Nữ Vương* (Drama of the Trung Queen). Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hemery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein, with Eric Jennings, Nora Taylor, and Noémi Tousignant (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 238. Sarah Womack, “The Remakings of a Legend: Women and Patriotism in the Hagiography of the Trung Sisters,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 9 (1995): 35.

of “Vietnam” and their selfless acts in the name of family and country. In a global context, Vietnamese journalists looked to other women in the metropole, India, China, Japan, the United States, and other European countries. Through news articles about these foreign women, Vietnamese female journalists constructed an ideal woman who was cosmopolitan, well traveled, educated, and charitable.

Ann Laura Stoler has discussed “animated circuits of movement” in the Asia-Pacific region and between metropolises, which connected the colonial subjects of Empire in intriguing ways.<sup>14</sup> Stoler’s phrase was primarily meant in terms of physical methods of movement; however, very few Vietnamese traveled outside of Indochina during the colonial period. For example, Peter Zinoman places the number of Vietnamese students who traveled to attend school in France at only three thousand during the interwar years.<sup>15</sup> This number would be even smaller for women, thus physical movement did not necessarily apply to them. This does not mean that they did not engage in *any* forms of movement. For the purposes of this thesis, I will instead attempt to analyze intellectual circuits of movement that led female writers in new and interconnected directions. While women outside of Indochina may not have felt connected to the Vietnamese women writing about and profiling them (nor the Vietnamese readers learning about them), the female journalists discussed within this thesis certainly made attempts to engage in dialogue and mutually-beneficial relationships with foreign women. First and foremost, however, these journalists wished to join, create, and emulate ideal women within Indochina and specifically the three *kỳ* of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina.

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<sup>14</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies” *The Journal of American History* 88 (2001): 848.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Zinoman, “Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vũ Trọng Phụng’s Foreign Literary Engagements” in *Traveling Nation Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia* eds. Caroline Hau and Kasian Tejapira (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 127.

Much of this community of women, particularly its overall image and perception, owed itself to the international popularity of the New Woman in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries. The phenomenon of the New Woman was first given a name by Sarah Grand in the *North American Review* in 1894, a world away from Indochina.<sup>16</sup> In the late 19th and early 20th-century, the ideal woman in America was the Gibson Girl. The Gibson Girl was “single, white, affluent, politically and socially progressive, highly educated, and athletic.”<sup>17</sup> She was neither as intimidatingly political as a suffragette nor as freewheeling as the 1920s flapper. There are many similarities between the American Gibson Girl and the Vietnamese ideal “modern” woman: specifically, her affluence, progressive outlooks, and education. There were some aspects of athleticism to the Vietnamese modern woman, which will be addressed later. However, the ideal Vietnamese woman was not often portrayed as single (which, in part, barred her from comparison to the young and unmarried Modern Girl); rather, she was married to an equally affluent, modern, and educated husband with whom she could travel by car or listen to popular music. Though there existed some differences between the Gibson Girl and the ideal Vietnamese woman, these differences can be assuaged with some comparison to the contemporary New Woman in China.

During the Republican era, many Chinese women centered themselves around working in the public sphere and organizing around a variety of social and political issues.<sup>18</sup> In this context, affluent and socially conscious Chinese women strove to insert themselves into issues that they considered important. The women involved in organizing around these issues came to be seen through an idealized lens, a lens that derived some inspiration from foreign women. For

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<sup>16</sup> Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth A. Littell-Lamb, “Going Public: the YMCA, ‘New’ Women, and Social Feminism in Republican China” (PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2002), 12.

example, Madame Roland of the French Revolution became a late Qing icon; she was portrayed “in a range of roles, from a helpful mate to her husband to a powerful political activist in her own right.”<sup>19</sup> This example demonstrates a marked similarity to heroines portrayed in Vietnam. Vietnamese women, for their part, preferred Joan of Arc or the French Revolution’s Marianne, most likely due to French diffusion of their heroines on Indochina’s currency, colonial seals, and monuments.<sup>20</sup> There existed intriguing similarities between American and European New Women and their counterparts in places such as China and Vietnam. Yet cultural differences allowed individuals in China and Vietnam to twist and alter certain aspects of the ideal modern woman. This means that the New Woman was not a monolith nor perceived in the same way throughout the world. Yet, the global presence of the New Woman phenomenon is essential in discussing Vietnamese women’s interpretations.

### **Vietnamese urban and print culture**

The female journalists and writers who decided to participate in the Vietnamese public sphere represented a very small proportion of women. They almost always lived in major city centers, such as Saigon or Hanoi, were literate, and could often communicate in both French and *quốc ngữ*, the romanized method of writing Vietnamese. Their education levels (usually not any further than the high school level) and places of residence meant that they often came from wealthy families who could afford to send them to school. The complexity and far-reaching nature of *PNTV*, along with those involved in its production, created a semi-microcosm of the Vietnamese intelligentsia during the interwar years. Many “celebrity” and guest writers appeared

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<sup>19</sup> Ying Hu, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Penny Edwards, “‘Propagender’: Marianne, Joan of Arc and the Export of French Gender Ideology to Colonial Cambodia (1863-1954),” in *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* ed. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), 118.

in the periodical's pages during its years of production. For example, the famous intellectual Phan Khôi was the "star essayist" during *PNTV*'s early years.<sup>21</sup> Further, the women who pursued journalism were usually married to men involved in publishing and the wider intellectual culture of the day. This was true of Nguyễn Đức Nhuận, *PNTV*'s publisher, who did not always work as the head of the popular women's newspaper. Before the advent and creation of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* in 1929, Nhuận was posting advertisements for design commissions from her store in Suong Nguyệt Anh's newspaper, *Nữ Giới Chung* (Women's Bell), the aforementioned first women's newspaper in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> It appears that after her store in Saigon failed, she began what became one of the most popular periodicals in Vietnam, read widely by men and women alike.<sup>23</sup> It is unknown what exactly Nhuận did between the ten years that separated the end of *Nữ Giới Chung* and the advent of *PNTV*. Perhaps Nhuận had derived inspiration for *PNTV* from Anh's work publishing *Nữ Giới Chung*. This demonstrates, in part, a little of the interconnected nature of publishing newspapers and the *bourgeois* class in Saigon at this time. Newspaper publishing, the emerging Vietnamese affluent urban classes, and the colonial city were all connected and created a culture that nourished the intelligentsia's writing and exchange of new ideas. Without this culture, the Vietnamese women described in this thesis would not have created and published the works that connected them to historical and international communities.

The Vietnamese middle class began to grow exponentially after World War I, eventually resulting in the expansion of opportunities for Vietnamese civil servants, professionals, and other employees working in colonial cities.<sup>24</sup> The members of this middle class were eager to send

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<sup>21</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 222.

<sup>22</sup> "Tiệm Họa Chơn Dung" Advertisement in *Nữ Giới Chung* no. 1 (January 1918).

<sup>23</sup> David Marr, "The 1920s Women's Rights Debates in Vietnam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 35 (1976): 372.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Hémerly and Pierre Brocheaux, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 213, 214.

their children to French schools, so that they would acquire “French intellectual culture.”<sup>25</sup> It is true that many within the upper levels of the Vietnamese middle classes wished to emulate French cultural practices and even become French citizens. Eric Jennings raises the idea that Vietnamese mimicry of French practices was coerced, citing a French citizenship questionnaire that asked if potential citizens traveled to the sea or mountain to prove their “Frenchness.”<sup>26</sup> Furthering this point is the fact that during the 1920s, Governor-General Albert Sarraut and André Lochard aggressively slated and promoted “priority” tourist sites such as Angkor’s ruins, the tombs of Hue, Hạ Lộng Bay, and Tonkin’s highlands.<sup>27</sup> However, primary literature shows that the Vietnamese middle classes were themselves enthusiastically adopting a select combination of French practices ranging from sports to travel. If families could afford these luxuries, they did not hesitate to participate. However, this did not mean that Vietnamese professionals were given enhanced treatment equal to their educational and social status; French counterparts or French of lower rank did not respect Vietnamese “professional competence.”<sup>28</sup> This resulted in resentment that came to a head in discussions during the 1920s and beyond. The proximity of French and Vietnamese in colonial cities, as well as the all-encompassing imposition of French culture, led to a mixture of umbrage and respect towards the metropole that made its way into the political journalism of the day.

Essential to the creation and maintenance of the Vietnamese middle class, the colonial city also contributed to the expansion of Vietnamese social classes, designations, and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 167.

<sup>27</sup> Aline Demay, *Tourism and Colonization in Indochina (1898-1939)* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 117.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Hémerly and Pierre Brocheaux, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 216.

occupations.<sup>29</sup> Many Vietnamese men and women saw the colonial city as a place to escape their elders; women specifically began to join voluntary and philanthropic associations in order to both exert a sense of independence and find a suitable way to occupy their time.<sup>30</sup> Many of the women involved in philanthropy and charities were also involved in political journalism, such as the women writing for *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*. Within the newspaper they discussed their own, as well as other women's, work within orphanages and poor houses. Urban areas, such as Saigon, contributed to changing views of acceptability and made women's expanding roles in Vietnamese culture easier to achieve. The attainment of a physical space wherein Vietnamese youth could express their frustrations, newfound passions, and discoveries was essential for the development of the intelligentsia. The politically aware and educated women who commonly worked as journalists in these cities would not have done so were it not for the colonial project's contribution to "modern" urban areas in Vietnam.

As Philippe Peycam has noted, there was a highly political and active newspaper culture in Saigon during the late colonial period, creating the *làng báo chí* (newspaper village) to which journalists and intellectuals belonged.<sup>31</sup> This newspaper village was more than the physical dissemination of newspapers and periodicals, but "a new social urban consciousness."<sup>32</sup> The creation of this newspaper village was, on the surface, due to French colonial authorities' opening of a space for public debate through newspapers, notably Governor-General Albert Sarraut during World War I.<sup>33</sup> This village showed Vietnamese engagement with the idea of modernity, in a variety of ways, spanning from discussions of Social Darwinism (among other

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<sup>29</sup> Alexander Woodside, "The Development of Social Organizations in Vietnamese Cities in the Late Colonial Period," *Pacific Affairs* 44 (1971): 39.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>31</sup> Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 67.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

intellectual topics imported from Europe) to debates over fashion and female deportment.<sup>34</sup> As Peter Zinoman has described, these engagements with global modernity were primarily representative of “filtered access” to the metropole’s intellectual culture; yet, the filtration and transformation of global modernity held profound interest for the Vietnamese intelligentsia.<sup>35</sup> It also profoundly changed the ways in which Vietnamese intellectuals communicated and exchanged new ideas. Vietnamese and French language newspapers became a cultural center to which readers looked for new vocabulary, domestic and international news, and emerging trends in Vietnamese literature.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, newspapers were where many future Vietnamese authors began their first forays into writing, as the newspapers provided a semblance of stable income and eventual name recognition.<sup>37</sup> This was true for both men and women writers.

Additionally, the colonial project and experience shifted traditional social relationships and opened the door for new forms of social consciousness. Shifts in sociocultural modes of thinking were met with varying degrees of both resistance and approval among individual Vietnamese commentators.<sup>38</sup> The fact that Confucianism did not cease to act as the dominant moral framework led to the populace twisting and expanding traditional moral tenets to include women. For example, by the 1920s and 30s, nationalists and intellectuals increasingly called for women to read for moral and societal reasons.<sup>39</sup> Calls for self-improvement were usually

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<sup>34</sup> Martina Thucnhi Nguyen, “Wearing Modernity: Lemur Nguyễn Cát Tường, Fashion, and the ‘Origins’ of the Vietnamese National Costume,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11 (2016): 77.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Zinoman, “Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vũ Trọng Phụng’s Foreign Literary Engagements” in *Traveling Nation Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia* eds. Caroline Hau and Kasian Tejapira (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 127.

<sup>36</sup> Notably connected to changes in literature was the journal *Phong Hóa*, published by *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self Reliance Literary Group).

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Hémery and Pierre Brocheaux, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 213, 235.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 77.

<sup>39</sup> Shawn McHale, “Printing and Power: Vietnamese Debates over Women’s Place in Society, 1918-1934” in K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore (eds.), *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 182.



couched in nationalist terms, urging women to foster their own intelligence and eventually the intelligence of their children, thus strengthening the nation.<sup>40</sup> The focus on strengthening and shifting moral tenets facilitated a space wherein female members of the middle and upper classes could participate in this newspaper culture, though it was primarily with the intent of national salvation through an educated populace. Moreover, women did not participate completely freely. As Shawn McHale has argued, the public sphere in Vietnam was “gendered” in this time period, where women were often not welcome and subjected to the negative opinions of their male counterparts.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, wives and daughters of the upper classes managed to participate in the intellectual culture of the day through their own determination to publish and create spaces for other women.

Very important to the new middle and upper classes was the concept of “modernity” and its ties to French culture. Social and intellectual upheavals within the colonial era lead to the idea of “modernity” becoming a catch-all phrase, encompassing progress, social advancement, health, and beauty. Urban, middle class dwellers used “superficial” modernity in its “talismanic form” in order to break from a traditional, provincial past.<sup>42</sup> In this way, Vietnamese consumers engaged with modernity as a performance through the buying of products that promised improved lives. Newspapers and periodicals like *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* aided in this endeavor, with advertisements encouraging consumers to partake in the performance of modernity, using language that emphasized the newness and improved aspects of the products sold.<sup>43</sup> Many of these

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<sup>40</sup> Christina Firpo, *The Uprooted: Race, Children, and Imperialism in French Indochina, 1890-1980* (University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 67.

<sup>41</sup> Shawn McHale, “Printing and Power: Vietnamese Debates over Women’s Place in Society, 1918-1934” in K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore (eds.), *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 179.

<sup>42</sup> George Dutton, “Advertising, Modernity, and Consumer Culture in Colonial Vietnam” chapter 2 in *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam*, ed. Van Nguyen-Marshall et al., Asia Research Institute Springer Asia Series (Singapore: Springer, 2012), 28.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

advertisements showcased products that were also sold in the metropole, such as Coty perfumes and Béka Records. Not only did advertisements emphasize the beauty of items, they also pointed to functionality [Fig. 1-1 and 1-2]. This can be seen in advertisements for raincoats and tennis hats in the pages of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*. Through these products, consumers could tout aesthetically pleasing clothing and merchandise with an added aspect of modern functionality. This functionality cited some aspects of science that were becoming more and more popular among Vietnamese readers.<sup>44</sup>

Newspapers latched onto the popularity of science and the newfound trust in products coded in scientific language. For example, newspapers such as *PNTV* and *Nữ Giới Chung* devoted entire sections and articles to teaching their readers about scientific concepts, such as different sections of the human brain [Fig. 1-3 and 1-4]. *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, in particular, had a section regarding the best and most modern methods of rearing children, even adding the expertise of a doctor in some instances.<sup>45</sup> In many ways, this apt attention to modernity was another method which the Vietnamese used in order to come to terms with colonialism and, additionally, simply enjoy the novelty of new technologies. In effect, performative modernity marked a certain subset of Vietnamese as wealthy or stylish enough to buy Western food, clothing, and medicine. This is similar to how Vietnamese also used modern roadways and transportation, such as cars, to ease and engage with the tensions of colonialism, putting those who could afford personal vehicles at a similar social level as their French counterparts.<sup>46</sup>

Though some Vietnamese writers mocked what they perceived as halfhearted or insincere

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<sup>44</sup> The popularity of and respect for scientific discoveries stemmed from knowledge of Social Darwinism. David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 91.

