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The Rise and the Fall of Rabindranath Tagore in Vietnam

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

Southeast Asian Studies

by

Chi P. Pham

June 2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Rise and the Fall of Rabindranath Tagore in Vietnam

by

Chi P. Pham

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Southeast Asian Studies
University of California, Riverside, June 2012
Prof. Mariam B. Lam, Chairperson

This thesis aims to explore the question of why Tagore's reception in Vietnam during the French colonial period was excluded and then selectively included into official Vietnamese cultural life today, inspired by the idea that power and knowledge are closely interconnected, so aptly summarized in Foucault's phrase "all will to truth is already a will to power" (in Merquior, 209). By way of a critical reading of these receptions (articles, news, photos and literary writings) in primary sources including newspapers, books and journals produced during the French colonial period (1885-1943), I will argue that they are manifestations of the colonial knowledge of "Annam-ness" produced by the French regime in order to gain control over Annam.

This thesis re-imagines the myth of Tagore in socialist cultural products by bringing to the table its revised origins in colonial period. The return of such colonial knowledge in current literary and political life, which is for the very different purpose of transnational collaborations, as Foucault says, "make[s] a mockery of the idea of

freedom” (in Merquior 117). The question is not about the individual freedom but about those who govern statements/knowledge and in what way they do this to constitute current politically acceptable propositions. Not many Vietnamese people know that the current knowledge of Tagore, brought up in connection with globalization, was neither a change of content nor a refutation of the legacy of colonial knowledge (cf. Merquior 112). Rather, the current appreciation of Tagore is the revision of the colonial knowledge of Tagore; the essence of the later has been retained, but terms are modified in accordance with the current discourse of globalization. The recollection of the knowledge of Orientalist Romanticism in Vietnamese textbooks and newspapers and in daily life is indicative of the “technology of power” of the socialist regime. The thesis is a postcolonial case study of colonial knowledge in Vietnam.

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Introduction

On June 21, 1929, Rabindranath Tagore, Indian writer, first Asian awardee of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913), made a stop-over in Saigon (Cochin China) and created literary and political discussions in contemporary Vietnam, at the time of French colony. This visit was finally recalled multiple times during an international conference on Rabindranath Tagore in Hanoi, November 2011: it had never been mentioned in official textbooks of literature and history in Vietnam during the socialist regime, from 1945 to the present. Generations of Vietnamese academics have assumed that the reception of Tagore began in 1961 with *An anthology of Tagore's poems (on the anniversary of 100th birthday of Tagore)*, a 53-page anthology of Tagore's poems translated by The Association of Vietnamese Writers (Literature Publishing House), and *R Tagore*, a publication of Cao Huy Đình and Lacon of the National Commission of Social Sciences (Literature Publishing House). *Văn học Ấn Độ [Indian Literature]* (Luu Đức Trung), the only textbook of Indian literature for Vietnamese students, first published in 1982, does not refer to the fact that Tagore was literarily and politically known in Vietnam in the colonial period.

This thesis aims to explore the question of why Tagore's reception¹ in Vietnam during the French colonial period was excluded and then selectively included into official Vietnamese cultural life today, inspired by the idea that power and knowledge are closely interconnected, so aptly summarized in Foucault's phrase 'all will to truth is already a will to power'. By way of a critical reading of different kinds of reactions (articles, news, photos and literary writings) toward Tagore and his works in primary sources including newspapers, books and journals produced during the French colonial period (1885-1943), I will argue that they are manifestations of the colonial knowledge of "Annarn-ness" produced by the French regime in order to gain control over Annam.

This thesis re-imagines the myth of Tagore in socialist cultural products by bringing to the table its revised origins in the colonial period. The return of such colonial knowledge in current literary and political life, which is for the very different purpose of transnational collaborations and global economic immersion, as Foucault says, "makes a mockery of the idea of freedom" (in Merquior 117). The question is not about individual freedom but about those who govern statements/knowledge and in what ways they do this to constitute current politically acceptable propositions. Not many Vietnamese people know that the current knowledge about Tagore, brought up in connection with globalization is neither a change of content nor a refutation of the legacy of colonial

¹ The term "reception" used in the thesis implies two meanings: one is a real function held by the French government in cooperation with Vietnamese intellectuals to welcome Tagore in 1929. The second meaning, in some way, shares Hall's theory of reception, which focuses on active responses from the host part (of French officials, Vietnamese intellectuals, Indian and labor people – "audience") regarding Tagore's visit, and Tagore's texts and ideologies ("a text"). These responses include negotiation" and "opposition" based on "specific historical context" ("discussive formation") and cultural and political background of the "audience" (Stuart Hall, 44-7)

knowledge (cf. Merquior 112). Rather, the current appreciation of Tagore is a revision of the colonial knowledge of Tagore; the essence of the latter is retained, but the terms are modified in accordance with current discourses of globalization. A recollection of the knowledge of Orientalist Romanticism in Vietnamese textbooks and newspapers and in depictions of daily life is indicative of the “technology of power” (Foucault, “March 17, 1976” 242) of the socialist regime. That power and that knowledge, as described by Foucault, “dovetails into it [the former disciplinary technology], integrate it, modify to some extent and above all, use it by short of inflating it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques” (Foucault, “March 17, 1976” 242). This thesis is postcolonial case study of colonial knowledge in Vietnam.

The thesis describes the controversial presentations of Tagore in Cochinchina and Tonkin (respectively currently Southern Vietnam and Northern Vietnam) (Section 1), and it analyzes the supposed expectations of the construction of the Orientalized figure of Annam, which was crafted as the home of lofty religions and therefore the land of spirituality, reinforced constantly in colonial discourse and institutions (newspapers, education system, the media, and the flux of political and economic ideologies) in the reception of Tagore (Section 2). Members of the Tagore welcoming event included French officials, French-educated natives and Tagore himself, all of whom appear to have lamented the disappearance of the cultural values of Annam, which had some of their roots in Indian civilization. That supposition, which is resonant with the plan to restore the “declining native Powers!” (Roberts 421) – or Indianess and Asianness - and led by the French colonial government of Indochina under the leadership of the Governor-

General, General Pierre Pasquier, in 1929, negotiated the growing sentiment of lost "Oriental" values among Western academics since the late eighteenth century. As will be later explained, the construction of Tagore's reception failed in offering practical ideological trajectories for rising nationalisms (Section 3), but succeeded in promoting and maintaining a kind of spirituality or intellectual "numbness" around notions of Annam and notions of the Oriental in literary products. Writings and visual descriptions of Tagore, translations of Tagore's literary works and even photographs were mostly imagined and illusionary, and focused intensely on Tagore's penetrating gaze and his eyes, rather than explicating his speeches (Section 4). The recollection of Tagore's visit, circulations of a colonial knowledge of the Oriental in the official literature of present-day Vietnam and the transcendence of colonial knowledge in everyday life is instructive in addressing Foucault's question of the capacity of revolution to bring about individual freedom/liberty and in an assessment of the enmeshment of knowledge and power in various social regimes.

Section 1:

The Presence of Tagore in Cochinchina and Tonkin in the French Colonial Period

Through newspaper discourse produced in the French colonial period, this section of the thesis creates the “regime of truth” (Foucault) of the presence of Tagore that pervaded intellectual life in Vietnam.

The “already said” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 110) that was excluded from the socialist regime of Vietnam is that Tagore was known among Saigon intellectuals in the early 1920s. Nguyễn An Ninh and his newspaper *La Cloche Fêlée* rarely missed a chance of quoting Tagore and other Indian political leaders calling for the “national cause.” In the second striking public talk² since the time of his return to Saigon after two years studying law at Sorbonne University (1923), “L’idéale de la Jeunesse Annamite” [Aspiration of Vietnamese Youth] was delivered on the 15th of October 1923 for the Association for the Encouragement of Study. In it, Ninh quoted Tagore and other “great Indians” to make Annamite people more aware of their own role in the nationalist project. In the first volume of *La Cloche Fêlée*, January 7 1924, an epigraph by Tagore was placed at the top right corner of the first page in big and bold letters:

“Those who love to dominate foreign races leave their true liberty and humanism for the support of mechanics, which is necessary to keep other people in slavery.

² The Governor Cognacq, who was intrigued by Ninh’s reputation for his confrontation to colonial authorities, attended the talk personally. After the talk, Cognacq warned Ninh that his aspiration for intellectual roles in the national cause would never succeed, as “this country does not need intellectuals! It is too simple.” Ninh confronted the Governor saying that the talk is to prepare for intellectuals to understand their country better. (Peycam)

On the other hand, the degradation of personal prides and interest damages true humanism. Consequently, there would be terrible penalties in the aftermath.”³

The article “A un Confrère du Nord” issued on March 17, 1924, dwelled on Tagore’s ideas of race, nationalism and internationalism. In a long article, entitled “La Sagesse du cochon” [Wisdom of the Animal] on November 26, 1925, Nguyễn An Ninh praised Tagore for his thoughts about Brahma and human harmony. *La Cloche Fêlée* also tracked the anti-colonial activities of Tagore. The March 24 1924 edition, for instance, contained a reprint from the publication *L’Information*, “Rab Tagore est Attendu en Chine,” an article about Tagore’s reception by Chinese students, dealing with the speech by Tagore in which he discusses refusing the title “Sir” granted by the British government, an upheaval in the Punjab, the patriotic activities of Tagore and the expectations of Hindu groups for Tagore’s visit to Saigon. The news brief, “Rab. Tagore sera à Pékin Fin Avril” (On March 31, 1924), provided information on the arrival of Tagore to Peking, his companions, and the names of Chinese leaders who would welcome him.

The news that Tagore would make a stop-over in Saigon on his way back from China in 1924 also reached *La Cloche Fêlée*. On April 7, 1924 and April 21, 1924, announcements were made about the visit of Tagore to Saigon. The first announcement was made by Hindu societies in Saigon, probably the most excited to welcome Tagore, claiming that Tagore had left Calcutta and would make a visit to Saigon. The second

³ This is my translation from French to English.

claimed that the reception for Tagore in Saigon was already organized, but that he would not visit Saigon due to his health problems after his public speech in Hong Kong. The expectation that Tagore would visit Saigon must also have been the main motivation for two short studies that were published on Tagore. The first, “Patriotisme chez Tagore” by Nguyễn Tịnh, filled five columns of *La Cloche Fêlée* on June 16, 1924; the French version of the essay “Mon École” [My School] by Tagore occupied several pages of *La Cloche Fêlée*, on May 19 and June 2, 1924.