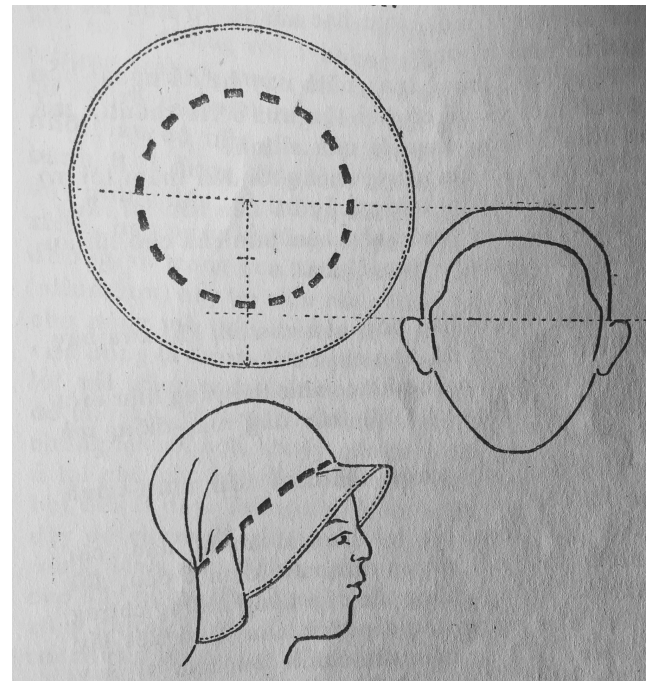
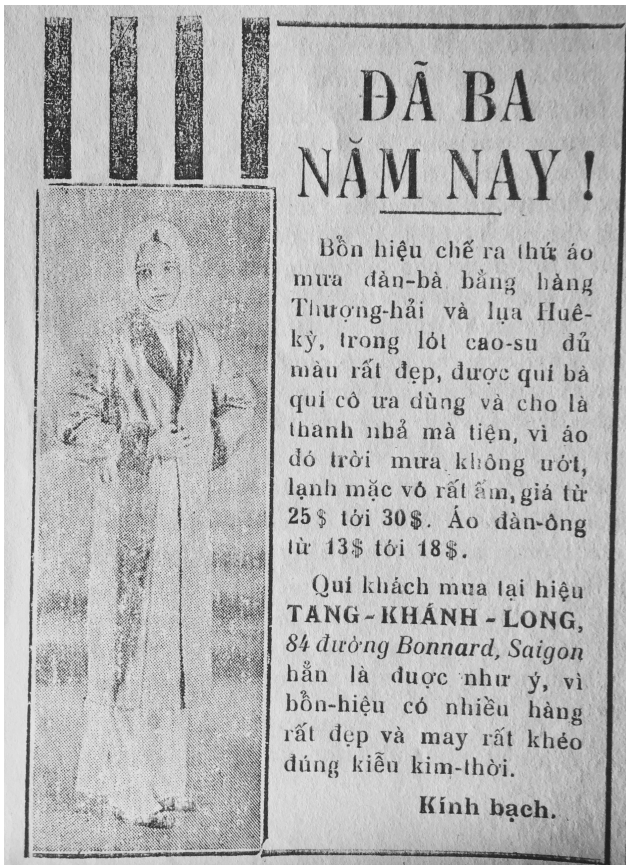
<sup>45</sup> “Nói về sự mùa” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 40 (February 20, 1930). “Cách uống sữa” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 37 (January 16, 1930). “Bệnh nên mùa, bệnh trái trời” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 42 (March 6, 1930).

<sup>46</sup> David Del Testa, “Automobiles and Anomie in French Indochina,” chapter in *France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations* ed. Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 64.

performances of modernity, the vast majority of those with the means to flout their *bourgeois* lifestyle did so.<sup>47</sup> This concept of modernity, along with its performance, touched all residents within the colonial city, especially Saigon.

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<sup>47</sup> Notably the author, Vũ Trọng Phụng. Peter Zinoman, Introduction to: Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Dumb Luck*, ed. Peter Zinoman, trans. Nguyen Nguyet et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

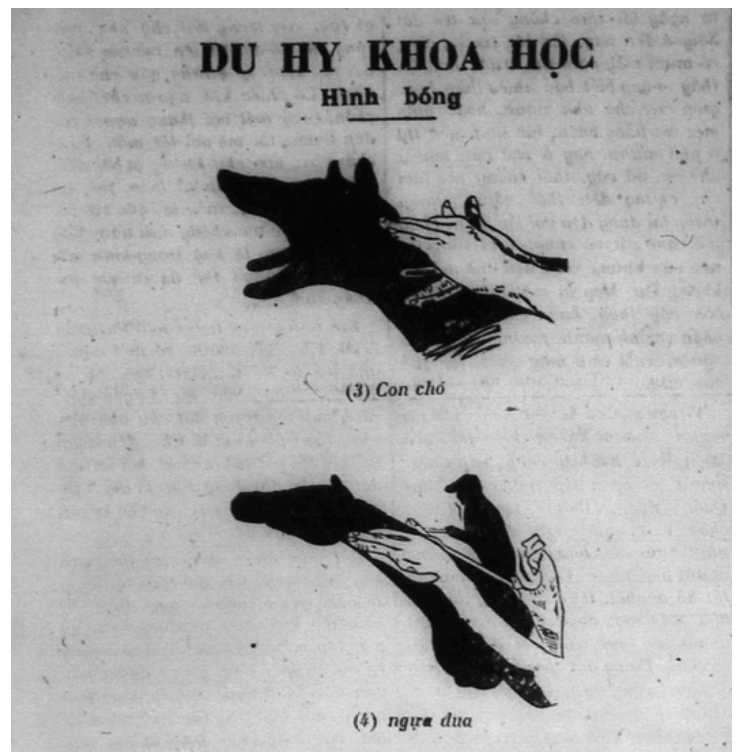
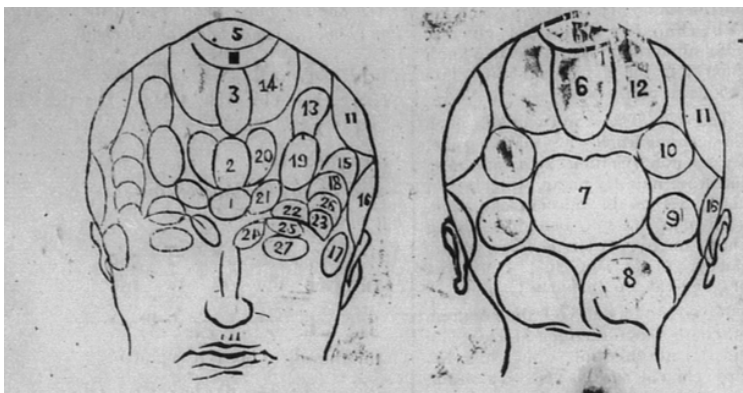


**Figures 1-1 and 1-2 (above)**

The aesthetics of the modern Vietnamese lady consisted of function as well as style. The left figure is an advertisement for a raincoat from *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*. The right figure is a representation of a hat suitable for playing tennis, which was a popular pastime for affluent Vietnamese women.

**Figures 1-3 and 1-4 (below)**

Scientific know-how became important for Vietnamese readers, prompting newspapers to include lessons in scientific principles. The left figure is a representation of different sections of the brain. The right figure is from a series of "Scientific Amusements" that taught readers how to make various shadow puppets and shows a more playful outlook on the benefits of scientific knowledge. Both are from *Nữ Giới Chung*.



## Women in the Newspaper Village

Colonial education aided Vietnamese women's entrance into the newspaper village. Specifically, women's entrance owed itself to the modern development of *quốc ngữ*, "which under the French became the national writing system of the Vietnamese."<sup>48</sup> European Catholic missionaries developed *quốc ngữ* in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century as a transcription of Vietnamese into Latin characters.<sup>49</sup> Importantly, *quốc ngữ* came into more widespread use due to its promotion by Vietnamese nationalists such as Phan Văn Trường after World War I, when it came to be seen as "a tool for literary creation and scientific teaching."<sup>50</sup> By the 1920s, primary education in Vietnam favored the use and teaching of *quốc ngữ*, with French being taught in higher levels of education.<sup>51</sup> Most importantly for young women, the French colonial administration saw fit to educate Vietnamese girls as part of the *mission civilisatrice*. Before colonial rule, Vietnamese women were taught at home, if at all, about issues ranging from domestic chores to the Confucian Three Submissions and Four Virtues.<sup>52</sup> Few became literate and fewer were able to write their thoughts and experiences down. During the colonial period, the ultimate French goal was to make Vietnamese women appropriate counterparts to their Vietnamese husbands. This was further supported by the French belief that Vietnamese women were more hesitant to accept French rule than Vietnamese men.<sup>53</sup> The increasing number of women enrolling in Franco-Vietnamese schools meant that more and more literate women could participate in the public forum facilitated through the newspaper boom of the 1920s.

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<sup>48</sup> Daniel Hémerly and Pierre Brocheaux, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 225.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>51</sup> Micheline Lessard, "Tradition for Rebellion: Vietnamese Students and Teachers and Anticolonial Resistance, 1888-1931" (PhD Diss., Cornell University, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 91.

<sup>53</sup> Micheline Lessard, "The Colony Writ Small: Vietnamese Women and Political Activism in Colonial Schools During the 1920s," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 18 (2007): 8.

Female journalists were contributors to the standardization and increased use and popularity of *quốc ngữ*. Today's speakers and readers of Vietnamese would have difficulty understanding the text from newspapers of the 1920s and 30s, especially newspapers published in Saigon such as *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*. This is due to a combination of the Southern dialect's differences in spoken pronunciation, leading to spelling differentiations, among standardization issues, and writers' use of Sino-Vietnamese words. As time went on, these issues receded and became singular to the time period that witnessed the beginnings of the modern Vietnamese press. Additionally, the use of *quốc ngữ* in print meant that newspapers in Vietnamese were subject to further scrutiny and censorship than their French-language counterparts, based on an 1898 colonial decree.<sup>54</sup> This was important for women involved in newspaper publishing, as women's periodicals were very often printed in Vietnamese rather than French.

Women present in the public sphere encountered rampant discussions of the “Women's Question” in a multitude of periodicals. According to David Marr, women and their place in society became “a focal point around which other issues often revolved” during the interwar period.<sup>55</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai has stated that this focus around women was a way to discuss broader issues, such as frustrations with the colonial administration, in a format that could get past French censors.<sup>56</sup> This is more than possible, due to common literary traditions of using stories to discuss the human condition; however, the women discussed within this project more likely wrote articles such as “Activities of Modern Women” with their own interests in mind, rather than simply using the category of “women” as a method of discussing the potential Vietnamese

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<sup>54</sup> Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 72.

<sup>55</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 191.

<sup>56</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 91.

nation.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, male pundits who criticized Nguyễn Thị Kiêm for her speaking tour were not criticizing her choices in order to make an embedded statement about the strained relationship between the Vietnamese and French. These men were simply uncomfortable with a woman traveling and discussing her written work in public. This idea of implicit statements does, however, find some merit within discussions of female fashion and the precursor to the modern *áo dài* in the pages of *Phong Hóa*.

As previously discussed, modern consumer culture impacted much of the globe, changing the aesthetics of modernity and the ways in which women interacted with clothing and newly purchasable items. Though not exclusive to Vietnam, the potential for a Vietnamese nation, patriotic rhetoric, and the perceived central position of women in the national imagining combined to produce the idea of a national female costume. The debates over how this costume should appear took place in the newspaper village, with the origins for the modern *áo dài* occurring in *Phong Hóa*, the journal written by members of *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self Reliance Literary Group).<sup>58</sup> These debates further reflected contemporary anxieties about a blurring of sexually demarcated realms of public and private, which the female journalists working for *PNTV* were accomplishing daily. However, not all female journalists agreed with the merits in use of modern aesthetics. Nguyễn Thị Kiêm, *PNTV*'s journalist from the beginning of this section, was said to have written an article about a Gia Định beauty pageant in *Dân Quyền* (Human Rights), published by the prominent intellectual, Nguyễn An Ninh. In the article, Kiêm questioned the “place of beauty in the political arena” and commented upon the differences in

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<sup>57</sup> “Sự Hoạt-Động Của Một Số Tân-Nữ-Lưu,” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* September 1933, 1.

<sup>58</sup> The designer credited with the precursor to the modern *áo dài* is “Lemur” Nguyễn Cát Tường. The members of *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* and publishers of *Phong Hóa* were Nhất Linh, Khái Hưng, Thạch Lam, Tú Mỡ, and Hoàng Đạo. Martina Thuchhi Nguyen, “Wearing Modernity: Lemur Nguyễn Cát Tường, Fashion, and the ‘Origins’ of the Vietnamese National Costume,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11 (2016): 77.

meaning between physical and moral beauty.<sup>59</sup> This disregard for feminine engagement with beauty shows the diversity and complexity of opinions inherent to the group of women operating within the newspaper village. While some may have enthusiastically engaged with modern clothing and cosmetics, paying avid attention to advertisements for Coty perfume and Western dress designers within newspapers, others found the idea frivolous. Also worth noting is that the publishers and writers within *Phong Hóa* were male; though women ostensibly engaged with men's ideals of feminine beauty, Nguyễn Thị Kiêm's outlook shows that there was some discrepancy between male and female perspectives.

These discrepancies show how imperative it is for scholarly studies to showcase both male and female perspectives concerning profound socio-cultural changes, much like the changes that occurred in Indochina after World War I. Though many studies have prioritized male perspectives when discussing the changes of the late colonial period, as previously stated, this project will also prioritize material written by Vietnamese women.

## **Sources & Methods**

This thesis primarily makes use of newspaper articles and other literature produced for women during the late colonial period, specifically from the first appearance of women's magazines with the production of *Nữ Giới Chung* in 1918 until the closure of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* in 1934. I have endeavored to find as much contemporary literature produced by women as possible. Though it will include some articles, short stories, and plays written by men, about women, this will be for comparative purposes only. There exist many analyses about women during this time period, all of which heavily include contemporary male perspectives. There was a large amount of literature written by Vietnamese men in the 1920s and 30s; however, the lack

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<sup>59</sup> Judith Henchy, "Vietnamese New Women and the Fashioning of Modernity," in Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee eds. *France and "Indochina" Cultural Representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 121.



of women's perspectives from the same time period is striking. This is because, though women did not publish (nor were given the opportunity to publish) widely-read literature at the same rate as Vietnamese men, there existed a handful of Vietnamese women involved in the writing and publishing of printed media during this time period.<sup>60</sup> Analysis of their writings, as well as their notions of the ideal Vietnamese woman, reveals intriguing insights and differences apart from their male counterparts. These insights and differences are worthy of study. Furthermore, I believe that a close look at individual women's writing and contributions will help us better understand real "women" rather than the broad classification of "woman" or "women's issues" often studied.<sup>61</sup>

The available sources vastly favor newspapers, as a larger volume of women wrote short articles and opinion pieces for periodicals rather than publish longer works. Further, the newspapers are, for the most part, from the southern city of Saigon. This is due to the fact that the press enjoyed much less censorship in the southern port city than the more directly ruled *kỳ* of Annam and Tonkin.<sup>62</sup> There is also a dearth of novels and short stories written by Vietnamese women from this time period, though they did exist. Many of the women discussed within this thesis engaged in both personal, creative pursuits and journalism, such as Phan Thị Bạch Vân and Nguyễn Thị Kiêm, whose pen name was also "Manh Manh."<sup>63</sup> The majority of these women wrote for *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, specifically. The women who worked for and created *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* were not the only women publishing at this time, but their voices were arguably the most represented. For this reason, I will foremost be using articles and pieces from *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*

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<sup>60</sup> Ben Tran, "I Speak in the Third Person: Women and Language in Colonial Vietnam," *Positions* 21 (2013): 581.

<sup>61</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 334.

<sup>62</sup> Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>63</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 224.

and *Nữ Giới Chung*. I will be analyzing opinion pieces, short stories, and articles discussing historical and international women, as well as sections aimed specifically at women such as the “family” section in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, advertisements, and recipes. Both newspapers possess a wealth of material concerning the construction of an ideal Vietnamese woman during this period.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will provide an analysis of the Vietnamese martial heroine and her modern inception in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. I will explain how this martial ideal, in the invented tradition of the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu, owed its creation to print culture and literature in the first half of the 20th-century and gained some traction once heroines came to be respected and venerated by women in the newspaper village. Though some people knew of or worshipped women such as the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu before the colonial period, intellectuals and writers created a contemporary, idealized martial Vietnamese woman in order to provide a homegrown ideal to which Vietnamese women should aspire. Yet, at this time, writers did not intend Vietnamese women to completely emulate these heroines. The fictitious martial heroine’s faint connections to Vietnamese history and spirit cults gave her potential as an appealing aspect of Vietnamese womanhood. With an invented tradition of famous, historical women grounding her, this martial woman was able to take modernizing Vietnamese women forward while comfortably reminding them of a largely fictitious past. This phenomenon demonstrates the importance of historical time as “space,” as space that enveloped these fictional creations within perceived familiarity and turned them into national heroines.

The third chapter of this thesis deals with Vietnamese women’s engagements with other women around the globe and the promotion of an educated, cosmopolitan, and charitable Vietnamese woman. Much like the heroic woman, the international woman came to fruition largely through Indochina’s vibrant print culture and represented Vietnamese women’s desire to

both set themselves apart from, and integrate themselves into, a global tradition of exceptional women. Though these historical and international ideals for women were not the only “ideal Vietnamese woman” promoted at this time, they are important because they were primarily promoted by women themselves. This ideal woman, more so than the historical martial woman, found a rapt audience in Vietnamese women. Her appealing aesthetic modernity and intellectual progressivism presented urban women with an ideal to which they more realistically could aspire. Though the ideal woman often rose to the heights of “world’s first female pilot” or “China’s first female lawyer,” she possessed a recognizable face that was not obscured by historical time or marred by violence, as in the case of the Trung Sisters or Lady Triệu. The ideal international woman foremost showed the popularity of the global New Woman and the depth of Vietnamese engagement with her conception and enthusiastic dissemination.

Ultimately, through my analysis of women’s writings, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of Vietnamese women in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Specifically, I hope to highlight a select few ideals to which the community of female intellectuals subscribed at this time. In addition to this analysis, I will discuss how the modern and the recent past are able to join one another in national imaginings. Lastly, I will suggest some avenues for further research and strategies for writing and researching about women in the colonial period and beyond.

## CHAPTER 2: FEMALE NARRATIVE BUILDING THROUGH HISTORY

On the front cover of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, towards the beginning of the newspaper's tenure, were three beautiful women reading, poetic words underneath them explaining that women embellish the nation [Fig. 2-1]. The women appeared fashionable but conservative, clearly wearing makeup but dressed in "traditional," Sino-Vietnamese style clothing one might have seen in the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>64</sup> These women read the very newspaper they appeared upon, perhaps having found discussions about women's rights alongside advertisements for Nestle condensed milk. This image was the front cover of *PNTV* during its early years, from 1929 until about mid-1933.<sup>65</sup> One may contrast this newspaper cover with a later Vietnamese image, such as a propaganda poster produced during the war with America, where three women again stood next to one another [Fig. 2-2]. Yet this time, the image appeared in bold color; the background consisting of the bright red Vietnamese flag, complete with the yellow star. These women did not read; instead, each woman carried a gun slung over her shoulder, ready to fight approaching enemies.<sup>66</sup> In this image, the writing underneath the women declared that Vietnamese women are heroes who adhere to the Three Responsibilities Movement, a wartime initiative that encouraged female commitment to holding down the home front and potentially giving their lives for the nation. Both images are very much indicative of the historical moment in which they were created, and both represent continuity and change in Vietnamese national imaginings and

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<sup>64</sup> Specifically, after the enforcement of Minh Mang's Chinese-style clothing laws during the Nguyen Dynasty. We cannot see their full dress, but the high collars appear to point to this. Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 134.

<sup>65</sup> David Marr states that this cover page existed for the first sixteen months of the newspaper (so not exceeding the year 1931), but my own experience and readings of the paper place this specific cover's usage until at least April 1933. David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 227.

<sup>66</sup> This image is from a war-era Vietnamese poster and can be found at "The Dogma Collection" under "Women Under Arms." A date is not listed nor is it visible on the image itself; I assume it was produced between 1955 and 1975.

perceptions of ideal women during the forty or so years that separated them. Similarly, both images used three women, perhaps a nod to the three regions of the country (North, South, Central). They also both, in their own way, emphasized women's responsibility to Vietnam.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In the first, women embellish, decorate (*tô điểm*) the nation. In the second, they are loyal (*trung hậu*) to their responsibilities to the nation and their families. Translations consistent with my reading of *PNTV*'s "embellish" or "decorate" rhetoric can be found by David Marr and Liam Kelley.

# TUẦN BÁO XUẤT BẢN NGÀY THỨ NĂM

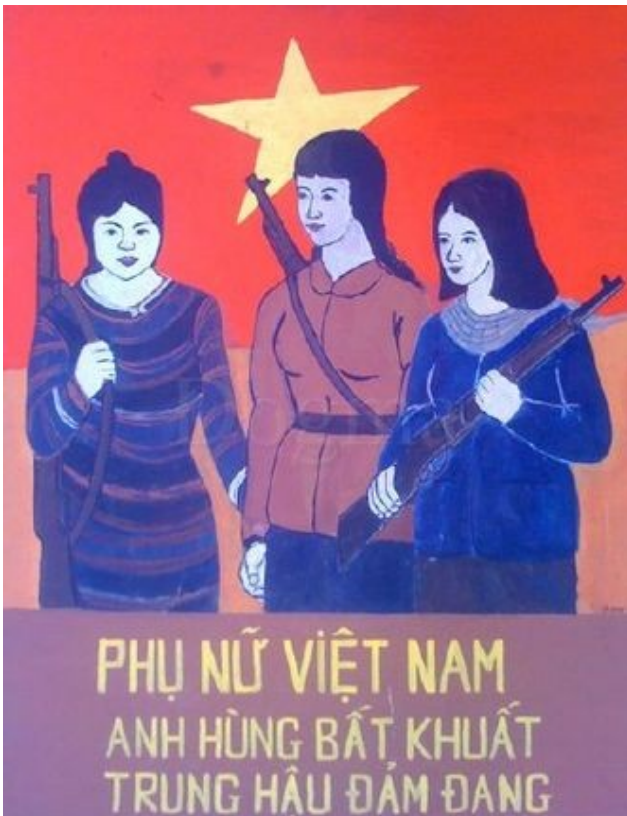


*Phản son tô diềm sơn-hà.*

**Figure 2-1**

Three women reading on the cover of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* (1929-1934)

Accessed from:  
<https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2010/04/26/women-reading-in-colonial-vietnam/>



**Figure 2-2**

Propaganda poster from the Second Indochina War (1955-1975), most likely created in the early 1970s

Accessed from:  
<http://dogmacollection.com/gallery/women-under-arms/struggle-and-strive-to-kill-the-americans-for-the-sake-of-our-beloved-south.html>

As for change, the first image was obviously printed in a time without overt conflict, while the second came in the midst of total war. As this chapter will demonstrate, while Vietnamese women's supposed heroic nature began to become a popular aspect of nationalism in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, it did not become an essential aspect of Vietnamese women *as a collective identity* until the conflicts with France and America. This chapter will not directly discuss the Vietnamese martial woman past 1945, but the changing and expanding national veneration of martial women was an essential aspect of Vietnamese patriotic imaginings throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>-century and beyond. The foundations of Vietnam's national relationship with heroines can be seen through *PNTV's* cover page. The newspaper's showing of fashionable upper-class women reading, while its content frequently involved reference to the exceptionally famous Trung Sisters, points to burgeoning, "modern" regard for national heroines. At this point in time, the lesson was that Vietnamese women should consider, "remember," and derive patriotic pride from their martial predecessors' deeds but not necessarily emulate them completely. Eventually, propaganda posters and other media would encourage Vietnamese women to carry on the work of national heroines in wartime. It is important to note that the martial heroine developed during the complex interwar years in Vietnam, wherein intellectuals were asking what it meant to be "Annamese," Vietnamese, or "Indochinese."<sup>68</sup> This underscores the martial heroine's profound importance in Vietnamese self-perception and women's place in the national narrative. While male intellectuals certainly prompted the modern veneration of martial women, especially in the context of a national heroine, women began to adopt this ideal and promote it within their own written works. Newspapers such as *PNTV* had a profound role in promoting the martial woman and connecting her to the Vietnamese past.

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<sup>68</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 4.

These Vietnamese heroines did not *completely* originate in the 20th-century; there existed a localized history of venerating Vietnamese heroines prior to colonization.<sup>69</sup> Yet, as the region came closer and closer to anticolonial conflict, a "tradition" and "memory" of martial women grew and expanded in Vietnam's psyche. Vietnamese intellectuals contributed to this expansion in a variety of ways, connecting modern Vietnamese women to a history of exceptional, martial women. They also took liberties embellishing and, at times, completely creating new narratives that included these historical women. Later, Vietnamese women's endorsement of the martial heroine expanded and solidified her place in the Vietnamese national imaginings. In this chapter, I will argue that Vietnamese understandings of women and the national heroine solidified in the early 20th-century, contributing to a national narrative which emphasized a newfound tradition of female sacrifice against oppressors in the name of family and country. This narrative drew upon historical heroines and established the idealized myth of an essential, martial Vietnamese woman.

### **Trưng and Triệu before the Colonial Period**

Although evidence is limited, some scholars have argued that that the predecessors to modern-day Vietnamese people possessed a matrilineal society before Chinese rule, with Lạc society featuring both male and female inheritance.<sup>70</sup> It was after the beginning of Chinese rule, around 111 B.C.E., that Vietnam's famous modern-day heroines would supposedly live and die fighting against Han generals.<sup>71</sup> It is generally accepted that the Trưng Sisters, Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị, were daughters of a Lạc Lord in *Giao Chi*,<sup>72</sup> fought an uprising against the Chinese

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<sup>69</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, "Rethinking the Historical Place of Warrior Women in Southeast Asia," unpublished book chapter, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Keith W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15-20.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>72</sup> The name that the Chinese gave to the Red River region.



governor around 40 C.E., formed a loose polity, and were defeated within three years.<sup>73</sup> This outline may appear broad; this is because very little historical evidence existed surrounding the topic of the Trung sisters. The 15th-century *Linh Nam chích quái liệt truyện* (*The Arrayed Tales of Selected Oddities from South of the Passes*), describes Trung Trắc as morally upright, brave, and intelligent.<sup>74</sup> The document also states that, after the Sisters' deaths, residents of the area worshipped their spirits and performed acts of supplication to the Sisters during periods of hardship, such as drought.<sup>75</sup> Olga Dror emphasizes local residents' pity for the Sisters and their deaths, stating that pity (and not admiration for their prowess against their enemies) was what moved people to deify them.<sup>76</sup> Rather than focusing on their heroic deeds, supplicants prior to the 20th-century focused upon their efficacy in bringing rain.<sup>77</sup> The lack of recorded historical information made new tellings and interpretations of the Trung Sisters possible in the 20th-century. These tellings supported a narrative that emphasized Vietnamese patriotism and sacrifice against foreign aggression.

As for Lady Triệu, her rebellion came around the third century, during the rise of the Wu dynasty.<sup>78</sup> Like the Trung sisters, perhaps even more so, Lady Triệu's record is vague and only later included in *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* (*The Complete Book of the Historical Records of Đại Việt*) in the 15<sup>th</sup>-century. Not much is conclusively known about Lady Triệu, except most place

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<sup>73</sup> Sarah Womack, "The Remakings of a Legend: Women and Patriotism in the Hagiography of the Trung Sisters," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 9 (1995): 33.

<sup>74</sup> Vũ Quỳnh, comp., *Linh Nam chích quái liệt truyện* [Arrayed Tales of Selected Oddities from South of the Passes], trans. Liam C. Kelley et al., (1492), Viet Texts, <https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/viet-texts/> [accessed March 3, 2018], 2/13a.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Olga Dror, *Cult, Culture, and Authority* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Keith W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29.

her death at around 248 C.E.<sup>79</sup> However, unlike the Trung sisters, there are descriptions of Lady Triệu's appearance in *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*, such as the length of her breasts.<sup>80</sup> Lady Triệu is not described as very heroic; rather, the document chiefly brings attention to her martiality and lack of a husband.<sup>81</sup> Triệu also became a spirit, yet, she was not worshipped as a rain goddess like the Trung Sisters. Interestingly, compared to the Trung sisters, Lady Triệu is much less revered in nationalist tellings of martial women. Hue-Tam Ho Tai attributes this to Lady Triệu's "passionate defense" of her own, personal goals rather than "national" ones, as well as her apparent refusal to marry.<sup>82</sup> Yet, this did not stop Vietnamese patriots from eagerly invoking her example, often just through her name, in order to encourage Vietnamese women to remember her death in battle against the Chinese.