Also in *Nam Phong tạp chí*, a journal in Tonkin set up by Governor Albert Sarraut, a series of articles about Tagore was published in celebration of the news of his visit to Saigon. Volumes 83 and 84 (1924) contain the article “Một nhà đại thi sĩ Ấn Độ: ông R.Tagore” [The Great Indian Poet: Mr. Rabindranath Tagore] and the *quốc ngữ* version of Tagore’s speech, “Declaration of the East,” as well a response by Maurice Croiset, a medical doctor and a professor at the Sorbonne University. Volumes 93 and 94 in 1924 contain the article “Đất châu Á mới – hai nhân vật – hai sự nghiệp” [The New Asian Land – Two Characters – Two Careers] by Sylvain Lévi, who was the first foreign lecturer at Visva-Bharata and who had a “really intimate [relationship] with Tagore and his circle” (Tagore, *Selected Letters* 353).

Tagore appears to have been better known in Saigon than in Tonkin. Whereas Phạm Quỳnh and his northern journal *Nam Phong tạp chí* published some introductory articles about Tagore, Nguyễn An Ninh and his colleagues at *La cloche Fêlée* assumed that their readers in Saigon did not need an introduction to Tagore and his work. While *Nam Phong tạp chí* paid much attention to classical French writings that were being

taught in French schools to reinforce French patriarchy, such as Corneille, La Fontaine, Moliere, Voltaire, Auguste, Paul Bourget, Baudelaire, Lamartine, Musset, and Vigny (Marr 110-11; Quỳnh 2007; Thao 167-80), the journal introduced Tagore as a new person. This is different from *La Cloche Fêlée* of Nguyễn An Ninh, who as far back as 1923 paid considerable attention to contemporary French intellectuals such as Jean Jaurès, Romain Rolland⁴ and André Gide⁵ (David Marr 162), strong advocates of Tagore in particular and of contemporary Indian nationalisms in general. Again and again, *La Cloche Fêlée* published and quoted Romain Rolland, a Gandhian,⁶ a close friend of Tagore, and someone keenly interested in Tagore's idea of a university.⁷ André Gide, the literary adviser of the publishing house of Gallimard to which Tagore had given the sole rights to publish French translations of his writings, translated and published a number of Tagore's writings, including *Gitanjali (L'Offrande Lyrique)*, Paris, 1913) and *Post Office (Amal et la Lettre du Roi)*, Paris, 1922).⁸ The similarities between Gide's novel *La Porte Étroite* (first published in French in 1909, an English translation - *Strait is the Gate* - in 1924, a *quốc ngữ* translation in 1937 (Thủy 5), and Tagore's *Nashtanirh*

⁴ In *La Cloche Fêlée* in February 1924, the long essay titled "The Opening of the New" (Au seuil de l' an nouveau) is a dedicated discussion about Romain Rolland's political thoughts. Nguyễn Tịnh, a regular contributor of *La Cloche Fêlée*, in his article "Nationalism and Internationalism" (Nationalisme et Internationalisme) on December 24, 1924, based his arguments on Romain Rolland's quotations.

⁵ Gide was mentioned in 1923 by Nguyễn An Ninh. However, only in 1943 was the first Vietnamese translation of Gide's *La Porte Étroite* issued. The first communication between the translator Pierre Đỗ Đình (Đỗ Đình Thạch) and Pierre was in 1928.

⁶ *La Cloche Fêlée* quotes C. Remon's Romain Rolland's excellent writing of Gandhi's biographies (*La Libération de Mahatma Gandhi*, July 14, 1924).

⁷ Romain Rolland said, "people see in Tagore only the Sage, the educationist, the prophet and they will not see the Poet" (Pierre Fallon, in *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary* 315).

⁸ It is said that Gide unfairly competed with Marie Sturge Moore to take over the translation of *The Crescent Moon*. Tagore had to write a letter to Sturge Moore suggesting ways to negotiate with Gide in order to get Gide's cooperation to publish *The Crescent Moon* that Marie Sturge Moore had translated into French (Tagore, *Selected Letters* 272).

(*The Broken Nest*), *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)*, and other works (Tagore, *Selected Letters* 379) are obvious, and it is no wonder that Tagore was to write to Gide in 1930, “I offer you my heartiest thanks for your book, *Strait is the Gate*... I feel intimately familiar with the atmosphere you have created in this story” (Tagore, *Selected Letters* 379).

Focusing on contemporary French intellectuals who were interested in Tagore, Saigon intellectuals, in particular the group around Nguyễn An Ninh and his *La Cloche Fêlée*, seems to have been far more familiar with Tagore than Phạm Quỳnh who with his *Nam Phong tạp chí* was more inclined to develop a curriculum for schools and formulate cultural and moral values for Annamites (Thao 167-80).

Another “moment of knowledge” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 112) around the figure of Tagore that failed to echo during the earlier period of the socialist regime of Vietnam is his visit to Saigon in June 1929, which at the time caused considerable uproar in Vietnam, involving colonial officials, journalists, politicians, and a variety of common people. A large amount of announcements and articles about Tagore and his visit found a place in both French and *quốc ngữ* newspapers in Saigon including *L’Écho annamite*, *Tribune Inchinoise*, *Đông Pháp thời báo*, *La Cloche Fêlée*,⁹ *Thần Chung*, *Công giáo đồng thịnh*, *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, and *Phụ nữ tân văn*. Among these magazines and newspapers, *Tribune Inchinoise* and *Đuốc Nhà Nam* were the official mouthpieces about the event, as their founders, respectively Bùi Quang Chiêu (1872-1945) and Dương Văn Giáo (1900-1945), were members of the official Welcome Committee. The articles and

⁹ Peycam categorized these newspapers as “mainstream” opposition papers (1926-1929).

photos that were published in *Tribune Inchinoise*, *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, *L'echo annamite* and *Thần Chung* make it possible to develop a clear picture of Tagore's visit, an event of political, economic and cultural importance in Saigon.

In late June 1929, Tagore did indeed stop over in Saigon on the way back from Canada where he had attended the Conference of the National Council of Education in Vancouver as a representative of India. In fact, after his stay in Canada, Tagore had spent a month in Japan giving lectures and interviews and when he prepared his return to India, representatives of the French Embassy had approached him to invite him to come to Indo-China and make a tour through the colony. Rabindranath's reaction was a very positive one; he thought he would be able to visit Angkor Wat. However, doctors in Japan strongly and secretly advised Chanda, Tagore's secretary, to make it impossible for him to visit Angkor given his brittle health, and the French Embassy was told to instruct Saigon to keep a visit to Angkor Wat out of the program.¹⁰ Tagore sailed for India in a French postal boat, *S.S. Angers* and reached Saigon at 11:30am on June 21, 1929.

The disciplinary character of colonial power was to be very visible and concrete in the way Tagore was received: efficient, well-organized, with clear restrictions. The Welcome Committee in Saigon reflected the colonial hierarchy: Honorary president, M. Béziat; President, Bùi Quang Chiêu; French-Vice President, Monribot; Hindu Vice-President, Xavier; Treasurer, Nguyễn Văn Cùa; and Secretary, Lê Trung Nghĩa. Bùi Quang Chiêu acted as the representative to the committee and was given the honor of welcoming Tagore in Saigon. Diệp Văn Giáp, the colonial counselor, offered Tagore and

¹⁰Supryia Roy, "Rabindranath Tagore: Stopover at Saigon" (Unpublished Papers of the Conference of R. Tagore in Hanoi, November 2011).

his companions a large villa at 35 Barbier Street, the government provided Tagore with cars, and “Bombay people” were responsible for his food. The committee had to meet at night (8.30pm) at the office of the Parti Constitutionaliste Indochinoise to determine the program for Tagore’s visit.¹¹

As programmed, the cabinet chef of the Cochin China government, Noueilhetas, and M. Samy, a Hindu, were at Nhà Bè Harbor to see the S.S. Angers come in to shore. Bùì Quang Chiêu and M. Béziat came later and warmly welcomed Tagore “on behalf of the Annamite”¹² in French in the first lounge of the ship, where Tagore took his first lunch in Cochin China. Tagore responded in English through a Mme. Palard, who had been invited by Chiêu to be the interpreter. Common people (“thiên hạ”) eagerly climbed up the ship to see Tagore and a white cloth banner reading “Welcome Rabindranath Tagore-Youth and Labor”¹³ hung in the harbor, visible to everyone. As for Tagore, he was dressed in black, wore a velvet cap, and, most impressive, his hair was snow white. A group of young people offered him a bouquet of flowers.

Today’s Vietnamese scholars are not aware of the fact that Tagore’s activities were strictly organized in a time-tabled program by the Welcome Committee. Colonial discipline was indeed tangible. The first day of Tagore’s visit was June 21, 1929. First, “To welcome Tagore, a Champagne party has been organized”¹⁴ at Hôtel de Ville at 6 pm. The party was attended by representatives of the Annamite, the Hindu and the

¹¹ *L’echo annamite*, «Chronique de Saigon: Reception de Rabindranath Tagore», June 17, 1929. “Reception de Rabindranath Tagore à Saigon and Programme de reception” June 20, 1929.

¹² “Rabindra Nath Tagore est arrive,” *Le Tribune Indchinoise*, Juin 21 1929.

¹³ This is my translation from French to English.

¹⁴ *Đuốc Nhà Nam* June 18 1929. There are many blank spaces in this article. Those might be consequences of censorship.

French communities as well as by representatives of journals and of governmental offices. Béziet¹⁵ bowed his head while welcoming Tagore on behalf of his city and gave a speech that focused on the appreciation of Tagore as the poet of a nation and the world, writing poetry that gave human beings the ability to release themselves from sorrows. Béziet's speech was in French; Kerjean translated it into English. A second reception was organized at the Theatre Principal at 9pm. Seats in the Theatre were filled with Indians, French and Annamese, although tickets for entry and back seats (trên chót) were respectively \$1.00 and \$0.50. Three public speeches were delivered, "Présentation du Rabindra Nath Tagore," "Address A. Ranbindra Nath Tagore," and "Traduction de l'allocution de Rabindra Nath Tagore," by Bùi Quang Chiêu, Dương Văn Giáo and Trần Văn Trị, respectively. The English speech of Tagore had been translated before the meeting, a French translation was read by Jacques Đức, and the *quốc ngữ* translation by Hồ Văn Nguon. According to reports, "As soon as Tagore entered the theatre, the audience seem[ed] to stop breathing... when listening to Tagore's speech, the audience was so quiet that the sounds of flying mosquitoes was audible."¹⁶ Both journalists of French and *quốc ngữ* were invited. At this party, representatives Lê Thành Lư, Huỳnh Phúc Yên (Focyane) and Trường Gia Kỳ Sanh (Trúc Viên) of Đảng Lao Động [the Labor Party] invited Tagore to give a speech to Vietnamese peasants. Tagore agreed tentatively. Bùi Quang Chiêu's disinterest in the invitation in his statement that Tagore's program was already fixed made the people of the Labor Party angry.

¹⁵ "Rabindra Nath Tagore est arrive" *Le Tribune Inchinoise*, June 21, 1929.

¹⁶ *Thần Chung* "Cuộc nghênh tiếp ông Tagore ở Saigon [The reception of Tagore in Saigon] (June 23-24, 1929)

On the second day,¹⁷ Tagore met the governor of Cochin China in the early morning. Tagore again mentioned his desire to visit Angkor Wat and he asked for some books about Indochina for his university.¹⁸ After 30 minutes, Tagore was taken by car to visit L' Ecole de poterie [College of Fine Art] in Biên Hòa. On this visit, he was accompanied by Jean Kerjean (secretary of Court de' Appel and interpreter), Trần Văn Kha (colonial counselor), Trần Khắc Nương (delegate of the Municipal Council), Tamby (cadastral commissioner), Hồ Văn Ngươn (representative of Annamite journalists), Chanda (secretary of the Poet) and several Hindu people. The chief of Biên Hòa province and the director of the college welcomed Tagore, guiding him through classes and showrooms to see artistic works in ceramic and bronze. Tagore bought a ceramic vase and two lampshades for his students in Santiniketan. He was particularly impressed with white stone vases painted with yellow flowers. At the end of the visit, Tagore signed the visitors' book of the College. Tagore's third activity was a visit to the tomb of Lê Văn Duyệt, a 19th Century mandarin who had rescued Christian missionaries. On his arrival, Annamite music was played at the gate to welcome him. Tagore did not join the tea party that had been organized by the administrators of the tomb; the journey to Biên Hòa over bad roads had tired him.

On the second day, Tagore was given a big champagne party in the Union Printing House, owned by the district chief, Nguyễn Văn Cửa. The owner, his employees and the members of the Welcome Committee stood in queue to welcome Tagore who talked with two Bengali workers. The visitor asked for a cup of coconut juice, and

¹⁷June 24, 1929.

¹⁸*Đuốc Nhà Nam* June 29, 1929.

showed great curiosity in Cửa's collection of ancient artistic items. The district chief offered Tagore a model of an Annamite battleship, red lacquered and trimmed with gold, as a gift.¹⁹ The photographer Khánh Kì took two photos of Tagore in Cửa's company. At 9pm later that evening, Tagore went to the Eden Cinema in Saigon.

The news that Tagore had worn a Vietnamese tunic on at least one of his visits occasionally appears on current internet newspapers (www.baomoi.com, www.tuotire.com) and in papers at conferences celebrating Tagore's birthday, but where and on what occasion he did so has never been made clear. In fact, on the third day, Tagore went to Catinat Street accompanied by Bùi Quang Chiêu, Bùi Đức Nhuận (the owner of *Phụ nữ Tân Văn*) and Lê Trung Nghĩa; he paid visits to several Bombay shops and one Annam textile shop. Wastamull, the owner of one of the Bombay textile stores, guided Tagore to see the Bombay shops on Catinat Street. Tagore bought the "essential objects" of Annam, a piece of brocade, and together with Nguyễn Đức Nhuận, he watched how a piece of satin was woven and dyed by Annamites. At Espagne Street, Tagore asked the tailor Trần Thái Nguyên to make an Annamite tunic for him; he was to use it on his third day in Saigon. The Annamite costume, a bright brocade shirt, white silk trousers, Gia Định shoes, and crepe hat made Tagore look like an old Annamite man. In "Rabindranth Tagore ghé viếng tòa báo Phụ nữ tân văn" [Tagore visits the editorial office of *Phụ nữ tân văn* newspaper], Nguyễn Đức Nhuận told his readers that he had expected that Tagore was as dark as other Indians he met, but as it turned out, he had "a white and smooth skin, high nose, broad forehead... his hands are elegant and noble, his fingers are

¹⁹ "Ba ngày thi sĩ R. Tagore ở Saigon." *Đuốc Nhà Nam* June 27, 1929.

white and round; he was born in a high class family; every day he composes poetry and plays music.”²⁰ Later at a reception hosted by the Chinese Chamber at the “Pagoda Cantonese”²¹ on Cây Mai Street, Chợ Lớn, Tagore had conversations with some members about the importance of Chinese knowledge for Asia and India.

Another memorable event on the third day that has never been mentioned among Vietnamese scholars is that Tagore was invited by Indians to participate in a religious ceremony of the Hindu community at the Chetty Pagoda. A group of Indians came to the Chamber’s reception and brought Tagore and his companions in a car decorated with flowers to the Pagoda for Lễ nhất châu diên Viện tàng thơ Murugananda Vasagasala [the opening ceremony of the Institute of Poetry Murugananda Vasagasala]. Tagore was invited to lead the ceremony along with Bùi Quang Chiêu and Lefebvre, Vice-President of Saigon. Garlands were offered to Tagore, Chiêu and Lefebvre; other members of the Welcome Committee were offered a flower. A girl named Kathéappa Thévarvin chanted a song by Passecarane, an Indian poet, to honor Tagore. The Indians gave Tagore a gift of 2101 piastres, which were placed in the middle of a tray of betel leaves. It was explained to him that the odd number was for good luck. Xavier, the Vice – President of the Pagoda’s Welcome Committee gave a talk. At the end of the day, Tagore met with the Governor General, Pierre Pasquie; they discussed the relations between East and West. The Governor General promised to send books about Indochina to Santiniketan.

²¹ *Phụ nữ tân văn*, July 4, 1929.

²² It is called Chùa Bà Thiên Hậu or Chùa Bà Chợ Lớn in Vietnamese. “Cantonese Pagoda” was built by Chinese people from Quanzhou in 1760.

When Tagore was back at his guest residence, representatives of Đảng Lao Động [Labor Party] came to see him and expressed their anger. Huỳnh Phúc Yên loudly blamed Tagore for not having given a speech to the Annamite peasants at the Theatre Thành Xương as he had promised. In response, Tamby, Tagore's representative, told the angry men that Tagore did not want to go to the theatre; instead, he was ready to give a talk at his house if the representatives of the Party would come and listen. It may have been fortunate that the interpreter did not translate the hostile reaction of Lê Thành Lư: "You should have a look at the people who had come to this land to suck the blood [of annamites]," "you should have shown gratitude to Annamite [labor], who offered you a great reception."²² The Labor Party people gave a warning that they would stop Tagore and Chiêu at the harbor to insult them in public.²³ Tagore enjoyed dinner at his home that evening and left Saigon at 9:30 pm. The final words of Tagore at the port before he left Saigon were:

The people of the Labor Party blamed me that I was favor of luxuries and ignorant of poverty and that I stayed in the house of a capitalist (Của) and did not come to those of poor people. It is an unfair judgment. I came to Của's house drinking a glass of champagne; they [Labor Party's representatives] also came there drinking champagne. While they could come there, so why could I not? ²⁴

Not only was news about Tagore's visit but also writings by Tagore and articles by Vietnamese about Tagore were published in Saigon newspapers. Bùi Quang Chiêu in

²² "Ngoài cuộc tiếp rước thi si Tagore vừa rồi" [Anecdotes marginal to the ceremony to welcome Tagore]. *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, July 2, 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

²³ "Ngoài cuộc tiếp rước thi si Tagore vừa rồi" provided additional stories and arguments about Tagore to clarify his non-political interest in the ceremony in Saigon.

²⁴ "Ngoài cuộc tiếp rước thi si Tagore vừa rồi." This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

21 volumes of *La Tribune Indchinoise* from March to June 1929 and the three-column article “Rabin Dranath Tagore” [Rabindranath Tagore] on June 17, 1929 recalled the trip to Tagore’s university at “9am on Wednesday in mid-January 1929,” and how he was attracted by the magic of Tagore and his high and bold figure. The sentences describing the university and Tagore are full of details; the author found the university a home of the world and Tagore a messenger of God. The fact that the French government persuaded Tagore to visit Indochina was also narrated in the article. *Phụ nữ tân văn* published the article “Ông Rabindranth Tagore” by Thạch Lan (June 27, 1929); written in poetic verse, it praised Tagore’s self-education and love of nature. Tagore’s poems were analyzed and compared with Nguyễn Du and Nguyễn Bình Khiêm’s poetry in an emotional and romantic tone. On October 30, 1930, *Phụ nữ tân văn* published an article about Santiniketan of Tagore, in which the dogmatic and backward teaching methods of Vietnam were criticized and new modes of education were suggested that allowed students to study in the open air instead of in an enclosed room. The article was embellished with two photos: one of Tagore teaching his students, the other of female students.

Writings by Tagore were also reprinted or translated in *quốc ngữ*. *La Tribune Indchinoise* on June 3 and 7, 1929 re-printed the long report by Tagore about his “Souvenirs de l’ He de Bali” [Memories of Bali] that had been published in *École française d'Extrême-Orient*. Tagore’s message about peace, unification of Asian and Western countries, and humanism in “la Religion du Poète” [Religion of the Poet] was also quoted and analyzed in a three-column article, entitled “Rabin Dranath Tagore”

[Rabindranath Tagore] on June 17, 1929. *Đuốc nhà Nam* translated Tagore's letter, "The Spirit of Freedom," sent from New York to his own countrymen. The *quốc ngữ* version of "Một vài tư tưởng của ông Tagore" [Some Thoughts of Tagore] in *Phụ nữ tân văn* dated July 4, 1929 was published concurrently with the French version.

Tagore's most important creative writings were mentioned by name, and an abstract was given for some of them. The three-column article "Rabin Dranath Tagore" [Rabindranath Tagore] on June 17, 1929 listed "the most famous" writings of Tagore that helped to beatify the Indian language and included "Cygne, L' Offrande Lyrique, la Jardinier d' Amour, le Maison et le Maude, le Jeane Lune, Souvenira, Mashi, la Corbella du fruit, la Fugitive, Poèmes, de Kabir, la Religion du Poète, [and] Personnalité."²⁵ The only complete translation is of the poem "Một đêm không ngủ [*A sleepless night*] in *Đuốc nhà Nam* [Torch of [Viet]nam], July 4, 1929.