As this brief history shows, the martial heroines who eventually became important in nationalist retellings of Vietnamese history had a sporadic and little-documented history. Beginning in the 20th-century, intellectuals and writers came to embellish upon Trung and Triệu's stories and used newly-invented traditions of these martial heroines in complex ways. This embellished narrative, emphasizing warrior women in the fight against foreign aggression, became about women's duty towards the potential nation of Vietnam and commemorated historical women to support this notion. Simple celebration of strong, heroic women did not serve the agendas of anticolonialists in a satisfactory way; rather, a lesson that could find large swaths of Vietnamese women and encourage collective female knowledge of their martial

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<sup>79</sup> Shaun Kingsley Malarney, "'The Fatherland Remembers Your Sacrifice' Commemorating War Dead in North Vietnam," in *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*, ed. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 48.

<sup>80</sup> Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* [Complete Book of the Historical Records of Đại Việt], trans. Liam C. Kelley, (1479, 1697 ed.), Viet Texts, <https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/viet-texts/> [accessed March 3, 2018], NK 4/30.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Faces of Remembrance and Forgetting," in *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*, ed. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 174.

“predecessors” was much more useful. This lesson found larger audiences and ease of dissemination through the expansion of political journalism and print culture in urban areas such as Saigon, Hanoi, and Hue. Vietnamese women who wished to become a model found it imperative to demonstrate knowledge and love for patriotic heroines. Outside of knowing about the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu, Vietnamese women loyal to “Vietnam” were to figuratively emulate these heroines through devotion to their family and culture.

### **French Perceptions of Heroic Women**

The most important precursor to the popularity of national heroines was the late colonial period’s solidification of ties between the abstract categories of “woman” and “nation.” Numerous factors contributed to the strengthening connections between Vietnamese women and the potential nation. This was partially due to Chinese influence from reformist authors such as Liang Qichao (1873-1929), who stressed the importance of women’s education in contributing to a stronger nation.<sup>83</sup> These views eventually made their way into the writings of Vietnamese authors such as Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940), who himself spent significant periods of time in China and Japan and discussed the need for education in strengthening a potential Vietnamese nation with Liang Qichao.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, the French colonial project, and the societal changes facilitated through exchange between Vietnamese and French culture, aided in connecting Vietnamese women to a Vietnamese “nation.” In the beginning of French colonization, French administrators endorsed the veneration of Vietnamese heroines, leading to their incorporation

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<sup>83</sup> Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>84</sup> “Introduction,” *Overtaken Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu*, trans. by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 12. Also see: David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 16. For more information about how Liang Qichao’s ideas made their way to the Vietnamese, see Liam C. Kelley, “Liang Qichao and Annam,” *Le Minh Khai’s SEAsian History Blog*, May 3, 2010, <https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2010/05/03/liang-qichao-and-annam/>.

into school textbooks and assuring that Vietnamese schoolchildren knew of the “legend” of Lady Triệu.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, their inclusion in texts such as *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* and *Lĩnh Nam chích quái liệt truyện* meant that some elite Vietnamese people were aware of the Trung sisters and Lady Triệu before French presence; however, the increased attention they received during the colonial period expanded the reach and importance of their place in history. There is the possibility that the “Women’s Question” and ensuing debates were a method of discussing topics that could not get past French censorship.<sup>86</sup> Outside of Cochinchina, French censors normally were vigilant for any topics employing nationalist rhetoric; therefore, disguised debates about women were at times making statements about the Vietnamese nation. There should be some emphasis placed upon *at times*, however. Not all debates and discussions of women were really about “Vietnam.” We should leave open the possibility that Vietnamese writers discussing women were simply interacting with the myriad views of gender circulating the world at this time. In China, for example, translations and novels inspired by the works of authors such as Alexandre Dumas became “a vehicle by which to explore the coming modernity.”<sup>87</sup> Especially for the few female Vietnamese writers active at this time, the works they produced were not simply veiled discussions of “the nation,” but more than likely their method of interacting with modern conceptions of femininity and new ideas. Nevertheless, though not all literature that discussed women also discussed the nation, writers in the late colonial period facilitated a conflation between womanhood and statehood. This conflation between womanhood and statehood led to increasing interest in a narrative that prioritized “national” heroines who fought “foreign” aggression.

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<sup>85</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, “Rethinking the Historical Place of Warrior Women in Southeast Asia,” unpublished book chapter, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 91.

<sup>87</sup> Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 10.

This phenomenon could also be attributed to increased exposure to French perceptions of women, as well as an increasing knowledge of French history and culture. This “subtle saturation” of French gender ideology occurred throughout Indochina, with special attention paid to the example of Joan of Arc after the First and Second World Wars.<sup>88</sup> An article published in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* in 1933 provided readers a history of various female French poets and writers. This was not unusual for *PNTV* or Vietnamese journalists at this time; many newspaper articles in the 20s and 30s focused on promoting female literacy in Indochina, encouraging Vietnamese women to focus on their studies and eventually become writers.<sup>89</sup> The author of *PNTV*’s article, Thiêu Sơn, mentioned Christine de Pisan and her work, *The Poem of Joan of Arc*.<sup>90</sup> The article, outlining multiple famous female French authors, showed both Vietnamese knowledge of French history at this time, as well as a recent development wherein Vietnamese writers appealed to French heroines. Christine de Pisan’s *Poem of Joan of Arc* was certainly not her most famous piece; therefore, Thiêu Sơn’s decision to include it most likely stemmed from the recognition Joan of Arc’s name would garner. Furthermore, Thiêu Sơn could also have been exhibiting “provincial cosmopolitan,” or “filtered access” to the metropole, a phenomenon in which some Vietnamese writers demonstrated a seemingly indiscriminate knowledge of French literature and art.<sup>91</sup> Readers of *PNTV* may not have known of Christine de Pisan or all of her work, but they may have known who Joan of Arc was and have responded to a piece by Pisan that mentioned Joan of Arc’s story.

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<sup>88</sup> Penny Edwards, “‘Propagender’: Marianne, Joan of Arc and the Export of French Gender Ideology to Colonial Cambodia (1863-1954),” in *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* ed. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), 121, 124.

<sup>89</sup> Shawn McHale, “Printing and Power: Vietnamese Debates over Women’s Place in Society, 1918-1934” in K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore (eds.), *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 182.

<sup>90</sup> Thiêu Sơn, “Nữ sĩ Pháp,” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, November 9, 1933, 8.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Zinoman, “Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vũ Trọng Phụng’s Foreign Literary Engagements” chapter 4 in *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia* ed. Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 127.

Sometimes, in their own poetry, Vietnamese women would compare themselves to French heroines such as Joan of Arc or Madame Roland. For example, this occurred in a poem written in the Tonkin Free School (1907), entitled "Advice of a Wife to Her Husband," demonstrating that this reference to Western heroines was "not uncommon" in Vietnam and China at the time.<sup>92</sup> These comparisons to heroines around the world and throughout history came to supersede traditional Vietnamese views of women; rather than the Trung Sisters existing as goddesses to whom elites prayed for rain, they became female warriors who resisted foreign invasion. Imported literature and views of women reinforced burgeoning associations between woman and nation. They also strengthened a sense of patriotic glory derived from death or sacrifice through love of country, famously seen in Joan of Arc's end. With a familiarity and knowledge of French heroines, superficial or not, it became much easier for Vietnamese authors to appeal to a growing sense of female heroism and duty to the nation.

However, this knowledge of French heroines did not come without some fatigue. In 1932, a journalist in *PNTV* called for the Vietnamese to gain greater knowledge of their own histories and historical figures.<sup>93</sup> A call to action such as this is easily written off as a demonstration of anticolonial anger, yet the article's existence and author's point highlights the intense promotion of French history and, through this, French historical figures and national heroines. Shawn McHale also writes that a portion of Vietnamese intellectuals sought to "embrace the future without completely Westernizing and rejecting the past."<sup>94</sup> Therefore, we can view this decision to promote the embellished pasts of Vietnamese heroines as a way of tempering the influence of French history and influence. Vietnamese nationalists increasingly called for promotion of

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<sup>92</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 95.

<sup>93</sup> "Người Việt-nam có nên đem bỏ Quốc sự mà xe lieng đi chang?" *Phu Nu Tan Van*, November 24, 1932, 5.

<sup>94</sup> Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 6.

Vietnamese-ness, yet French imports had already squeezed themselves into a growing Vietnamese penchant for venerating female heroism. This penchant would transform as the promotion of *Vietnamese* martial women joined the fray.

### **Phan Bội Châu and the Trưng Sisters**

Though the use of French heroines occurred in appeals to Vietnamese patriotism, appeals to Vietnamese heroines became more common and influential. Specifically, some of the first and most influential uses of the Trưng sisters to stir up patriotic sentiment came from the famous Vietnamese nationalist, Phan Bội Châu. Phan Bội Châu was a Vietnamese writer and anticolonial activist born into a poor scholar-gentry family in 1867.<sup>95</sup> He was raised and educated to be familiar with Chinese classics and made a name for himself as a talented young scholar in the Nam Đàn district of Nghệ An, though he did not receive his *cử nhân* degree until 1900.<sup>96</sup> He was heavily influenced by Chinese reformist writings, especially after he went abroad to Japan in 1905 and came into contact with writers such as Liang Qichao.<sup>97</sup> Châu spent many years abroad in Japan, China, Singapore, and Thailand until he was arrested by the French and brought to Hanoi in 1925.<sup>98</sup> Though he spent many years away from home, Phan Bội Châu possessed a loyal following of his fellow Vietnamese, especially among the young intelligentsia that made up the newspaper village.

Some of Châu's writings discussed what he perceived as the importance of women in anticolonial struggle. Châu mentioned Trưng Trắc in *Việt Nam Quốc Sử Khảo (A Study of Vietnam's National History)*, wherein he listed her name under a group of failed heroes who

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<sup>95</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 83.

<sup>96</sup> "Introduction," *Overtaken Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu*, trans. by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

rejected foreigners.<sup>99</sup> The passage is short, only about three paragraphs, but highlights the sisters' soldiers as men who scattered in battle against the Han forces; partially due to this, the two women died.<sup>100</sup> In its brevity, among other aspects, the passage is also quite similar to what is written about the Trung Sisters in *Linh Nam chích quái liệt truyện* from the 15<sup>th</sup>-century. A few years later, in 1911, Châu wrote a play about the Sisters that he titled *Tuồng Trung Nữ Vương* (Drama of the Trung Queen).<sup>101</sup> In the drama, he identified Trung Trắc's husband, Thi Sách, as the motivator and initial organizer of their rebellion.<sup>102</sup> Further, only after the deaths of her brother-in-law and nephew did Trung Nhị encourage Trung Trắc to avoid behaving like an "ordinary" woman and lead the rebellion.<sup>103</sup> Phan Bội Châu's literary decisions show interesting dichotomies in the ways he must have wished men and women to behave in national struggle. On the one hand, he places a great deal of responsibility on men; that is, making Thi Sách the major catalyst in fighting against the Chinese and writing about the Sisters' soldiers scattering in battle against the Han army, leading to their deaths. On the other, Châu calls Trung Trắc a queen and hero, implying a need for women to act as figureheads in times of insurrection. Additionally, in his play, he chose to end the story with Trung Trắc's victory rather than describing the Sisters' defeat.<sup>104</sup> This implication demonstrates major changes in uses of the Trung Sisters between the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Châu's drama both embellished and created details

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<sup>99</sup> In the Vietnamese translation, the sentence above Trung Trắc's name is: "Những vị anh hùng bậc nhất chống ngoại xâm mà thất bại" from Phan Bội Châu, "Việt Nam Quốc Sử Khảo" in *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập: Tập 3 (Văn Thơ Những Năm ở Nước Ngoài)*, ed. by Chương Thâu (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Thuận Hóa Trung Tâm Văn Hóa Ngôn Ngữ Đông Tây, 2000), 93.

<sup>100</sup> Phan Bội Châu, "Việt Nam Quốc Sử Khảo" in *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập: Tập 3 (Văn Thơ Những Năm ở Nước Ngoài)*, ed. by Chương Thâu (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Thuận Hóa Trung Tâm Văn Hóa Ngôn Ngữ Đông Tây, 2000), 94.

<sup>101</sup> This play has been described in multiple secondary sources (David Marr, Sarah Womack, and Judith Henchy). Though the play was written while Châu was in Thailand and smuggled to Indochina at a later date, Henchy writes that there were "local performances" of Châu's play; however, Henchy provides no citation so we cannot be certain.

<sup>102</sup> Sarah Womack, "The Remakings of a Legend: Women and Patriotism in the Hagiography of the Trung Sisters," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 9 (1995): 38.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 153.



surrounding the spotty story of the Trung Sisters, and emphasized national liberation at the (apparent) hands of women. Yet, Châu gave them little responsibility for doing so.<sup>105</sup> Most importantly, Châu’s drama communicated that women could and must display bravery and military might in service to the national struggle, but only once every male option had been exhausted. Trung Trắc’s and Trung Nhị’s call to action through their male family members, and in the spirit of patriotism, very accurately summed up the growing insistence that women display fidelity to both their families and their country.

Established after his play about the Trung sisters’ rebellion and after his arrest in 1925, Phan Bội Châu’s Association of Women for Work and Study (1926) in Hue pushed the “foundation of patriotic sentiment” and emphasized his belief that the ideal liberated woman “was best symbolized by the Trung Sisters.”<sup>106</sup> Phan Bội Châu’s veneration of the Trung sisters and use of their example may not have reached the majority of Vietnamese at this time; however, it did show that Vietnamese intellectuals were searching for models that women should emulate and found suitable models in Trung Trắc and Trung Nhị. For Vietnamese women in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, Phan Bội Châu’s direct appeals to Vietnamese women’s patriotism was influential and would be repeated throughout subsequent decades by women themselves. Châu’s popularity during this time period was profound, though lessened by his time spent abroad and arrest. The women involved in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* endorsed him and advertised his speaking engagements within the newspaper, making his influence upon their female readership apparent.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, Phan Bội Châu’s education in the Vietnamese examination system enhanced his authority and ensured that his belief in the importance of female fidelity to the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel Hémery and Pierre Brocheaux, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 238.

<sup>107</sup> Đào Hùng, “Nghe CỤ Phan Bội Châu Đọc Thơ” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 76 (October 30, 1930).

nation found an attentive audience. Vietnamese advancement of the *women as nation* cliché was strengthened through the shift of the Confucian notion of male fidelity from loyalty to one's ruler to the general populace's loyalty to the nation.<sup>108</sup> Phan Bội Châu was not unaware of this and aided in this monumental change. The historical importance of Confucianism in governing the conduct of Vietnamese women made this shift just as salient for women as it was for men, if not more so.