In general, in the late 1920s, the intensive involvement of newspapers and organizations in representing Tagore and his visit shows that Tagore's visit was an event in the political and intellectual life of Saigon. This body of knowledge has been kept in silence since after the August Revolution of 1945.

Although, the "truth" – the knowledge of Tagore – in the 1930s and the early 1940s was not as dynamic as in the previous period, it was meaningful because of its transformation of genres and themes. Throughout this decade, the reception of Tagore tended to focus on his creative writings on apolitical topics. The weekly French-*Quốc ngữ* bilingual journal *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Tonkin), established in 1937 under the

²⁵ "Rabin Dranath Tagore". *La Tribune Indchinoise* June 17, 1929

motto of “West-East collaboration,” printed *quốc ngữ* versions of short stories by Tagore. These included “Cô láng giềng xinh đẹp của tôi (truyện ngắn của thi sĩ Ấn Độ Rabindranath Tagore viết bằng tiếng Anh)” [My Fair Neighbor, a Short Story Written in English by the Indian Poet Rabindranath Tagore] (July 17, 1937) and “Su-ba (truyện ngắn của nhà thi sĩ Ấn Độ Rabindranath Tagore viết bằng tiếng Anh)” [Suba, a Short Story by the Indian Poet Rabindranath Tagore] (July 24,1937). Both of these versions were translated from French by the director of the newspaper, Nguyễn Giang, the son of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, the former editor of *Đông Dương tạp chí* founded in 1914 by the Governor General Albert Sarraut.

In this final decade, the most intensive writing about Tagore as a poet is *Thi hào Tagore: Nhà đại biểu văn hóa Á Đông* [*The Great Poet – R. Tagore – The Representative of the East*] by Nguyễn Văn Hải (Tân Việt Publishing House, 1942). The book contains five chapters: Chapter 1 *Bengali Renaissances* (31 pages) is about cultural traditions and political situations of Bengal that influenced Tagore’s poetry; Chapter 2 *The Cradle of a Genius* (40 pages) discusses how family and education influenced Tagore’s career; Chapter 3 *Poems of Tagore* (112 pages) is about Tagore’s views on poetry; Chapter 4 *Thoughts of Tagore* (127 pages) investigates Tagore’s opinions on his devotion to humanity, the relations between humans and the universe, humans and God, and Eastern culture and Western civilization; Chapter 5 *The Institute of Peace* (30 pages) narrates Tagore’s policies on his international institute of peace, Santiniketan; and the book ends with a list of Tagore’s works in Bengali and French.

Current Vietnamese researchers, students and officers should have included the real and imagined knowledge of Tagore in colonial Vietnam in their research and administrative activities to promote the relationship between Vietnam and India, Vietnam and the world. Nowadays, all details of Tagore's visit, brief but telling, including the names of the Welcome Committee and the places he visited, remain silent as does all the information that comes with these details. The present day recollections of the reception of Tagore in the late French colonial period have been modified in such a way that no one realizes that even the short visit of an Indian poet could very well be interpreted as illustrative of the ways in which French colonials wielded power (and knowledge) over Cochin China and beyond.

Section 2: The Reception of Tagore and the Colonial Construction of the Native

Figure – the “Order of Power” (Foucault)

It is currently constitutionalized belief that Tagore was appreciated for his considerable effort to make old age Eastern values such as pacifism and world harmony known in the Western world (Thục 359; Unpublished Papers of the Conference of R. Tagore in Hanoi, November 2011). However, as Foucault points out, all constitutions of knowledge have problems of power, whose technologies can be examined by “historical contextualization;” so, one needs to focus not only on the knowledge but the historical framework within which the knowledge is constituted (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 117). Tagore’s visit and the reception of Tagore in colonized Vietnam, as will be explained, was constituted in the historical context of the colonial construction of the figure of the native – the Oriental, which was supposed to be religious and spiritual (Hay 4). To explain, the thesis offers a close reading of the colonial discourses of Tagore’s visit, which were culturally, religiously and literarily oriented, and contextualizes them in the colonial projects of media, education and religion in bringing Annam back to “the light of its own past” (Roberts 419).

The French colonization of Indochina, according to Stephen H. Roberts in *The History of French Colonial Policy 1870-1925*, had two periods or forms. The first stage was based on assimilation, which involved the destruction of native cultures; the second stage starting in 1897, following the liberal teaching of Paul Bert and de Lanessan, was based on association, and realizing the “native powers” (421). The policy of association was put into practice by the Governor-General Albert Sarraut (1911-13 and 1917-19).

The reason that made Sarraut “a popular administrator so far as the indigenous people were concerned” (Lam 10) was his emphasis on “the native view-point,” and the natives’ own cultures and institutions (Roberts 471, Peycam 2007, Lam 10). Phạm Quỳnh, the most influential writer at the time, in his speech to students of the Colonial Schools in Paris who would become administrators of French colonies, eulogized Sarraut in stating that with his appreciation of native cultures, Sarraut “has conquered for ever the heart of Vietnamese” (Lam 11).

Although after Sarraut, other governors-generals followed the policies of *La politique indigène, c'est la conservation de la race* [The Colonial Policy is to Maintain the Native Race] (a book written by Sarraut) and the book “was also warmly received by the indigenous people of Indochina” (Lam 10). It is undeniable that the “native culture” was also a “regime of truth” ordered by the colonial power. Colonial newspapers, religions, educations and other cultural, political, administrative and economical activities were built to embed specific cultural aspects as the truth of the native – of Asian origin. Such accepted truths were religiously, spiritually, and morally oriented.

Tagore’s visit, which was arranged by the Governor-General and members of the Colonial Council in Cochin China, were among cultural and political activities that were reinforced by the colonial power to build the discourse of an Asian essence.

First, the calendar of Tagore’s visit in Saigon was bound to traditional cultural activities rather than in economic and political fields. Tagore mostly went to temples and pagodas regardless of indigenous, Chinese or Indian origin (the Tomb Lê Văn Duyệt, “Pagoda Cantonese,” Chetty Pagoda). The committee also arranged for Tagore to attend

events promoting art and religion in different communities in Saigon such as l' Ecole de poteric [College of Fine Art] in Biên Hòa, the cinema with films about the cultures of Tonkin and the opening function of the Institute of poetry, Murugananda Vasagasala.

“The disciplinary power” of the colonizer over the native seems to have operated in the way that the intellectuals of Saigon’s “moderate newspapers” (Peycam 120) intensively embellished the essence of religiousness and the morality embodied by Tagore. They tended to gaze at Tagore, himself, as the essence of the Oriental and promoted cultural similarities between Indian culture embodied by Tagore and Annamites to indicate that India is Annam’s cultural and moral root. The photo “Chân dung Rabin Dranath TAGORE mặc y phục Annam, đầu bịt khăn đen, mình bận áo dài” [Tagore in Annam Dress] was reprinted in two newspapers *Đuốc Nhà Nam* (June 27, 1929) and *Phụ nữ tân văn* newspaper (July 4, 1929). Nguyễn Đức Nhuận, the chief editor of *Phụ nữ tân văn* and a member of the reception committee, expressed his special interest in the Annam dress that Tagore wore:

Saigon people were interested in and surprised at the offer Tagore had made; he wanted to take a walk on Saigon streets in Annam dress... Immediately the next morning, on the crowded streets of Saigon, there was a big Indian with white hair and beard and dressed in a Vietnamese bright brocade tunic, white silk trousers, Gia Dinh shoes, and crepe hat walking peacefully; he looked as if he was a real Saigoner.²⁶

²⁶ Military People: <http://www.qdnd.vn/QDNDsite/vi-VN/61/43/6/36/36/82822/Default.aspx>. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

The speech by Dương Văn Giáo at the function also stressed that India was the cultural origin of all human beings:

European researchers were surprised to realize that India was the placenta of many countries; it is the resource upon which great characters can base their great ideologies. In this part of Asian, our nation never forgets its foundations including China and India. We have known each other for a long time. We are indebted to your moral lessons and knowledge (art, philosophy, literature, etc), which are still evident in our culture.²⁷

The *quốc ngữ* poetic lines in *Đuốc Nhà Nam* issued on July 4 referred to Tagore as a mandarin hero according to Confucianism ideology:

Những nghe đồn thổi bấy nay	I have heard of you for a long time.
Mà đến bây giờ mới thấy đây	Only now can I see you here. You are the
Một vị tinh khôi trời cõi Á	star of the Asia.
Ngàn thu không hổ tiếng râu mày”	Thousands of autumns you deserve to have
	“brow and beard” ²⁸

The lines remind people of the belief that Tagore was the essence of Eastern spirit. The reference to Tagore’s Asian spirit is more apparent in the Vietnamese translation of Tagore’s poem *A sleepless night* (Một đêm không ngủ) in *Đuốc nhà Nam* [Torch of Vietnam] in volume 104, July 4 1929. Although the anonymous author does not mention the original poem, it is clear that the translation loses much of the musicality and imagery of Tagore’s poetry. Instead, the translation lent itself to the images and forms typical of

²⁷ *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, June 25, 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

²⁸ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

classical Vietnamese poetry; the lyrical character of the poem was made to bear the typical emotional state of a mandarin intellectual. The cooing sound of a cock in the early morning, the drop of autumn rain, the maintenance of a lit lamp throughout the night, the whirligig of time, and the image of a woman waiting for her husband to fight in far off battles in the *quốc ngữ* adaptation are historical references of Sino-Vietnamese and Chinese poetry of early modern Vietnam. The poetic form, seven-seven-six-eight word meter is one of the two supposed traditional poetry forms of Vietnam. Readers would find the *quốc ngữ* version of Tagore's poem similar to poems by Nguyễn Trãi, Nguyễn Du and Bà Huyện Thanh Quan – great poets and politicians in the feudal periods of Vietnamese historiography. It is also easy to find in the translation the ideological poetry typical of classical Vietnamese poetry.

The stress on heroic and moral traditions implanted into the reception of Tagore lay within the colonial discourse of native tradition, which was also constituted in the contemporary educational system and its publications. Recognizing the liberal teaching of Paul Bert and de Lanessan, Albert Sarraut issued the 1917/1918 Code of Public Instruction “renewing” Franco-Vietnamese schools (Kelly, *French Colonial Education*, Peycam).²⁹ The code solely focused on professional education with the purpose, “let us raise them [natives] to us by a gradual apprenticeship, by the establishment of model agricultural and industrial schools” (Roberts 478). Consequently, there had been only one industrial school and two semi-industrial schools focusing on rice-methods, new crop,

²⁹ This model of school, as explained by Kelly, was to differentiate Vietnamese (both mass and elite) from French education and science. It is in reaction to rising anti-French movements led by those who were trained in French technology and sciences (Kelly: c2000).

communications, the setting up of credit-facilities (Roberts 471). Following the standard state curriculum, Franco-Vietnamese schools focused on “‘national’ history, Sino-Vietnamese literature, moral education,” ’affection for rural villages, gushing feelings for parents, beautiful sunsets, sampans and pedicabs”” (Kelly: 18, 2000c) instead of science and technology. The curricula for elementary, high school and college levels in 1925-1929 (Thao 180-184) show the domination of courses on morality. These courses for the elementary schools had a wide range of topics including morals in family (recognizing ancestors and respecting parents), morals in society (respecting authorities, distinguishing good from evil), and duties with the body (hygiene). High school students followed moral philosophical courses including how to maintain ethnicity and notions of sentiment. College students were not required to take morality courses; rather, they had to take more history courses. The contents of these historical classes appear to have focused on the history of ancient Asia. In the first year, the history major, which was named by the French empire determined the ancient Orient to be the earliest stage in the general history of civilization. For the second year, ancient India, China and Japan were taught in parallel with European civilization. There were no courses in the sciences or technology listed in the curricula. The curricula of colonial schools in Indochina, which was constituted by the powerful colonial ideology of the image of the native, portrayed the overwhelming hegemony of cultural and moral values protecting the “conservative ideology of the Confucian, patriarchal and pro-family (three commissions - *Tam tong*) connotations,

focusing heavily on the pervasiveness of paternal authority and underpinned by a predominantly agricultural economy and rural culture and community” (Thao 197-80).³⁰

The rhetoric of the Asian origins of the native inculcated in the reception of Tagore was also perpetuated by mainstream publications. The French encouraged French accounts of the earlier Indian “colonizer” in Southeast Asia. “The vision of an ‘Indic’ *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission)” was supposedly left traces in both living cultures, such as Bali in Indonesia and Angkor Watt in Cambodia, and lost cultures like Champa in Annam. The Hanoi-based EFEO (French School of the Far East) founded in 1898, and its journal, the EFEO *Bulletin* promoted “rediscovered” [Indian] heritage as a ‘great colonizing people of Southeast Asians. Henri Parmentier in *Inventaire descriptif des monuments cams de l’Annam* (Paris, 1909±18) and George Maspero in *Le royaume de Champa* (Paris and Brussels, 1928) expressed interest in the phenomenon of sacred kingship in the so-called Indic world, thus linking Champa scholarship with theorists of the Indian caste system. George Coedes was a key contributor to significant discoveries of Indianized states in Indochina and was enthusiastic in his long running debate of trade connections between Champa and ancient India (Bayly, “French Anthropology and the Durkheimians” 518-622; Edwards, *The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945*, 40-1).

Native intellectuals who were influenced by French anthropological accounts of Indochina (Bayly, “French Anthropology and the Durkheimians” 518-622) also turned their interests to the ancient Asian traditions of their land and people. In the 1920s while Cochin China newspapers tended to stress Asian Indian nature of Annamites (Goscha

³⁰ This is my translation from French to English.

10). In Tonkin, Phạm Quỳnh, the editor of the *Nam Phong Journal*, appears to have guided his readers in traditional rituals, oral expressions and Chinese philosophies. Throughout the volumes in 1929, *Nam Phong Journal* dedicated long articles to Chinese philosophers, Tet tradition, folk poems and songs. In the article “Eastern philosophies,” Phạm Quỳnh himself searched for national identity in the Tết holiday, ancestor ceremony, and moral values (Quỳnh 117-149), and realized that his “intrinsic essence” (Deane 8) was his perpetual love for tradition.³¹ While appreciating traditional values, Quỳnh criticized Western machines and technology. Quoting R. Tagore, Phạm Quỳnh insisted that scientific inventions were destroying social stability:

According to Tagore, [science] provided weapons and armor to the West so that it could realize its power and will. However, ... science could control the material world but failed to control spirituality. Thus, the spirit becomes wild; it is not guided; it is not principled enough (Quỳnh, *Essay in French* 160)³²

The criticism of technology seems to have been within the disciplined discourse of native orientalism, which was assumed to be more religious and moral, by European academics. The dichotomy of Western strengths in arms, trade and technology and Eastern advances in “unwarlike” and pure spirituality was stimulated by European and American intellectuals at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Matthew Arnold once wrote:

The east bow'd low before the blast
In-patient, deep disdain;

³¹ Phạm Quỳnh inevitably invented a culture that promoted a self-perpetuating society (Marr 111) or “anterior legitimating nature” (Deane 17).

³² This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again (Hay 6)

The fact that Tagore promoted Eastern civilization and criticized Western mechanics was emphasized by Western intellectuals themselves. It is said that when Tagore was disappointed with intense nationalism, his faith in Eastern cultures was soon strengthened by “the repeated assurances of British, French, German, and American friends that the West needed the healing power of Oriental religion and philosophy to save it from its own self-destructive folly” (Hay 7).

Dương Văn Giáo pitifully addressed the unfortunate fate of the disappearing exchange between India and Annam and suggested that religion and morality were two factors that helped to maintain Indian culture:

Unfortunately, the valuable ancientness was destroyed and sent into oblivion. The intellectual traffic between [India and Vietnam] stopped. However, fortunately due to religious beliefs and moral customs, the traffic could continue. Nowadays, India can stand steadily among ruined cities. Today [Tagore] comes here and we have a chance to see [him] in person; that makes us more confident that India is still alive.”³³

Tagore himself appears to have subjected himself as the messenger of Indian culture, considered to be the lost “essential object” of Annam. In the speech given at the welcoming ceremony, Tagore requested people see him as:

³³ “Bài của ông Dương Văn Giáo ở tạp hát Tây chúc mừng ông Tagore.” *Thần Chung*. June 25, 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

A messenger of passing opportunities. Although I stand outside your door, I am seeking a place in your hearts. At this moment, please accept me even in the situation that the flourishing age [of Indian civilization in Annam] is blurred, the light of happiness being together [India and Annam] is losing.³⁴

It is undeniable that Tagore stressed the collapsed tradition of Annamite people. His speech is mostly the lament of Annam's disappearing cultural values; he recalled the renaissance of Annamite culture when Indian civilization was dominant:

Looking back into several centuries, I am dreaming of a time in [India], which is still flowing strongly in my blood. Today I am bringing to you evidence of the time when our cultures met together through documents, archives and art works to awaken your spirit [of tradition]. The time [of India in Annam] became ominous and was buried in several pages of historiography; that period is like a sapphire which was dissolved because of time, and left a beautiful but dried box of old hints behind...The Indian soul was once vital under the sunny sights of beaches of this area. The ancient Indian is here; India brought many thinkers to convey beautiful ideas to this area. The soul of India is still in my mind; it seems like I was walking around the countryside of my hometown, which is at the very momentum of disappearance.³⁵

Tagore seems to have tried to make Annamite people more aware of their culture and used his rhetorical figures and his poetic speech to touch upon some Annamite sensitivity for losing beautiful traditions. Tagore's words also addressed the possibility of

³⁴ *Thần Chung* June 23-24, 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

³⁵ *Thần Chung* June 23-24, 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

revitalizing the evaporating essence of Annam, the reason being that the essence still existed-- so invisibly but permanently that only cultural and poetic souls could capture it. For Tagore, only those who were ready to “greet coming springs and sing deep songs of compassion under shadows of late sunsets” could smell the spreading fragrance of Viet land.” The fragrance of the Viet land, as addressed by Nguyễn Đăng Thục, is embodied in old spiritual activities and pagodas that remained throughout the villages.

The lost Indian/Asian values that Tagore looked for in Annam seems to have been Buddhism and religiosity. During the trip in Saigon, Tagore appears to have kept thinking about Angkor Wat, which was considered among European academics as a remnant of the ancient Indian state in Southeast Asia. The moment he reached Nhà Bè port, Tagore quickly asked to visit Angkor Wat. On his second day, although tired and initially having declined the offer to go to Eden Cinema, Tagore agreed to go with the hope of seeing films about Angkor Wat. However, once at the Cinema, only films about the cultures and landscapes of Tonkin (Kiếp Bạc and Hạ Long Bay) were shown; the films of Angkor Wat were said to be ruined due to humidity. In the article “Chấn hưng Phật học” [Making Buddhism Prosperous] (*Đuốc Nhà Nam* (July 4, 1929), Lê Trung Nghĩa, a French-educated prominent journalist and politician in Cochin China, recalled the Buddhism-related conversations between the Governor-General Pierre Pasquier (1928-34) and Tagore. At 6pm on June 24, Tagore went to visit the Governor General Pierre. During the meeting, Tagore expressed his special interest in the connections between poetry and religion and his love for the peaceful environment of Buddhist pagodas.³⁶ In response,

³⁶ “Chấn hưng Phật học.” *Đuốc Nhà Nam* July 4, 1929.

the Governor of Indochina shared with Tagore and members of the Indochina Constitutionalist Party that he had signed the decree to set up an institute for teaching and studying Buddhism and moral lessons in Cochin China.³⁷

It is apparent that Tagore's discourses of mourning for the loss of Asianess/spirituality/ Buddhism were constituted by the powerful Orientalist discourses in European academics and politics in the late Eighteenth and the early Nineteenth Century. Having been born and raised in a family that supported the Asian Society found by British Orientalists and in the time of the Bengali Renaissance (Kopf, 22- 42), Tagore must have been influenced by European Orientalists "in Search of a Golden Age." One of the values honored by the Orientalists from the Golden Age is a kind of Oriental spiritualism embodied in Indian Buddhism. During the Enlightenment and the Romantic period, India and China had been described as abodes of reason and spirit; when Greece took over western attention by the middle of the Nineteenth Century, India was portrayed as spiritually corrupted. In such a context, Buddha, a supposed symbol of morality and religiosity, was taken for granted as evincing the vitality of Indian sacred spiritualism to oppose the "ritual, superstition and sacerdotalism" of modernized India (Lopez 1-29). Such a powerful discourse appears to have controlled Tagore's speeches and desire for Buddhist/Indian civilizations in his Asian voyages from 1924 to 1929.

In addition to the control of the powerful European imagination of Asianness, it appears that Tagore's speech and the response to Tagore among Vietnamese were subjected to a demand for the projects of Buddhist/moral/religious restoration in

³⁷ "Le Gouverneur General Pasquier a Tra Vinh et Soctrang: Il decide la creation d'un Institut Bouddhique." L'echo annamite July 18, 1929.