### **Heroines in Vietnamese Newspapers (1918-1934)**

Men were not the only ones who used emerging national heroines in their publications; Sương Nguyệt Anh's choice to endorse the Trung sisters, and stray from her newspaper's stated confines, represented some women's interest in the martial woman ideal. Sương Nguyệt Anh (1864-1921) edited and wrote for *Nữ Giới Chung* (Women's Bell), the first periodical for women in the region.<sup>109</sup> *Nữ Giới Chung* was also a forum in which writers could advocate for women and, in certain cases, patriotic women. *Nữ Giới Chung's* conceptualization did not begin with Sương Nguyệt Anh, however. Phạm Quỳnh (1892-1945), a prominent conservative intellectual during the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, recruited Sương Nguyệt Anh to run the publication at the behest of Indochina's Governor-General Albert Sarraut.<sup>110</sup> Her recruitment and involvement in Phạm Quỳnh and Sarraut's collaborative Franco-Vietnamese designs stemmed from her family's position as traditionally anti-assimilationist Southerners.<sup>111</sup> With her help and involvement, Sarraut and Quỳnh hoped the Southern region, often perceived as rebellious, would become more amenable to Franco-Vietnamese collaboration. Furthermore, the creation of a periodical aimed specifically at women would be advantageous for collaboration as well. Women's

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>109</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 205.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

connection to the family and raising of children meant that collaborative attitudes could reach a young Vietnamese audience. Therefore, their education and induction into the *mission civilisatrice* was readily important to what Quỳnh saw as a collaboration that would greatly benefit the Vietnamese, enacting “colonial republicanism” and reform.<sup>112</sup> This does not mean that Anh was a simple tool for male designs, however. At first glance, Sương Nguyệt Anh appeared to be the perfect fit for a periodical that would promote colonial republicanism. At this point in her life, she was well known for her poetry written in Chinese and *nôm* characters, as well as her decision to never remarry after the death of her husband.<sup>113</sup>

Through Anh’s example as a placid, ideal, and traditionally Confucian Vietnamese woman, women in Indochina would, presumably, find a suitable role model to emulate. While David Marr characterizes Sương Nguyệt Anh as amenable and easily led by the traditionalist aims of Phạm Quỳnh, her actions and choice of subject matter in *Nữ Giới Chung* throw this characterization into question. It appears that Anh did not completely emulate an ideally placid woman. French censors eventually closed her publication after only five months. Scholars attribute *Nữ Giới Chung’s* closure to the paper’s advocacy for women’s education, women taking the initiative, and a reference to the Trung sisters.<sup>114</sup> At this time period, around 1918, references to the Trung sisters were no longer endorsed by the French administration. Barbara Watson Andaya places this switch, from French endorsement to censorship of Vietnamese national heroines, to the 1920s.<sup>115</sup> Sương Nguyệt Anh’s invocation of the Trung sisters, as well as any inspirational national heroines, represents a bold move on her part. After all, the first issue of her

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<sup>112</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 116-117.

<sup>113</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 205.

<sup>114</sup> Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 63.

<sup>115</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, “Rethinking the Historical Place of Warrior Women in Southeast Asia,” unpublished book chapter, 8.

periodical promised to stay out of national politics and instead focus on women's moral advancement, daily work tasks, and handicraft production.<sup>116</sup> Endorsement of martial national heroines, from a woman such as Anh, who was considered to represent an ideal of Vietnamese womanhood, demonstrates a growing importance of martial women to Vietnamese readers and writers. Additionally, Sương Nguyệt Anh sympathized with and supported Phan Bội Châu, agreeing with his disapproval of the use of *quốc ngữ* and exhibiting a wariness of Vietnamese writers acting too "Western."<sup>117</sup> Her connections to patriotism and accord with Phan Bội Châu, one of the preeminent anti-French activists of his time, made her reference to the Trung sisters and validation of national heroines consistent, if not daring for a publication backed by the Governor-General of Indochina.

*Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* encouraged the use of national heroines to inspire its female readers. *PNTV* had a loyal following of both men and women, yet almost any article that made reference to a national heroine did so with the intent of reaching female readers.<sup>118</sup> While most of these references to the Trung sisters or Lady Triệu were made in promotions of female literacy, this also ties into the early nationalist emphasis on *knowledge* of national heroines, rather than direct emulation. Most literature about the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu in *PNTV* was written by men, yet it is possible that some poems and articles were written by women. In March of 1930, *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* published a special edition of the paper that focused almost entirely on the Trung Sisters [Fig. 2-3]. The edition featured articles by Trịnh Đình Rư, a textbook publisher from Haiphong, some poetry and prose about the Sisters, and an informational article by Dương Tự

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<sup>116</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 205.

<sup>117</sup> Đặng Thị Vân Chi, *Vấn Đề Phụ Nữ Trên Báo Chí Tiếng Việt, Trước Năm 1945* (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, 2008), 79.

<sup>118</sup> David Marr, "The 1920s Women's Rights Debates in Vietnam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 35 (1976): 372.

Quán.<sup>119</sup> The most intriguing aspect of the edition was the central article that outlined the history of the Trung Sisters’ campaign against Han generals; the article displayed a timeline and ended with a section describing the “law” the Sisters enacted during their short victory.<sup>120</sup> Also different from a number of other writings about the Trung Sisters was *PNTV*’s emphasis on the memory of their “revolution” and the plea that readers do not “forget” their sacrifice.<sup>121</sup> Though men such as Phan Bội Châu urged female readers to learn about their martial heroines and even consider emulating their example, it appears that other contemporary writers wished to focus upon a living memory of Vietnamese heroines, though information was most certainly inaccurate and incomplete. Rather than use the Sisters as a way to encourage literacy or patriotism, in this issue, the people behind *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* wished to create a space where their readership could “commemorate” heroines and even communicate with them, thus facilitating a newfound “tradition” of recognizing the Trung Sisters. One piece within this special edition was an essay presented as a funerary offering to the Sisters, written by Thương Tân Thị from Vinh Long.<sup>122</sup> Though the piece was written in offering to the Sisters, it was addressed to readers, again urging them to “remember the ancient Sisters.”<sup>123</sup> This emphasis on memory and the use of the funerary *văn tế* genre showed some continuation with the past, though with a significant break in which readers and writers could commemorate the Sisters’ contribution to and sacrifice for a Vietnamese national cause. This special issue focusing on the Sisters, and their apparent importance in the past, demonstrated a substantial effort on *PNTV*’s part to present the Trung Sisters as heroines of national importance.

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<sup>119</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 208-209.

<sup>120</sup> “Hai Chị Em Bà Trưng” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 42 (March 6, 1930).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Thương Tân Thị, “Bài Văn Tế Hai Bà Trưng” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 42 (March 6, 1930).

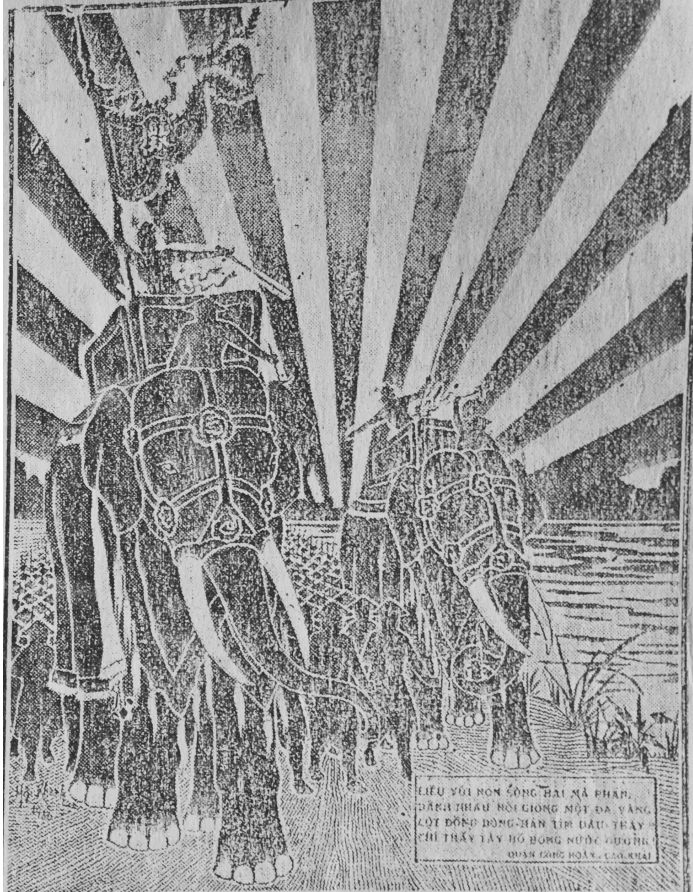
<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

*PNTV's* efforts either reflected a growing interest in Vietnamese heroines or aided in stoking that interest. Much of this interest was propagated by men; yet, women who read *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* or read other forms of literature produced around this time would have seen some mention of the Trung Sisters or Lady Triệu. Some women readily accepted and promoted an interest in heroines; for example, one female teacher in Lang Son reminded her female students to remember the Vietnamese past and look to Trung Trắc as an ideal for Vietnamese femininity.<sup>124</sup> David Marr writes that the teacher was encouraging her students to “revere” the past and tradition.<sup>125</sup> I believe that this shows the beginnings of a new tradition that touted the Trung Sisters as important national figures in Vietnamese history, though, in reality this was not the case at the time of their purported deaths.

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<sup>124</sup> Đinh Chí Nghiệm quoted in David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 207.

<sup>125</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 207.



**Figure 2-3**

Illustration of the Trung Sisters at war on elephants, from a special edition of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* on March 6, 1930.

While there were no outright calls for women to bear arms or act in a particularly martial manner at this time, they were expected to revere and hope to emulate famous women who, according to men like Phan Bội Châu, fought to save the “nation.” Perhaps, in the future, Vietnamese women could call upon this knowledge of their martial predecessors and fight for the nation. The use of martial women in articles and poetry within newspapers, marketed towards women, was arguably more powerful than their use in literature produced by men, such as Phan Bội Châu’s drama. Women’s eventual affirmation of the martial heroine, as a venerable ideal, demonstrates the depth of diffusion this ideal had achieved in Vietnamese self-representation. This is shown in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, a newspaper that had multiple women on its staff and

leadership positions.<sup>126</sup> The use of the martial woman, by women, would have made her much more important to women reading and engaging with print media in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Final Thoughts on the Vietnamese Heroine**

The elevation of the martial national heroine, brought from relative inconsequentiality to national importance in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, had profound effects on how both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese people saw the country's history and Vietnamese women. While, of course, it is not inaccurate to point to the existence of women such as the Trung Sisters or Lady Triệu in Vietnam's past, as they did exist, their inclusion in the national narrative communicated a specific ideal to which Vietnamese women should aspire. Further, the Vietnamese martial woman's eventual popularity among women themselves shows just how influential national heroines had become. Though there existed some differences in the ways women and men wrote about their national heroines, their popularity among the genders only serves to highlight how idealized martial women became. This ideal did not stem from placid admiration of martial women or an essential, primordial "feminist" culture in the country. Scholars and students of Vietnamese history and culture often comment upon how "equal" Vietnamese gender relations appeared to be. Indeed, the communist government of northern Vietnam made gender equality a basic component of their party's platform in the mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>127</sup> Yet, if one reads further into what the high classification of fighting, dying women truly means, especially for the women aspiring to this ideal, one will perhaps see that it does not mean "gender equality" but rather more a sense of "female disposability." This lies in contrast to the highest position to which men should aspire in Vietnam, that of the educated civil servant, a remnant of the region's

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<sup>126</sup> Besides being led by Madame Đức Nhuận, examples of women who regularly wrote for *PNTV* were: Nguyễn Thị Kiêm or "Manh Manh," Phan Thị Bạch Vân, Bang Tầm, Thạch Lan, and Phạm Vân Anh.

<sup>127</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, "Rethinking the Historical Place of Warrior Women in Southeast Asia," unpublished book chapter, 11.



interactions with China and Confucian ideology. Indeed, many French administrators noticed and lamented at the Vietnamese bias against physical labor or occupations that were not in line with the Confucian esteem for education.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, the two highest positions for men and women have historically been very different in Vietnam. Cultural producers and Vietnamese leaders have communicated to women that, should they seek to emulate the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu, their glory lies in death and sacrifice through war. Men, on the other hand, have historically achieved status through their intellectual pursuits and governmental service.

The future legacy and use of the “martial woman” in Vietnam remains to be seen. Indeed, women’s status in contemporary, post-unification, post-*Đổi Mới* Vietnam merits constant reappraisal and study. Students who wish to study the country, however, should tread carefully when making generalized statements about the position of women in Vietnam. Though I have spent the majority of this chapter arguing for one view of Vietnamese women, a spectrum of interpretations concerning the ideal for Vietnamese womanhood certainly existed in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century and beyond. This surely was true outside of the intelligentsia and away from large cities. Further, men outside of the pages of *PNTV*, and apart from Phan Bội Châu, certainly held differing opinions concerning how an ideal Vietnamese woman should act. I will discuss this ideal, coupled and contrasted with the ideal woman of international descent, in the next chapter.

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<sup>128</sup> Micheline Lessard, “Tradition for Rebellion: Vietnamese Students and Teachers and Anticolonial Resistance, 1888-1931” (PhD Diss., Cornell University, 1995).

## CHAPTER 3: FEMALE NARRATIVE BUILDING THROUGH INTERNATIONAL NEWS

In 1930, *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* ran an article about a woman named Yvonne Sarcey of Paris [Fig. 3-1].<sup>129</sup> The author discussed *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*'s proposal to replicate Sarcey's "Annales University" journal and establish something similar in Indochina. The article continued to list Sarcey's accomplishments, noting her establishment of *Les maisons claires*, shelters that provided vocational training for impoverished children. The author went to far as to describe her "gentle" appearance, seen in a photo situated next to the text, which was "filled with benevolent feelings towards mankind."<sup>130</sup> Finally, the article ended with a call to readers to emulate Yvonne Sarcey and asked whether or not the Vietnamese were able to boast of a woman like Sarcey.

Turning away from the metropole, in October of 1930, the same periodical featured an article that touted Indian women as a beneficial example for their Vietnamese counterparts.<sup>131</sup> In the article, a female reporter in Paris conducted a short interview with Lady Rama Rao, the Indian representative for the International Alliance of Women (IAW)'s conference that had taken place in Berlin in 1929. The article featured two questions posed to Rama Rao, about how hard Indian women worked compared to Indian men and whether or not Indian women sought to emulate the West. The commentary in between the questions described how fervently Indian women enacted educational, societal, and political reform in their country and noted similar (but less successful) attempts by Vietnamese women. The final section of the article discussed "mimicry" of European and other foreign cultures, stating that Vietnamese women should

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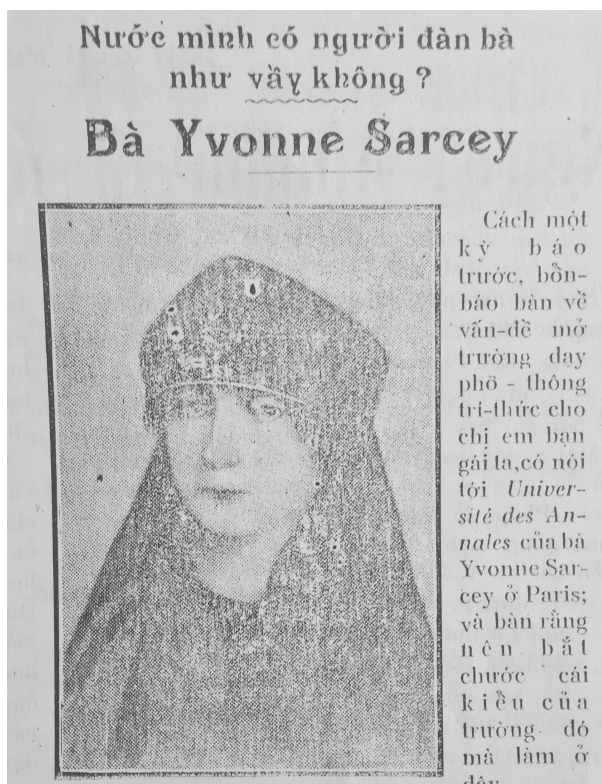
<sup>129</sup> "Nước mình có người đàn bà như vậy không? Bà Yvonne Sarcey" *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 37 (January 16, 1930). Sarcey's legal name was Madeleine Brisson.