Indochina. Earlier in 1929, newspapers and official documents of the French government in Cochin China had fostered the project of Buddhist revival to restore the ethnicity and tradition of Annamites. The Governor-General of Indochina and the native intellectuals, who were mostly members of the French-sponsored Constitutionalist Party of Indochina and its mouth-pieces *La Tribune Indochinoise*, *L'Echo Annamite* and *Đuốc Nhà Nam* [Light of South] (the so-considered *quốc ngữ* version of the French newspaper *La Tribune Indochinoise*) and those who were members of the welcoming ceremony of Tagore, were all involved in saving Buddhism. In the article “Making Buddhism Prosperous” (*Đuốc Nhà Nam* (July 4, 1929), Lê Trung Nghĩa stressed that it was practical to revive Buddhism to save morality for people; in the past, Buddhism used to be sacred and made people more moral and disciplined. Although the text “Un effort sérieux est tenté pour sauver la religion et la morale bouddhistes” [A Serious Effort to Save the Buddhist Religion and Morality] (*La Presse Indochinoise*, December 20-21, 1929) opposed the project of Buddhist revival, it revealed the discourse promoted by policy makers of the “lost” Asian morality:

Buddhism reigned in India then it came to Burma, Tibet, Siam, Cambodia and Laos. In Annam, Tonkin and Cochinchine, Annamese Buddhists are very few... The religion of the Annamese, as well as of China, is all more primitive... they pray and offer their ancestors and genies; genies become protectors for them to propitiate the good and avoid the fury of evils.

In response, *La Presse Indochinoise* posted the article “Sur Les traces du bouddha: Le Bouddhisme est une discipline proposant d'atteindre le bonheur par la voie du bien”

[Tracing Buddha: Buddhism is a Discipline Proposed to Achieve Happiness through Goodness] and asserted that the project helped to save the native from materialist ambitions caused by modernization. Thus, to revive Buddhism is to purify Annamite souls; Buddhist ethics alter the hearts of the Annamese, reborn into ancient love. The discourses of antiquity such as these are quite similar to the lamenting discourses of the lost Indian soul or spirituality in Annam made by Tagore and the members of the reception committee. In reality, there were Buddhist associations found throughout Indochina at this time. The Cochinchina Buddhist Study Association was established by Ven. Khánh Hòa in the 1930s and published the magazine *Từ Bi Âm* [*Sound of Compassion*]. Dr. Lê Đình Thám set up the An Nam Buddhist Study Association in 1932 and published the magazine *Viên Âm* [*The Perfect Sound*]. Nguyễn Năng Quốc founded the Tonkin Buddhist Association in 1934, and published the magazine *Đuốc Tuệ* [*Enlightenment Torch*] (Quang 8-10).

There are different hypotheses about the reason behind the appraisals of Indian ideologies in Annam by the colonialists. The reception of Tagore, which appears to be religion-, morality- and Indian-oriented, might have been controlled by the powerful political discourses attempted to discourage Indochina from the revolutionary ideologies coming from China and Japan (Christopher, “The Modern Barbarian; Marr: 153-154). The reception might also have been disciplined in response to powerful discourses to discourage Annamites from modernizing (Kelly, *French Colonial Education*, 10). It is evident that the reception of Tagore included ideas and activities arranged within the dominant discourse of the French colonial state from 1917 onward. In response to “an

intangible force – the soul and religion of a people [in Indochina]” embodied in the age-old force of passive resistance and cultural expansion since 1897, the French followed an inclusive special regime as defined by Jules François Camille Ferry (1832-1893):

As far as possible, you will seek to aid the existing powers and to direct their action for the most useful functioning of the country’s social life, without prematurely seeking to substitute for them new organizations and systems borrowed from our civilization and our manners (Roberts 438).

Accordingly, De Lanessan (1843-1919), a leading colonial theorist, was sent to investigate Indochina. Realizing that “the native had to be progressive, but progress was impossible without a political self-expression and a pride in their civilization– consummations which could be achieved only by the maintenance of their old culture” (Roberts 438), De Lanessan fought for native tradition and customs. Therefore, it is clear that the colonial regime of truth- fighting for “native Powers” since 1897- was involved in disciplining the reception of Tagore within contemporary colonial discourses of the native– Oriental religiosity, morality and Indianess.

Section 3: The Reception of Tagore and Emerging Questions of Nation-Building in Cochin China- the ‘Battle for Truth’ (Foucault)

Time of Tagore’s visit to Saigon was “the most tumultuous period in the history of [the] Indochinese colony” (Lam 12): the uprising of the Nationalist Party of Vietnam, a series of workers and peasants’ strikes and demonstrations throughout the colony, Sô Viêt in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh, and the emergence of communism (Lam 12; Duiker 191-234). Therefore, “there is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth'” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 132) transmitted and produced in the reception of Tagore among intellectuals who had different class positions, conditions of education and work, and political ideologies. This section of the thesis focuses on politically and culturally controversial reactions around the “regime of truth” embodied in the reception of Tagore. Tagore’s visit revealed the question of economic, cultural and political status among races, classes and genders in rising nationalisms in Cochin China; the debate echoed “the art of distributions” (Foucault in Hoffman 29)³⁸ of the colonial power.

First, the art of racial distribution tends to have been a controversial issue around the reception of Tagore; the point of “racial equality,” stressed in newspapers about the reception, reflects ongoing racial divisions in Cochin China. The issues on June 17, and 21, 1929 of *Le Tribune Indchinoise* published administrative announcements of the reception of Tagore. The first post made public principles for setting the committee; the principles required racial equality (French, Annam, Hindu). The second post provided

³⁸ According to Foucault, the disciplinary power uses the “art of distributions” to separate individuals into spaces which are enclosed by their specific functions and ranks. The “art of distributions” is used by the disciplinary power in order to break up collective activities and in order to be easy to control individuals. In this part, the thesis talks about the racial differentiation or the distributions of races embedded in the reception of Tagore (Hoffman, “Disciplinary Power” 27-54).

more details about names and positions of each member in the reception committee. The order in the committee was set for racial equality's sake; for example, at the level of president, the French representative was M. Béziat, the native was Bùì Quang Chiêù, the Indian Xavier. *Đuốc Nhà Nam* (a mainstream newspaper), with the article “Ngoài cuộc tiếp rước thi sĩ Tagore vừa rồi” [Anecdote Marginal to the Ceremony to Welcome Tagore] (*Đuốc Nhà Nam* June 20, 1929), highlighted that the committee embraced Indians, French and Annamites. The provided list of participants from journals in French and *quốc ngữ* seems to have implied that there was parity among parties and races involved in the reception. The article also claimed that the reception was in line with the traditional non-racist appreciation of heroes and great poets of Annamites. The article “Chung cuộc cuộc tiếp rước văn sĩ Rabindra Nath Tagore” [About the Current Ceremony to Welcome Tagore] (2 July, 1929) also asserted that the reception of Tagore was free from political racial interest:

There are Indians, French and Annamites in the committee... Annamites should cooperate with the French and Indians to welcome Tagore... Although the committee met at the office of the Indochina Constitutionalist Party, the office of *La Tribune Indochinoise* and *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, we never organized the event in order to benefit any of the three organs or the party...the committee included all people in the city, not those of a specific party.³⁹

However, it is undeniable that the reception reflected the myth of racial superiority that dominated French anthropological writings in the 19th century (Bayly).

³⁹ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

The most powerful race in contemporary Annam was the French, followed by the Annam people who took over the domination of earlier “Indian” kingdoms. That order can be read in the hierarchically disciplined reception committee of Tagore. *Nhật tân báo* [Newspaper of Labor Party] (July 2, 1929) provided more information about racial debates in the reception of Tagore in “Nói về ông R.Tagore” [About Tagore]; according to the article, Tagore favored white people; the colored people of Saigon were only his alternative when he was not welcomed in the US.

Another aspect of the racial issue raised around Tagore’s reception was the dominance of white-Western knowledge in speeches and ideologies of the intellectual, who, is supposedly the conscience of truth, “the bearer of universality” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 126)⁴⁰ or the conscience of nation (Pramoedya). Although terms such as “universal,” “humanism,” and East and West collaboration were used in Vietnamese nationalist projects with regard to their freedom from colonial obsessions, those terms themselves appear to have implied the superiority of white people and the inferiority of Annamites. This can be seen in the nationalist proposal by Nguyễn An Ninh (1900-1943), who earned a BA in Law at the Sorbonne University (Paris) in 1920. His ideas of universality or economical and educational renovation learnt from Tagore’s ideology are full of prejudices about native cultures rather than encouragement of them. On October 15, 1923, in the speech *L’idéaI de la Jeunesse Annamite* given to the Association of Study Encouragement, Saigon, Nguyễn An Ninh compared the political, educational, technical

⁴⁰ According to Foucault, historically, the intellectual was once supposed to be the 'bearer of universal values'; he/she could speak for the truth and justice; she/he was able to be the conscience of everyone. However, currently, new mode of intellectual is established; because of being “situated either by their professional conditions of work or their conditions of life,” the intellectual is so is no longer “the character of the ”niversal”, the “exemplary”, the “just-and-true” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 126-130).

and economic conditions of Annam with India. His comparison appears to have intimidated “his people.” According to Nguyễn An Ninh, Vietnam and India shared the same certain socio-political circumstances; however, while India-- thanks to its great characters such as Tagore and Ananda Coomaraswamy-- found its way to freedom from colonialism, Vietnam was like a child who did not know how to escape from slavery:

Our youth is not comparable with Indians. Anyway, I know that it is too early to expect that there would be great characters [like Tagore] in this country. It will be very funny to think that it is possible to find a great person [like Tagore] among you, who are weak, shy and have bad will, who are prone to failure, who do not know how to struggle, who do not dare to face challenges and burdens, who are lazy (Lan 23).⁴¹

In the long speech that was later published in *La Cloche Fêlée*, the merits of great characters like Tagore were repeated to stress the weakness and inferiority of Annamites. In addition to that humiliating attitude, Nguyễn An Ninh identified the Western world as the universal; being universal meant being Western. On the one hand, Ninh said, intellectuals:

do not think that building an India similar to the West is sufficient. Great people [like Tagore] also take more generous responsibilities; they try to find thousands of ways for this universal. Being concerned for India is not enough; you need to think for humanity in general.⁴²

⁴¹ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

⁴² This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

However, on the other hand, Nguyễn An Ninh imagined that the freedom of India would be a reality as soon as India “becomes similar to Western countries.”

In the same manner, Bùi Quang Chiêu (1872-1945), who became *ingénieur agronome* from *École Coloniale* in Paris and had a French wife and French citizenship, in his travelogue to India posted in 21 volumes of *La Tribune Indinoise* (March -June 1929) expressed his high appreciations of internationality/Western knowledge in Tagore’s project of Santiniketan. The students there were educated in their own language, literature and culture, and had been offered the chance to study different cultures of the world. Chiêu’s descriptions of the university and Tagore are full of imagination; the author found the university a home of the world and the messenger of God. The world culture Chiêu repeated seems to have referred to Western knowledge as Santiniketan constantly invited German, British and French scholars to teach students (Tagore, *Selected Letters* 263-264). It was Tagore who frequently acknowledged support from the West for his national project of the universal university. In the novel *The Home and the World*, with the story of the failure of the two main characters, Nikki and Sandip, in their implementing Western-free nationalist projects, Tagore appears to have suggested a possibility for the nation which comes closer to its colonizers. It was Tagore, who tried to make the Western visible in his nation and his knowledge visible in the Western knowledge market by translating his novels into English and using Western concepts and explaining Indian concepts by way of Western concepts. *Tri Tân* (volume 97, 1943) in its review of the book about Tagore by Nguyễn Thanh Hải, appraised French knowledge, without which the writing should be mistrusted:

The author must have put a lot of labor for this book. He took the analysis method to look at R. Tagore's poems. Most documents mentioned in this book are alien to Vietnamese. The author is able to read materials in French, therefore, this book is more trusted. It is not deniable that this book will help Vietnamese readers understand the mysterious and grand soul of R. Tagore.⁴³

It can be seen that the thought of a nation beyond national boundaries is Western oriented; or to borrow Ninh's phrase, without Western factors, there was no "universality." The imagined nation by French educated Vietnamese intellectuals like Ninh and Chiêu appears to have been inescapable from their obsession with Western models. It is undeniable that the disciplinary superiority of Western knowledge/colonial knowledge was transmitted in ideologies and speeches of native intellectuals embodied in their receptions of Tagore. These Franco-Vietnamese intellectuals' presentations echoed not only interactions between Asia and Europe (Bayly, "French Anthropology and the Durkheimians," 4), but also French claims regarding racial identity and differences (Britto 1-11).

Second, class distribution tends to have also been a controversial issue around the reception of Tagore. The elite natives and French officers were aware of the importance of the masses in their political projects. In the "Wish List of the Vietnamese people" (1925) presented to Governor-General Alexandre Varenne on November 27, 1925, Vietnamese intellectuals, politicians and journalists from Saigon under sponsorship of a committee composed of indigenous members of the Colonial Council, of the Municipal

⁴³ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

Councils of Saigon and Cholon, and of the Chambers of Commerce and Agriculture first addressed their concern for the masses:

We who come from all the regions of Cochinchina, who have ties with all the social classes of the population, we can assert that no reform, whether political or administrative will leave the Vietnamese masses indifferent (Lam 209).

The problem of the masses presented in the reception of Tagore, which was ignored by *La Tribune Indochinoise* and *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, is the exclusion of poor people from that reception. It seems that the participation of the journalists of *quốc ngữ* newspapers in the reception was insufficient to indicate its peasant class inclusion. Participation of Annamites who were rich landlords, company owners, newspaper producers and French-educated people seems not to have been convincing enough to visibly represent the Annamite masses in the reception. The price of the reception must have been too costly for Vietnamese peasants to approach Tagore. In 1931, the total annual income of poor Vietnamese peasants was \$49 and \$168 for middle class people. The annual income of peasants in Tonkin was \$44, \$47 in Annam, and \$55 in Cochin China. It seems to have been too luxurious for a majority of Annamites to spend \$1, nearly one fourth of their monthly income, to buy a ticket to join the ceremony for Tagore in the Theatre Principal. The ceremony seems to have been exclusively for rich Vietnamese, who earned \$6000/year and Europeans, who earned \$5000/year (Khoang 445).

The power of class division in the colonies is also visible in Tagore's own life, as he presented himself as a high class intellectual. As narrated, Tagore lived in luxurious conditions while in Saigon. The article "Nhà thi sĩ Tagore đã đến Saigon" [Poet Tagore

Reached Saigon] in *Thần Chung* (June 22) detailed Tagore's lunch in the first class lounge on the ship before landing on Saigon; as I previously mentioned, meanwhile common people "thiên hạ" were eagerly climbing the ship to catch a glimpse of Tagore. In the narration "Ba ngày thi sĩ R. Tagore ở Saigon" [Tagore's three days in Saigon] (June 25, 1929), part 1, *Đuốc Nhà Nam* provided its reader with information about accommodations, transportation and food for Tagore while in Saigon. Tagore lived in a big villa and was provided two 7 seat-cars. The second part of "Ba ngày thi sĩ R. Tagore ở Saigon" (June 27, 1929), which was about Tagore's second day in Saigon, named the party in Nguyễn Văn Cửa's printing company as a Champagne party. The article "Ngoài cuộc tiếp rước thi sĩ Tagore vừa rồi" [Anecdote Marginal to the Ceremony to Welcome Tagore] considered the tensions between the Labor Party and Tagore shameful for Annam; "the politics-free welcoming function turned into political conflicts." Huỳnh Phúc Yên loudly blamed Tagore for not having given the speech at the Theatre Thành Xương to Annamite peasants as promised. The repeated details of the champagne appears to have created more hatred among Annamite people toward Tagore. It was Tagore who lamented that the detail of champagne that he drank during his stay in Saigon created misunderstanding among the natives. Champagne appears to have become the symbol of luxurious high-class lives, which was too foreign to peasants living in poor conditions.

Moreover, the issue of pacifism and humanism that Tagore evoked was also considered ideologies of rich people, whose lives are covered by material sufficiency. The liberal newspaper *L'echo annamite*, founded by Nguyễn Phan Long, who had a scholarly, political and friendly relationship with the anti-colonial French novelist and

Minister for Cultural Affairs André Malraux (1901 – 1976), refused Tagore’s ideas of pacifism. In the article “Rabindranath Tagore à Saigon” (June 22, 1929) by the editor of *L’echo annamite* posted on the first page, the chronicling of the meeting at the theatre was full of strong sarcasm. Tagore’s character and career were narrated sardonically:

We burned with the desire to see a great hero... Alas! Our hope was disappointed... You [Tagore] are a pacifist. It must have had more than the courage of heroism, as [you] dare to be pacifist when you are a citizen of a conquered country!... ⁴⁴

While the postings “*L’Inde et Tagore*” [India and Tagore] by Dương Văn Lợi (June 29, 1929) and the “*Le poete et le martyr: Tagore et Phan Boi Chau*” [A Poet and A Martyr: Tagore and Phan Boi Chau] by Hi Vong (July 2 and 3, 1929) lifted Tagore up to the same rank with patriots and heroes, *L’echo annamite* also launched other articles to attack Tagore. The other articles suggested that his speeches of optimistic pacifism were too immature; their illusion and enthusiasm would lead to the edge of collapse; people should be cautious with Tagore’s words.

Following the argument, the ideas of pacifism and universalism seem to have been considered as of those of the rich and powerful, those who did not have to be concerned with the daily needs of money and food. Therefore, the voice of Tagore seemed to have failed in presenting the voices of peasants. Initially, *Thần Chung* was the first media excitedly announcing the news of Tagore’s visit (“Rabindranath Tagore đã từ Nhật Bản” [“Rabindranath Tagore has Left Japan”] June 13, 1929), but then expressed its

⁴⁴ This is my translation from French to English.

disappointment with Tagore's ideology as Tagore left. Most articles posted after Tagore's visit intensified the fact that Tagore's thoughts of "peace" and "charity" were unfeasible for the people of Vietnam who were living in fields of war, and the reception of Tagore was exclusively for "the first class, the second class":

Our compatriots, especially peasants, who are miserable and dying for a great hero to come to save them, think that those [Tagore] who come to Vietnam are their protectors. We want to tell you that such hope is vague and utopian...

Tagore is not Jesus Christ... Tagore loves human beings, peace, and charity, but it is impossible to realize such faiths in reality, as they are free from the political and solely poetic... We should neither see him a savior nor hope for his rescue of us. If you do not believe me, please refer to his speech. He just loves our rivers, our mountains, our winds and our moon; his words have nothing to do with the bitterness of life.⁴⁵

For the masses, the issue is neither religion nor spirituality, but hunger and slavery:

While we are dying for peace and we have to live for a long time in times of trouble, in hopelessness and discontentedness, Tagore leads a religious life and brings his Ganga to our land to teach us to love world peace. Does Tagore understand that discontentedness of life is the characteristic of our people or does he want to laugh at our crying?⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Thần Chung*, *Cái ý nghĩa cuộc tiếp rước ông Tagore mới rồi* [The Meaning of the Current Reception of Tagore], June 26, 1929). This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

⁴⁶ *Thần Chung*, *Nói về Tagore* [About Tagore], June 27, 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

According to these articles, only high-class people like Tagore could have enough leisure time to think of tradition and poetry. Tagore was excellent in speaking of peace rather than offering a practical tool for the masses to reach it:

We respect Tagore's grey beard, his philosophy and his talent in phrasing his thoughts in a beautiful way, but we want to say that his philosophy of 'peace and charity' is so luxurious that it is for few people... Tagore does not understand why human beings do not have peace now... Because Tagore's ideology of peace goes into the clouds and his career is about sounds of music and song, the reception of Tagore should have been similar to the way we receive street people. The reception of Tagore should have included Nguyễn Tấn Đà and Phạm Thương Chi, so that [the three of them] could have either enjoyed flowers and the rising moon or lying and singing for Phoebe at Hương river. Western and Eastern cooperation means bringing My Darling [the cigarette brand] cigarettes and drugs to his land. It is wrong to raise flags of Peasants and Youths to receive Tagore... The bird [Tagore] from Ganga came here... The bird's song is very sweet. However, those who want to listen to the song must suffer "the first class, the second class... Dương Văn Giao told Tagore to tell his Indians that Annamite people loved peace very much. How miserable Mr. Dương is!"⁴⁷

Such arguments share criticisms of Tagore by George Lukács, who called Tagore "petty bourgeois" and someone who "assess[es] wisdom 'in itself' in the vacuum of pure theory

⁴⁷ Nguyễn Văn Bá in "Chung quanh cuộc tiếp rước ông Tagore: Tâm lòng bác ái và hòa bình của tiên sinh" *Thần Chung* 28 June 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