<sup>130</sup> Hình in đây tức là chon dung bà Yvonne Sarcey; coi nét mặt thiệt là phước hậu, chan chứa cái tình đối với nhơn loại," in "Nước mình có người đàn bà như vậy không? Bà Yvonne Sarcey" *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 37 (January 16, 1930).

<sup>131</sup> "Tâm gương cho chị em ta soi: Đàn Bà Ấn Độ" *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 75 (October 23, 1930).

identify attractive aspects of foreign cultures to copy and ignore any “corrupt” practices, though it is unclear what exactly “corrupt” practices meant.<sup>132</sup> The article closed by calling on Vietnamese women to consider the article a lesson for themselves and others, to emulate Indian women’s hard work and enact positive educational and social change in their own communities.

During the late colonial period, a substantial number of newspapers and periodicals, especially those geared towards women, featured articles like those described above. The significance of these articles is twofold: first, middle and upper class Vietnamese women were aware of their female counterparts in other countries around the globe. Second, they were looking to both the metropole and other colonies, such as India, for inspiration to reach an ideal womanhood. This ideal womanhood was subject to change but often comprised of education, attention to civil society and philanthropy, and a desire to enact “reform” in urban spaces. In this chapter, I will argue that examples of global comparison in women’s newspapers reveal a nascent ideal for Vietnamese women to emulate. This emerging ideal was a way for Vietnamese women to tie themselves to “modernity,” exceptionalism, and a growing global community.



**Figure 3-1**

Picture of Yvonne Sarcey (or Madeleine Brisson) from her profile in *PNTV*.

## Background & Comparison of Ideals

Beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, Vietnamese women became educated at a higher volume than ever before. This resulted in their participation in written culture, though at a lesser volume than Vietnamese men. Regardless, their participation in the booming print culture, in Saigon especially, reveals intriguing aspects of Vietnamese femininity and intellectual pursuits during this time period.

Vietnamese periodicals such as *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* show that the interwar years witnessed Vietnamese women seeing themselves as part of a *global* community of women, wherein they could share common goals with their female counterparts in other countries. Philippe Peycam has noted that the development of Vietnamese political culture was intricately tied to the goings-on in the metropole and other French colonies.<sup>133</sup> It is therefore no stretch to state that the rest of the world also influenced Indochina's print and political culture. Importantly, for female journalists and newspaper readers, they could witness other women and their accomplishments and draw upon an array of ideals and examples for themselves. Especially in "world news" sections of newspapers, Vietnamese women could look globally to compare and contrast themselves to prominent women in the international arena. Particularly for the urban middle class, *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn's* target audience, comparison became increasingly important as a small percentage of *bourgeois* Vietnamese students studied abroad, traveled, or read about far-off places in travelogues and stories.<sup>134</sup> This, in many ways, connects to Benedict Anderson's study of print culture and "imagined" community, and the existence of "animated circuits of

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<sup>133</sup> Philippe Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 16.

<sup>134</sup> Though this exposure to the rest of the world was undoubtedly "filtered," as discussed by Peter Zinoman. "Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vũ Trọng Phụng's Foreign Literary Engagements" chapter 4 in *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia* ed. Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 127.

movement” in the Asia-Pacific region and between metropolises.<sup>135</sup> Especially considering Vietnamese women’s preoccupation with communities beyond the metropole, global knowledge began to grow exponentially in this period.

It should be noted that this educated, cosmopolitan ideal was not the only Vietnamese ideal for femininity at this time. If one reads contemporary literature about Vietnamese women, usually by men, one sees a vastly different example promoted within these stories. For example, *Anh Phải Sống (You Must Live)*, by Khái Hưng and Nhất Linh was first published in 1934 and featured a poor couple who could not afford to feed themselves or their children.<sup>136</sup> During the story’s climax, the mother left her children to help her husband collect wood in the nearby river during a storm. As the storm made their boat capsize, the mother sacrificed herself so that her husband could live and care for their children.<sup>137</sup> This character trope, of a self-sacrificing mother and wife (usually impoverished and living in the countryside) was not relegated to *Anh Phải Sống* but featured in a large amount of literature from the time period. Thạch Lam, a member of the same literary group as Khái Hưng and Nhất Linh, wrote about a similarly self-sacrificing young woman in *Cô Hàng Xén (The Market Girl)*. The titular character is consistently sweet natured and works endlessly to provide her family (and, later, her husband’s family) with every cent she makes at market. We can contrast this pastoral harmony with the jaded sex worker who cheats a hapless rickshaw driver in Nguyễn Công Hoan’s *Người Ngựa, Ngựa Người* (1931). Though the male protagonist is poor and cannot afford to celebrate the New Year (Tết), he continues to drive a penniless sex worker searching for customers in hopes that she will eventually pay him. Nguyễn Công Hoan ends the piece with the woman escaping the rickshaw

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<sup>135</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1983) and Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies” *The Journal of American History* 88 (2001): 848.

<sup>136</sup> Khái Hưng and Nhất Linh, *Anh Phải Sống* (Hanoi: Đời Nay, 1934).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

driver and, thus, payment for his services.<sup>138</sup> The fact that much of this literature was written by men is telling. Female characters, in these stories, are treated dichotomously: they exist on a binary as a selfish woman prone to dishonesty or as a good-natured village girl who can do no wrong. Though it is more than possible that women were also enamored of the selfless rural mother trope, *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* demonstrates that female journalists, at least, were looking internationally for a different, and more realistic, ideal to emulate.

This desire to emulate global, progressive women shows just how international the “New Woman” had become in the early 20th-century. Though the New Woman was not inherently Western, those who emulated the New Woman (or even the Modern Girl) concept inevitably derived inspiration from European and American feminine models. To re-state the American ideal of the Gibson Girl in the late 19th and early 20th-centuries, she was “single, white, affluent, politically and socially progressive, highly educated, and athletic.”<sup>139</sup> The American Gibson Girl’s criteria is eerily similar to the criteria for the ideal Vietnamese woman in the 1920s and 30s, with few differences. Importantly, the American ideal was a figure “between the Victorian woman and the flapper” and represented a woman who was neither stuck in the past nor too modern to be unrecognizable or threatening.<sup>140</sup> China’s New Woman phenomenon was very similar to Indochina not long before this time period, with Chinese periodicals translating and disseminating information about women such as Madame Roland and Sophia Perovskaia.<sup>141</sup> The purpose of these translations was to create the New Woman ideal, in a transformation of both foreign models and indigenous women. She, and her creators, may have drawn inspiration from

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<sup>138</sup> Nguyễn Công Hoan, *Người Ngựa, Ngựa Người* (Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Học, 1931).

<sup>139</sup> Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.

non-Chinese figures, but she became uniquely and ideally Chinese. The creation of an ideal woman in China was tied into the creation of “a viable cultural, racial, and national identity.”<sup>142</sup> This was akin to the case of Vietnam. Additionally, as much of this study’s newspaper articles were written by women, similarly to China, we can trace how Vietnamese women took the trope of the New Woman and “engaged it, played with it, and created a fantastic range of possibilities for themselves.”<sup>143</sup> These possibilities resembled a multitude of different women from a variety of different countries. Furthermore, this ideal shared some aspects with the Modern Girl, who was very similar to the New Woman, though her creators placed more emphasis on her cosmopolitan outlook. Additionally, her visual appearance was described as a flapper with bobbed hair and short skirts.<sup>144</sup> Vietnamese writers admired women from urban areas who were well-traveled, yet did not appear to endorse the aesthetics touted by flappers in the years after World War I. Writers held well dressed and fashionable women in high esteem without a doubt; however, usually newspapers placed emphasis on women’s educational and occupational feats. Specifically, a previously-mentioned beauty pageant in Gia Định in 1935 received condemnation from male and female writers over the emphasis on physical beauty, clothing, and “decadent American-European ideas.”<sup>145</sup> This shows an aspect of discomfort with women engaging in new visual self-representation and aesthetics, especially aesthetics that derived too much inspiration from American and European women. Further, the flapper’s proclivity for short skirts and androgynous silhouettes marked a newfound expression of sexuality and gender in the United

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>144</sup> Katrina Gulliver, *Modern Women in China and Japan: Gender, Feminism and Global Modernity Between the Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 18-20.

<sup>145</sup> Judith Henchy, “Vietnamese New Women and the Fashioning of Modernity,” in Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee eds. *France and “Indochina” Cultural Representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 122.

States. It is likely that this overt defiance of sexual norms prompted even the admirers of the New Woman to shy away from promoting the Modern Girl.

As many of the women featured and profiled in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* were French, it is important to consider why this was so. Eric Jennings's point about Vietnamese mimicry of French practices being coerced is important to consider. Yet for the most part, newspaper articles and advertisements show that affluent Vietnamese enthusiastically adopted *bourgeois* French practices that would set them apart from other Vietnamese and enhance their chances toward upward mobility. Though Vietnamese and others subjected to colonialism were undoubtedly coerced in a number of ways, owing to the violent and hierarchical nature of colonialism, simply stating that their adoption of French practices was "coerced" obscures the complexity of exchange and appropriation during the late colonial period. The articles encouraging Vietnamese women to enact social organization, or appropriate the practices of foreign women, were continuing a trend eagerly promoted by Vietnamese women themselves. The greatest evidence for this lies in the fact that many articles in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, for example, were written by women. Therefore, though coercion was no doubt a significant part of "modernity" during the colonial period, it does not explain the reasoning behind promotions of exceptional and charitable women from around the globe. Rather, we can see that this was part of a growing desire to shape the ideal modern Vietnamese woman.

### **World News – What or “where” did newspapers highlight?**

One way we can trace the mutual knowledge of and interest in different empires across the globe, and Vietnamese participation in this, is by looking at the world news sections of newspapers in the 1920s and 30s. *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*'s focus on women in Europe, America, India, China, and Japan was symptomatic of exactly "where" other newspapers looked for general news



to report. At this time, most international news to reach Indochina was coming from the aforementioned places; a cursory look at other newspapers such as *L'Écho Annamite* or *Nữ Giới Chung* confirms this. Therefore, there was simply a higher volume of information that would have been available for newspapers to analyze. This made it easier for journalists working for *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* to find international women to idealize and promote in their newspapers. Furthermore, as one article in *PNTV* stated, people only picked out the news stories that had use for them and their own desired knowledge.<sup>146</sup> This demonstrates both what Vietnamese were interested in reading at the time and what newspapers provided them, as well as a growing international community within print.

One section of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* titled “Women’s News Around the World” [Fig. 3-2] had the stated purpose of “letting our women know what progressive women in the world are like, how they innovate, or what interesting news is out, which stories are strange.”<sup>147</sup> The article stressed that this endeavor would increase women’s intelligence and encourage a self-strengthening of sorts. This particular section, from June of 1931, featured stories about women from Germany, China, and Belgium. The stories ranged from women flying planes and parachuting, attending national conferences, and driving motorcycles across great distances. The short articles had an air of whimsy to them; at least two out of the three stories were about women engaging in daring feats of sport and physicality. This means that they did not necessarily conform to the more frequently-touted feminine ideal of intelligence and progressive political leanings; however, they did emphasize *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*’s engagement with modernity and desire for their readership to emulate this.

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<sup>146</sup> “Người ta sắp vẽ lại địa đồ thế giới” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 40 (February 20, 1930).

<sup>147</sup> “Để cho chị em ta biết phụ nữ thế giới tiến bộ ra sao, cải cách thế nào; hay là có tin gì hay, chuyện gì lạ.” From “Thế giới Phụ Nữ Tiêu Túc” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 85 (June 4, 1931).

If periodicals looked internationally for inspiration for their readership, they wanted to make sure that their readers knew where and which countries they were talking about. One article in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* gave readers a lesson about the world map, stressing the importance of knowing where particular continents and countries were. The bottom of the page showed two images of different maps based on the Mercator projection.<sup>148</sup> The article mainly focused on paying attention to world news that was important to the advancement of Vietnamese society and came from important, powerful countries. The article was directly addressed to women and exhibits the thinking behind highlighting women in specific countries like America or France. It also demonstrates newspapers' emphasis on picking and choosing which countries and female practices their readership should emulate. If authors of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* believed in the importance of highlighting stories from powerful nations, they certainly looked for exceptional women from these nations. This was done in order to show Vietnamese women to whom they should be looking as the highest standards of womanhood.

### **Specific women profiled in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn***

Judging from the print culture of this period, especially in women's magazines and periodicals, readers can clearly find a pattern that highlighted and praised well-traveled, educated, and charitable women. This view can be contrasted with contemporary literature that warned against women who traveled to far off places, such as Nguyễn Công Hoan's *Thế là vợ nó đi Tây*. This short story, published in the 1930s, follows a dishonest wife as she travels to France to study and eventually takes a lover, leaving her ill and destitute husband to care for their son in Tonkin.<sup>149</sup> *Thế là vợ nó đi Tây* can be read as a cautionary tale of what happens when Vietnamese women go abroad and leave family and country. There is, additionally, a subtle

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<sup>148</sup> “Người ta sắp vẽ lại địa đồ thế giới” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 40 (February 20, 1930).

<sup>149</sup> Nguyễn Công Hoan, “Thế là vợ nó đi Tây,” *Annam Journal* 43 (1927).

suggestion that Vietnamese women would act this way were they to leave the eyes (or, perhaps, the surveillance) of their community. This story can be compared to *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*'s much more positive “Mười Tháng ở Pháp,” a column that began in 1930 and detailed the life of Phạm Vân Anh as she studied in Paris.<sup>150</sup> In this column, which ran about twice a month, Anh sent articles that covered an array of topics about work-study, the French temperance movement, and the lives of French women. The column was a way for readers in Indochina to experience the thrill of travel to the metropole, through the eyes of a budding investigative journalist. Phạm Vân Anh provided female readers a much better role model to emulate than the titular *mợ* (wife) of Nguyễn Công Hoan's piece. Additionally, while Anh was not given a detailed description nor idolized in the pages of *PNTV*, her pieces detailed a life of travel and study, much like the idealized women that the newspaper frequently highlighted. Therefore, though Phạm Vân Anh was not lifted to the level of Yvonne Sarcey or Lady Rama Rao, she was a more realistic option for female readers of *PNTV* to follow. Her columns showed an inquisitive and eager young woman, who was much more accessible than the idealized international women that *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* frequently chose to show. While Phạm Vân Anh showed a more practical example for Vietnamese women to look to, examples of exceptional international women were showcased much more.

Amy Johnson was a British pilot who undertook an astonishing solo flight from England to Australia in 1930 and was featured in an article in *PNTV* later that year. As Johnson was the first woman to accomplish this feat, her profile in any periodical is not surprising. However, what *is* surprising is both what the author of her *PNTV* article chose to venerate and how this compared to “New Women” in Vietnam at the time. For example, the article's author calls Amy

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<sup>150</sup> Phạm Vân Anh, “Số Một” “Hội cự rượu,” and “Một Gia Đình Ben Pháp,” etc. in *Mười Tháng ở Pháp, Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* January-July 1930.

Johnson a “female genius” and a “high example for other women.”<sup>151</sup> The article explains that this is because she did not possess any reluctance in leaving her job as a secretary and flying solo across the globe. The author implies that this stands in contrast to the timidity of Vietnamese women. Yet, working as a secretary would have been somewhat unusual in 1930s Indochina; though the article appears to recoil in distaste at the prospect of decaying “with mold” as a secretary, having an independent source of income would have been quite a feat for women in many countries at the time.<sup>152</sup> It may be that the author did not believe any Vietnamese female readers would entirely emulate Amy Johnson’s example. It is more likely that the author wished to highlight Johnson’s hard work and education so that female readers would find inspiration in her tenacity and willingness to follow her dreams.

In May of 1930, Phạm Vân Anh wrote an article about Trịnh Dục Tú, or Tcheng Yu-hsiu (1891-1959), the first female lawyer and judge in Chinese history [Fig. 3-3]. Anh wrote her story based on an article from an American publication, detailing Dục Tú’s early life and accomplishments, highlighting her “revolutionary thinking” and defiance toward traditions such as footbinding.<sup>153</sup> At the end of the article, Anh discussed Dục Tú’s hard-fought independence and its importance within society. She also stressed how important Dục Tú’s story was for women to learn and know. Much like Amy Johnson, Dục Tú was an example that the vast majority of women would not be able to emulate. The article noted her disdain towards traditional practices, pointing to her rejection of a man to which she had been betrothed.<sup>154</sup> While Vietnamese women would not completely follow Dục Tú’s example, Phạm Vân Anh wanted her female readers to be aware of Dục Tú’s accomplishments and radical mindset. Perhaps Anh’s

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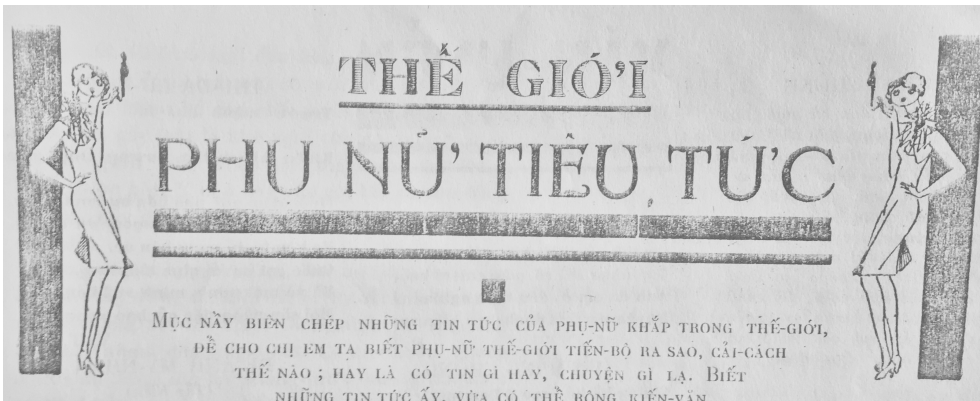
<sup>151</sup> “Một bài học cho chị em ta: Nhà phi hành Anny Johnson” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 71 (September 25, 1930).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Phạm Vân Anh, “Đàn Bà Đời Nay: Trịnh Dục Tú” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 83 (May 21, 1931).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

studies in France had brought her to this familiarity with Dục Tú, who had earned her law degree at the Sorbonne. The similarities between Amy Johnson's and Trịnh Dục Tú's treatment as models for Vietnamese women show the global nature of the ideal woman. Rather than looking to specific areas of the globe, such as Europe, any highly "modern" or exceptional woman was fair game.



**Figure 3-2**

Illustration from *PNTV's* section highlighting international women's news.



**Figure 3-3**

Picture of Trịnh Dục Tú, or Tcheng Yuh-siu, in *PNTV's* profile about her.

*Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* featured an article about Selma Lagerlof in September of 1930, which listed her accomplishments and charity work.<sup>155</sup> Much like aforementioned articles, the piece called Lagerlof an example for women and an important international figure.<sup>156</sup> Soon after the author discussed Lagerlof’s accomplishment in winning the Nobel Prize in literature earlier in 1930, she mentioned the fact that many of Lagerlof’s works were available in translation in a host of languages. However, they were not available in Vietnamese. The author wrote that it was the obligation of the newspaper to translate Lagerlof’s work, so that their readership could understand her importance.<sup>157</sup> This article shows that the women writing in *PNTV* were not only discussing pertinent examples for Vietnamese women, they were attempting to take conscious steps towards translating and engaging with literature produced by women around the world.

Thạch Lan wrote a profile about Camille Drevet in May of 1930. Camille Drevet was a writer and member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Drevet visited China and Indochina in 1929, meeting with and speaking to the article’s author, Thạch Lan, about the state of women’s rights in Indochina.<sup>158</sup> Lan wrote about her conversation with Drevet, relating the latest hurdles for Vietnamese women and the work of prominent women in contemporary Vietnam such as Trần Thị Hường and Phan Thị Bạch Vân.<sup>159</sup> Lan felt the need to justify why she believed that Vietnamese women were “behind” their Chinese counterparts, but explained the work that *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* was undertaking and introduced Drevet to a number of Vietnamese women who could converse with her in French. Finally, Lan wrote that she believed

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<sup>155</sup> “Bà Selma Lagerlof” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 70 (September 18, 1930).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> “Bà Camille Drevet” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 51 (May 8, 1930).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

Camille Drevet would become an important person in history.<sup>160</sup> Though this article was unlike the many profiles about international women, it contains an interesting conceit to analyze. Thạch Lan did retain much similar rhetoric concerning idealized foreign women, as she discussed Drevet's credentials and proclaimed her an important figure in history. Yet Lan's article also took the time to highlight Vietnamese women whom she believed were important for Camille Drevet to know. One of these Vietnamese women, Phan Thị Bạch Vân, had already published multiple books by this time and had her publishing house (which specifically published material for and by women) shut down at the hands of the colonial authorities earlier that year.<sup>161</sup> Bạch Vân certainly filled much of the criteria for an ideal woman at this time; therefore, this piece demonstrates a reciprocal desire, on the part of Vietnamese writers in *PNTV*, for women in other countries to understand their accomplishments and work in the realm of women's rights. This wish for reciprocal understanding shows the truly global consciousness of female writers. Though they may have perceived of themselves as "behind" Chinese women, they nonetheless were very consciously looking to modern foreign women and welcoming a mutual understanding and acknowledgement within elite circles of women around the world.

### **Civil Society Enacted**

One way in which *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* could enact the ideals its writers professed was through scholarships they often advertised to send disadvantaged students to France to study. Sometimes advertised next to the aforementioned "Mười Tháng ở Pháp" column about a woman studying in Paris, written by Phạm Vân Anh, these scholarships were partially funded by Phủ Huỳnh Đình Khiêm and a group of retired alumni of the Bồn Quốc school in Saigon, currently

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> "Nữ lưu thư quân bị đông cửa: Cô Phan Thị Bạch Vân bị giải ra tòa án" *Hà Thành ngọc báo* no. 753 (February 12, 1930).



the Lê Quý Đôn high school. The two-part scholarship appeared to be quite competitive, reinforcing the fact that only a very select few students in Vietnam ever actually studied in the metropole. The application asked for a birth certificate, a writing sample, proof of graduation at the high school level, a doctor's examination, a resume, proof of financial need, and a written statement detailing what the applicant would do once the scholarship period was over.<sup>162</sup> These scholarships both reiterated *PNTV*'s oft-touted support of travel and study in France and their focus on "civil society" and aiding those in need. They also reiterated the values that *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* professed their readers should embody when they stated that each member of an "evolved, civilized country" must contribute to its development.<sup>163</sup>

Another step that the authors of *PNTV* took to enact civil society in Indochina was through poor houses and orphanages. Much like Yvonne Sarcey's *Maisons Claires*, *PNTV* ran a profile about an orphanage in Saigon with pictures and a description of the author's visit. The piece was directly addressed to *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*'s female readers, with the ending line reading *các bà nghĩ sao?* Or, what do you (women) think?<sup>164</sup> The pictures included in the piece showed orphaned and poor children at play, posed for the camera, as well as in the cafeteria and communal bedrooms. The authors described a new orphanage, opened only three months prior, which had toys, beds, clothes, and food for the 30 children in its care. This appears to have been in marked contrast to orphanages described as overwhelmed and filthy in Saigon only seven years later, in the journal *Phụ Nữ*.<sup>165</sup> The authors also described the orphanage as the doing of Madame Béziat, though with the cooperation of both Vietnamese and French women. The end of the article encouraged *PNTV*'s wealthy readership to help disadvantaged people in their own

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<sup>162</sup> "Việc cấp học-bổng cho học sinh nghèo sang Pháp" *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 83 (May 21, 1931).

<sup>163</sup> "Nước mình có người đàn bà như vậy không? Bà Yvonne Sarcey" *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 37 (January 16, 1930).

<sup>164</sup> "Viện Dục Anh ở Saigon" *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 85 (June 4, 1931).

<sup>165</sup> Thuy Lunh Nguyen, *Childbirth, Maternity, and Medical Pluralism in French Colonial Vietnam, 1880-1945* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2016), 197.

areas and mimic the work Béziat and others were undertaking, but reminding them that they should not forget the charitable contributions of the five most philanthropic Vietnamese women in the region, who had also contributed to the orphanage.<sup>166</sup>

This article about the orphanage, and the previously mentioned scholarships to study in France, represented echoes of Vietnamese desire to enact social organization that Alexander Woodside described in his study of late colonial urban life.<sup>167</sup> Accelerated development of urban spaces and middle classes resulted in calls for social organization that would “transform Vietnamese society” for the better.<sup>168</sup> This can be seen in many of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*’s articles. The periodical’s publisher and authors wanted to foster a readership that would be willing to enact positive social and urban change through civil society. Because this readership was most often assumed to be female, *PNTV* wished to shape the ideal Vietnamese woman as charitable and philanthropic. This lent itself to the individual profiles about charitable women, scholarships, and orphanages. One can also glean that there existed some tension as to how this ideal charitable woman should operate: would she derive her ideas from France, or perhaps other Vietnamese women? Though *PNTV* often expressed admiration for philanthropic Western women, they were careful to discuss other models to emulate.

### **Pan-Asianism vs. Western “civilization:” Who to emulate?**

Within the framework of internationally exceptional women, there existed some facets of tension between traditional culture and foreign ideals. In Chinese literature, the feminist novel *Huang Xiuqiu* featured the French heroine Madame Roland appearing before a Chinese woman

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<sup>166</sup> The women were: Đốc Phủ Thu, Bác Vật Lang, Trang Sư Trịnh Định Thảo, Đốc Tư Nhã, and Cao Thị Cường in “Viện Dục Anh ở Saigon” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 85 (June 4, 1931).

<sup>167</sup> Alexander Woodside, “The Development of the Social Organizations in Vietnamese Cities in the Late Colonial Period” *Pacific Affairs* 44 (1971): 42.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

protagonist to lend her “modern knowledge and feminist ideas” through embroidering patterns.<sup>169</sup> In the novel, the idea of international sisterhood and harmony encountered challenges as Huang Xiuqiu, the female protagonist, enjoyed an uneasy relationship with Madame Roland. This tension demonstrates that even relationships borne of desires for mutual understanding and cultural exchange may become strained through cultural chauvinism and gulfs too wide to be crossed. The chief takeaway from this issue is that, though many aspects of female exceptionalism held universal appeal, the ideal woman’s Western template did not always agree with women in Vietnam and China. In China, writers attempted to cross these cultural gulfs and power imbalances by making their European characters speak Chinese, thus enabling readers to more easily come “to terms with the West...with modernity.”<sup>170</sup> This does not detract from the importance and profundity of international engagement, through female excellence, at this time. However, it casts aside the myth of universal sisterhood and displays the unique changes Vietnamese women made in their use of the New Woman ideal. This became most pronounced when Vietnamese female writers discussed their perceptions of Western morality.

Although many of the women *PNTV* profiled were Western, the newspaper’s authors were not afraid to discuss the moral shortcomings of “Western” society. Vietnamese women understood some of the hypocrisy intrinsic to the Western civilizing mission. This can be seen in the “Mười Tháng ở Pháp” column that Phạm Vân Anh wrote. In the January column, Phạm Vân Anh demonstrated her investigative flair as she met with and discussed alcoholism with leaders of a temperance group in Paris.<sup>171</sup> Though she began her article citing the many accomplishments and positive aspects of France, she peppered her article with bitter comparisons

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<sup>169</sup> Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>171</sup> “Mười Tháng ở Pháp – Hội cự rượu” *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* no. 38 (January 23, 1930).

of the alcohol monopoly in Indochina and the state of alcoholism in the metropole. Most pointed were her references to Auguste Raphael Fontaine, the “primary beneficiary” of any profits from Indochina’s alcohol monopoly after 1902.<sup>172</sup> While the alcohol monopoly was widely unpopular in French Indochina, Anh’s mention of A.R. Fontaine, with implicit support for the boycott of alcohol, was bold. Complex issues regarding censorship (it was often strict for Vietnamese publications, like *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, but could be avoided if publishers and advertisers had money or knew the “right” people)<sup>173</sup> would have made Anh’s article difficult to work around or even publish. Furthermore, Anh told readers about her description of the monopoly to the leaders of the temperance group, and their wish for her to give a speech on the subject to a wider audience. She ended her article with a cutting remark referencing the French civilizing mission in Indochina and the irony of their problems with alcoholism in France.

While the issues that Anh pointed out in her temperance article represented some of the negative aspects of French society, this did not stop *PNTV* from continuing to advertise study in the metropole and advocate for a lifestyle comprised of aspects of French culture. Phạm Vân Anh’s article shows the complexity of Vietnamese women’s outlooks surrounding women in France and other Western countries. This can also be seen in the newspaper’s profile about Lady Rama Rao. As previously discussed, the article profiling Rama Rao mentioned some of the failings of Western women and held up Indian women like Rama Rao as additional models for Vietnamese women to emulate. Trịnh Dục Tú was another non-Western woman to whom Vietnamese women could look, though there were others. Perhaps we can read these conflicting outlooks as *PNTV*’s belief that ideal Vietnamese women should look to a variety of places for inspiration. It appears that as long as the women held some aspect of “modernity,” either

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<sup>172</sup> Gerard Sages, “State, enterprise and the alcohol monopoly in colonial Vietnam” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 43 (2012): 147.

<sup>173</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 48.

aesthetically or intellectually, possessed a form of daring, or challenged tradition in some way, the female writers in *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* wanted to write about them so that Vietnamese women (and men) would become aware. It is also important to note that Vietnamese women could look amongst themselves for examples of ideal women. As mentioned in Thạch Lan's article, women such as Phạm Thị Bạch Vân could find themselves lifted to the status of a prominent and important woman within Indochina. This was especially true if these women engaged in literary pursuits and ran in the same circles as the women of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*. Vietnamese women were not only looking to foreign countries for inspiration, but highlighted fellow Vietnamese women when it appeared warranted. Perhaps it can be said that, as more and more news came to be disseminated about international women, Vietnamese women effectively emulated their strengths and retained their own "morals" in a way that became both global and Vietnamese.

### **The Concept of Indochina and Tourism**

Another important aspect of ideal womanhood was her engagement with aspects of modernity, namely tourism. Sometimes next to Phạm Vân Anh's "10 Months in France" column was an advertisement to see *Đế Thiên Đế Thích*, or Angkor Wat.<sup>174</sup> Organized by *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, the advertisement boasted of a five-day trip from Saigon to Phnom Penh and, finally, to Siem Reap and Angkor's ruins. While the newspaper's readers could not often afford the expense to travel to France, they may have been able to pay the 45\$ for a five-day travel package to Cambodia. These advertisements emphasized the beauty, luxury, and cleanliness of both the sites of travel and modes of transportation. In *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, the mode of transportation advertised was often a car. In Vietnam, travel advertisements, travel stories, and travel guides were prevalent at this time, between the 1920s and 1930s, as more and more Vietnamese moved

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<sup>174</sup> "Cuộc du lịch Saigon – Angkor," *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* 16 January, 1930.

throughout Indochina. These advertisements, stories, and guides showcased a range of destinations, some international and others domestic, specifically within Indochina. As an emerging Vietnamese middle class grew (as discussed, chiefly a result of heightened French investment into Indochina after the First World War),<sup>175</sup> its members were eager to partake in tourism. These tourist guides and advertisements began to emphasize domestic tourism as a reasonable and attractive activity for urban dwellers. The significance of domestic tourism to women can be seen through *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*'s attempts to organize a trip. This ties into the French creation of Indochina, as well as Vietnamese commitment to this creation.<sup>176</sup> Through domestic tourism to various parts of Indochina, Vietnamese women could demonstrate their possession of disposable income, cosmopolitanism, and knowledge of areas to which they believed they belonged.

### **Final Thoughts on International Women**

As Vietnamese women began to view themselves as a special social category and engage with more forms of written and print culture, we can see a vocal minority of wealthy and educated Vietnamese women who formed a specific ideal for themselves. This ideal woman represented what many of them already were: educated, focused on a number of charitable causes, and part of the middle and upper classes. The ideal woman's aspect of exceptionalism was what separated her from many of the women working as journalists and writers during this period. While this ideal, promoted within the pages of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, may not have led to a

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<sup>175</sup> Trần Thanh Hương places the development of a distinct Vietnamese middle class in the 1920s, cited in Van Nguyen-Marshall, Lisa Welch Drummond, and Daniele Belanger, *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam* (New York: Springer, 2012), 3. See also: Alexander Woodside, "The Development of the Social Organizations in Vietnamese Cities in the Late Colonial Period" *Pacific Affairs* 44 (1971) for information about this middle class and engagements with civil society.

<sup>176</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 4.

host of Vietnamese women flying planes or winning Nobel Prizes, its importance should be given scholarly attention.

Though there is a large amount of literature written by Vietnamese men which addressed the idea of new and modern women, little has been done to look at what women were writing about themselves. Analysis of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, among other literature written by women, partially remedies this issue. Although these women represented a very small porportion of French Indochina's population, they were an important aspect of Cochinchina's print culture during the interwar years and the Vietnamese *bourgeois* class. Their idea of what the quintessential woman should look like, or how she should behave, is important in analysis of the "Woman's Question" during this time period.

The numerous profiles focusing on individual and foreign women, both Western and non-Western, exhibits the cosmopolitan and global nature of the ideal woman in the minds of these Vietnamese women during the late colonial period. Furthermore, their attempts to engage with these women, either through translation or direct conversation, shows a geniune desire to become part of an international class of exceptional women. Enacting civil society and engaging in philanthropic pursuits within Indochina drives this point home. Far from simply plucking individual women from international newspapers and placing them in a Vietnamese context, women ensconced within Saigon's vivid print community during the 20s and 30s worked to make such nebulous ideals a reality.

This wealth of information from *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* could only be aided with translations and analysis of contemporary novels written by women. Though they are rare and difficult to come by, Phan Thị Bạch Vân wrote at least two novels before 1930 (*Giương Nữ Kiệt* and *Tinh Thần Phụ Nữ*) and Nguyễn Thị Kiệt, "Manh Manh," composed poetry and wrote in a number of

periodicals around the same time. Hopefully, continued research will bring out their perspective surrounding what was a highly vibrant period for much of the world.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on the creation of an ideal Vietnamese woman during the late colonial period. Specifically, in the second chapter, I have analyzed the advent of manufactured “historical” heroines, namely the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu, and their ties to nationalist discourse in newspapers and other literature before and after World War I. Precolonial engagement with these women consisted of little detail within official documents and, in the case of the Trung Sisters, people prayed to them out of pity and their ability to provide rain.<sup>177</sup> The purveyors of this discourse sought to consider the role of women in national struggle and, further, to provide Vietnamese examples of heroic women. French heroines were admired in Indochina, due to successful French campaigns encouraging European gender distinctions, as well as the popularity of heroines in the metropole; Penny Edwards has called this a “subtle saturation” within Cambodia specifically, but this can also be applied to the rest of Indochina.<sup>178</sup> However, as time wore on, Vietnamese heroines began to replace the popularity of the symbol of Marianne and the bravery Joan of Arc. The function of Vietnamese heroines was similar to the function national heroines played in France, though with marked distinctions. National heroines were popular in Europe and America during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century as important ideals, which placed the concept of the nation onto a female form. The introduction of “national” Vietnamese heroines was also an aspect of building nationalism within Indochina. Yet, for Vietnamese nationalists, namely those such as Phan Bội Châu and a number of the writers working on *PNTV*, they wished that their readers would commemorate the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu as figureheads for Vietnamese struggle against colonizers, not simply as figureheads for the

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<sup>177</sup> Olga Dror, *Cult, Culture, and Authority* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>178</sup> Penny Edwards, “‘Propagender’: Marianne, Joan of Arc and the Export of French Gender Ideology to Colonial Cambodia (1863-1954),” in *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* ed. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), 116, 118.

“nation.” This eventually grew into a national narrative that emphasized constant struggle against colonization, though much of Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin did not endorse this narrative at this time. The desire to commemorate and remember heroines is clear in *PNTV*'s special issue dedicated to the Trung Sisters. One of the most intriguing aspects of nascent interest in Vietnamese heroines was the conflict between military valor and a certain level of obedience. In Phan Bội Châu's writings, the Trung Sisters were not portrayed as overtly martial; yet, according to his play and other summarizations of their military feats before their deaths, they were by nature martial. Their *raison d'être* (or their very reason for being plucked from “history” and touted as heroines), at least within Châu's literary canon, primarily hinged upon their military skill when first facing Chinese foes. Yet they did not come to their military prowess willingly and not before their male relatives had ceased to be viable options. They did not take charge in defiance of male family members' wishes; though they did take charge in the face of male cowardice, dying after their soldiers deserted in the face of Han military might. This suggests an intermediary ideal for Vietnamese women that emphasized obedience to male family members and love for the “nation” to the point of death. Sacrifice in the name of country was a marked change from Confucian and precolonial ideals communicated to women. Though the aspects of obedience to husband, father, and son remained, the new aspect of patriotic love brought Vietnamese heroines into struggles for national determination. The change was not necessarily positive for women; in reality, it presented Vietnamese readers with heroines who died violent deaths in service to “Vietnam.” This communicated, in part, that Vietnamese women were expendable in service to the nation and valued for this service.

Additionally, in the third chapter, I have discussed the popularity of the cosmopolitan international woman, who was particularly well liked among the women who wrote for *Phụ Nữ*

*Tân Văn*. While there were other ideals to which women could aspire at this time, women's newspapers and the urban middle classes came to discuss many different women abroad who were well educated, philanthropic, well traveled, or sophisticated in some fashion. This was a phenomenon common around the world, especially with the existence of the "New Woman" and "Modern Girl." The Vietnamese appeared to be more enamored of the New Woman and her association with education and nationalism; however, advocates for this cosmopolitan ideal retained aspects of the Modern Girl, namely her fashionable tastes, interest in European products, and proclivity for travel. This fondness for women who flew airplanes, became lawyers and doctors, or wrote award-worthy literature shows an interest in exceptionalism and a self-conscious desire to exist within the ranks of exceptional women around the world. Though the writers of articles profiling a specific woman such as Amy Johnson or Selma Lagerlof did not expect their female readers to begin flying planes and producing Nobel Prize-worthy literature, they nevertheless wished to expose their readership to these women and their singular accomplishments. In reality, journalists were fostering knowledge of the international community and women's part in that community. This meant that Vietnamese women, too, could earn a place on the global stage and represent Indochina to the rest of the world.

The truly international scope of this model cannot be emphasized enough. Vietnamese women were not only looking to the metropole and America for women to highlight; rather, they looked toward other colonies such as India and compared themselves to women in China as well. This is clear in the profiles written about Lady Rama Rao from India and Trịnh Dục Tú from China. In some ways, the women of *PNTV* brought readers' attention to these women as alternatives to European and American women. This is not necessarily because journalists found women's credentials and accomplishments in Europe and America lacking. This had more to do

with writers' awareness of the differences between Vietnamese culture and common precepts within "Western" culture. Further, some writers highlighted women in non-Western areas in order to raise the idea of differing "moral" norms between places such as India and the metropole. This probably had something to do with the same discomforts that prevented many Vietnamese intellectuals from wholeheartedly endorsing the Modern Girl and flapper aesthetics popular in other parts of the world at this time. The creators of the model international woman in Vietnamese newspapers wished to place emphasis upon (those they perceived as) morally upright women who engaged in exceptional feats of intelligence, bravery, and resolve. For better or worse, women in the international arena who chose to push the limits of sexual and gender distinctions did not catch the eye of *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn's* writers. This could have been due to the significant presence of men on *PNTV's* editorial board, as well as the newspaper's head being a married woman whose husband also enjoyed creative direction for the periodical. *PNTV* was not a newspaper comprised of young, single women. The only period in which the newspaper came close to this was when Nguyễn Thị Kiệm and Phạm Thị Bạch Vân gained some power within the newspaper's ranks in the early 1930s. Therefore, we should not see the lack of representation of the Modern Girl and flapper aesthetics as proving Vietnamese culture prudish or inherently puritanical. Rather, we can surmise that *PNTV* simply did not advocate women's sexual liberation. Perhaps, were we to analyze other women's writings, we would find more radical sentiments. Yet none of this disregard for the Modern Girl makes Vietnamese regard for the New Woman insignificant. Overall, *PNTV's* interest in exceptional women around the world showed a desire to engage with and become part of an international female community.

We should consider whether or not this desire for engagement with global affairs was heartfelt or rather a self promotion of sorts; perhaps these articles were a method of

demonstrating one's own knowledge to a wide audience. While I do believe that the women writing articles in *PNTV* were interested in joining the ranks of exceptional women throughout the world, there is the possibility that writers wished to promote their cosmopolitan outlooks as simple pretension. Though these authors' true motivations cannot be known, the tone of their writings leaves open the chance that they were promoting an irregular assortment of foreign women in an attempt to appear informed. It is impossible to ascertain this, however, and the desire to appear informed on a wide range of international issues does not detract from the fact that Vietnamese newspapers *did* demonstrate awareness of major global events and figures during this period.

Though the sources I used were mostly from *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*, there exist a number of other sources that were written by Vietnamese women during the interwar years. These sources are difficult to come by; therefore, I have made use of more readily available newspaper articles. Were I to continue this line of inquiry, I would endeavor to translate and use some of the novels by Phạm Thị Bạch Vân, two of which I have mentioned before in this thesis (*Guong Nữ Kiệt* and *Tinh Thần Phụ Nữ*). I would also use Nguyễn Thị Kiệm's poetry, which earned her a place in the New Poetry Movement of the 1930s, and for which she embarked on the speaking tour that I described in the introduction of this thesis. I would also like to explore the potential ideals for women outside of urban city centers. Though documentation of this may not exist, as women in rural areas did not have the educational opportunities that women in cities did, there may be differences in female archetypes between women raised in village areas and women who grew up in Saigon and Hanoi. There were certainly differences in the way male writers portrayed female characters in stories about village life versus city life. We see this in the way Khải Hưng and Nhật Linh wrote the doomed self-sacrificing mother in *Anh Phải Sống*, or how Thạch Lam

presented the sweet market girl in *Cô Hàng Xén*. Compared to the wily and dishonest women in Nguyễn Công Hoan's *Người ngựa, ngựa người* and *Thế là vợ nó đi Tây*, the archetypal rural women are pure-hearted and obedient in an ideal display of femininity which worldly urban women could not appear to emulate or achieve. Further, it does not appear that these cosmopolitan female characters from large cities *wanted* to emulate the women who sacrificed their happiness and lives for the good of others. It would be beneficial to find female authors' perspectives surrounding this dichotomy and ascertain whether or not women authors would entertain more pluralist and diverse characterizations of women. Lastly, though I used sources in both Vietnamese and English, this study would benefit from use of sources in French or Chinese. Many women who worked in the newspaper village at this time used Vietnamese to express themselves; however, many still felt more comfortable using Chinese or French. As such, my study leaves these women out.

Future research should not only prioritize the viewpoints and opinions of Vietnamese women, but also further analyze the messages communicated to women through advertising, opinion articles, and educational literature. Very little literature has been produced looking into visual representation of modernity and the aesthetic choices of those producing and working around print culture in Indochina at this time. Especially outside of fashion and the *áo dài*, newspapers made specific artistic choices as they began to target middle and upper class women within their advertisements. Additionally, I believe scholars should continue to analyze exchange between the metropole and Vietnamese intellectuals; however, exchange between Vietnamese and intellectuals in other colonies could reveal new insight into the nature of news and international exchange during the interwar period.

The study of underrepresented actors in history is a difficult endeavor. Further, cultural codes for the ways that men and women are expected to behave – ideal traits of masculinity and femininity – can be so embedded within social fabric that they can appear impossible to separate and analyze. The presence of these issues (such as a lack of available sources or difficulty in accurately discussing cultural norms) does not mean that scholars should cease attempts to bring the perspectives of Vietnamese women into historical study. Rather, historians should make every effort to find and analyze what available sources do exist and purposefully seek out new perspectives in the study of gender within history.

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