(and within the walls of an elegant salon)” and who did not/can not speak “ about the most burning contemporary questions.” (Lukács 3) Some intellectuals expressed their disappointment with the fact that Tagore was not nationalist. The newspaper *Tân Việt* posted the articles “Ái và hòa bình: Bình luận về Tagore” [Peace and Charity-Thinking of Tagore] (June 23 and 24, 1929) narrating ironically the Nobel Prize of Tagore:

Tagore spent the Nobel award for his annual travels around the world to spread his faith in ‘peace’ and ‘charity.’ Everywhere he went, he spoke pleasing words to lull imperialists and people and to embrace each other in sleep. Therefore, people got peace! The Nobel method could be applicable in such way.⁴⁸

The statement is full of sarcasm. Accordingly, Tagore is explained as a cunning person, who just talked but did nothing for the peace of the world. The cunningness of Tagore is also explained in another article, “*Qua ông Tagore mà nhớ đến ông Bertrand Russell*” [Remembering Bertrand Russell through Tagore], (June 25, 1929) in *Tân Việt*. *Tân Việt* also acrimoniously suggested that the reason which made Tagore not “pray Buddha in his house but Buddha on streets [not being a nationalist but an internationalist] is that he had been aware of the fate of Bertrand Russell, who was imprisoned because of his calling for “non-war” in England. ”

Third, the other truth that helps to realize the “art of distribution,” of colonial regimes in association with native intellectuals is the absence of women in the reception of Tagore. The only female participant was the poet Mme. Palard, who seems to have functioned as the translator of conversations between Tagore and Annamites and French

⁴⁸ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

officers. In all photos of Tagore taken in different spaces, there was no female involvement. The second female mentioned in the narratives of Tagore's visit is a girl named Kathéappa Thévarvin who performed a song to honor Tagore in the meeting at Chetty Pagoda. The powerful discourse of gender that is transmitted in the absence is the notion of female domesticity. "Female virtue," connected with "home" became a central point in nationalist thinking in the colonized world around the turn of the Twentieth Century in Vietnam. Bùi Quang Chiêu, Phạm Quỳnh, Nguyễn Phan Long encouraged women to go back into the home. In an interview with the *Phụ nữ Tân văn* [*Journal of the New Woman*] June 20, 1929, Bùi Quang Chiêu criticized so-called feminism when he states, "I think it is time to bring education to women; the most necessary thing is to educate them about morality."⁴⁹ The core of morality, in Bùi Quang Chiêu's view, is the awareness of domesticity: "I think it is necessary to teach women about their rights and obligations; to show them that they should respect their husband, who is the (main) member not only of the family but also of society and of organizations."⁵⁰ Nguyễn Phan Long, the deputy leader of the Parti Constitutionnaliste Indochinois, discussed the social and moral dangers of Vietnamese females who are Westernized and leave their place at home:

I am not happy with the present day morality and behavior of women. They imitate the Western life style while they do not understand Western concepts of family and society. They are just trying to destroy the traditions of Vietnamese

⁴⁹ This is my translation form Vietnamese to English.

⁵⁰ This is my translation form Vietnamese to English.

family life (...) Women compete with men for jobs. Women no longer need men. Currently, more and more women leave their home to work outside; thus, the family will be destroyed. Many women cannot get married. No man wants to marry a woman who does not know how to do house work, how to feed children, how to take care of her husband... The inborn or inherent task of a woman is to look after the house, to educate children and to support her husband. Remember those things.⁵¹

The “art of distribution” of race, class and gender ideologies transmitted and produced in the reception of Tagore shows the contemporary dynamic debates of truth and nation-building in Cochin China led by native intellectuals. It is evident that Tagore’s visit was disciplined by both colonial and Vietnamese nationalist discourses as it failed in breaking the art of racial, class and gender differentiation.⁵² It therefore did not have practical meaning to the rising nationalisms of that period.

⁵¹ Phụ nữ tân văn July 11, 2919. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

⁵² Bayly said that even the idea of revolution in 1945 was knowledge given to Annam by the colonials.

Section 4:

The Reception of Tagore and the Fabricated “Numbness” in Vietnamese Writings: The Effects of Power⁵³

“During the period of colonization, the native never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning” (Fanon 52)

Postcolonial arguments are often about seeking native voices that were silenced in colonial discourses. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” or how do we hear the muteness of the Other’s discourses (Spivak)? What do they want? Who is speaking (Rey Chow)? These are the constant questions of postcolonial critics. Postcolonial discourses have also been trying to disclose ways in which colonial discourses “read” resistant native culture and people. It turns out that:

Whether positive or negative, the construction of the native remains at the level of image identification, a process in which "our" own identity is measured in terms of the degrees to which we resemble her and to which she resembles us - try to make the native more like us by giving her a ‘voice’ (Rey Chow 35).

The writings of Others become “mirror writings” in which the violent dissymmetry between the “voracious subject” (colonial) and “its objects of knowledge” (Others) is “re-inscribed” (Sommer 546). Put another way, writing about Others is often about the writers themselves. As a result, discourses about natives are much more about the

⁵³ “Numbness” is the name of a character in *Su-ba*, the Vietnamese version (1937) of Tagore’s short story “Subha.”

colonialist himself; the native is kept in silence. The native is written or visualized by the colonizers.

This thesis, in its offering of the concept of numbness, follows the postcolonial model of silence, which refers to the way in which the native does not necessarily know and does not necessarily get the chance to speak for herself. Numbness is the way in which silence becomes an aesthetics of emotion; sadness and quiet become the merits in poetry and daily lives embraced by the colonized. This numbness indicates the pervasiveness and depth of the powerful discourse of the colonizer into the spiritual lives of natives. The concept of numbness is similar to the concept of the “Romantic Oriental” that Said once defined, but the numbness of Annamese spirituality further includes the beauty of sadness and innocence.

Although Tagore’s visit was a failure in terms of offering a new direction for emerging nationalisms in Cochin China in the 1920s, it eventually strengthened the colonial stereotypes of Annamite spirituality.⁵⁴ The image of Annamite spirituality that Tagore promoted set the tone for Vietnamese creative representations of Tagore and of Vietnamese society in the colonial period. This part of the thesis examines the presence of these stereotypes of Annamite spirituality-- the effects of colonial discourses about the figure of native-- in literary reactions to Tagore and his works. Such reactions include *quốc ngữ* translations of Tagore and Vietnamese literature that shared topics and themes

⁵⁴This part is about the reception of Tagore in Annam more generally. In 1937, short stories by Tagore were translated in Tonkin (*Đông Dương Tạp chí*). Poets of the New Poetry Movements, who might have been influenced by Tagore or the ideology of the Oriental that Tagore is representative for are from Tonkin and Annam. The absence of Cochinchinese intellectuals in literary receptions of Tagore might show the failure of Tagore’s visit in offering nationalisms which were exciting in Cochin China and show the success in shaping and improving the manner of Oriental poetry and literature in Annam and Tonkin.

with Tagore's works. These stereotypes, as the thesis will reveal, include the qualities of intellectual numbness and sadness. Deep influences of Tagore are latent in Vietnamese writings appreciating numbness and sadness.

First, during the Tagore's visit, the audience focused more on Tagore's appearance than his speech. This focus demonstrates the pervasiveness of colonial discourses of natives. It is easy to recognize that descriptions of Tagore's appearance are full of illusions of magic and romance, which stem from stereotypes of spiritualistic and tranquil Indian-ness and Eastern-ness. Tagore appears not to have talked much or shared much during his visit to Saigon; his voice seems to have been sunk under programmed speeches of the committee. For example, at the reception of Tagore at "Hôtel de Ville" at 6pm on June 21, as narrated by *Le Tribune Indinoise*, Tagore appears to have been silent while there were continuous speeches by the honored host Béziat and by representatives of Annamite, Hindu and French journals and governmental offices. It is fair to say that news reports of the reception of Tagore were more about Tagore's eyes, which were considered by natives to have more power to communicate with people and better convey meanings rather than Tagore's speeches themselves; there seems to have been an illusionary and intensive gaze at Tagore's appearance. The article "Cuộc nghênh tiếp ông Tagore ở Saigon [The Reception of Tagore in Saigon] (June 23-24, 1929) in *Thần Chung* conceived Tagore as a Supreme Being; his words were gospel and it seems not to have been bothered about what exactly Tagore's message was:

Tagore [has] strangely bright eyes which look like deep and pure oceans.

Although we do not understand English, we are able to understand his words by

seeing his eyes... as soon as Tagore entered the theatre, the audience seems to stop breathing... when listening to Tagore's speech, the audience was so silent that they can hear the sound of flying mosquitoes.

In the same manner, Mne Nguyễn Đức Nhuận, the chief editor of *Phụ nữ tân văn* in “Rabindranth Tagore ghé viếng tòa báo Phụ nữ tân văn” (July 4, 1929) had an amazing stare at Tagore's eyes with their godlike power:

Only in this chance I came to know in person Tagore's appearances. It turns out that all portraits of Tagore that we see are not effective enough in presenting the fresh aura on his face and the vital strength in his eyes, which seems to have bright nimbuses and are typical for those who have fairy-like manners and a moral core.⁵⁵

The focus on the eyes tends to have echoed the mental portrait of Tagore among Annamites brought about by contemporary newspapers. The bright eyes and the broad forehead of Tagore were made prominent to highlight his smartness and philosophical ability. A look at the photo of Tagore by Khánh Kỳ that was published in most newspapers such as *Le Tribune Indochinoise* and *Phụ nữ tân văn* shows that Tagore was presented as a symbol of spiritual and serene Easternness. The photo does not capture Tagore from the front but from one side to make Tagore's long and thick hair and beard stand out. Those visual signs seem to have encoded visual perceptions of Tagore as a representative of the Orient. In Vietnamese expression, Tagore in the photos looks like “ông tiên” – a virtual god-man in folktales. In addition, the eyesight of Tagore seems to

⁵⁵ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

have been the focal point of the photo. The visualization of Tagore, who looks neither downward nor upward but forward and into the distance, shows the orientalist fantasy of a serene state and the love for thinking and foresight.

The painting of Tagore by the painter Lê Trung Nghĩa, which was prominently published in *La Tribune Indochinoise* on June 26, 1929, also reveals insights into the orientalist fantasy. Many images of Tagore show his profile to suggest the fundamental fantasy of the native. The painting with the note “the signature on the photo is of the poet” offers the additional signification to the traditional model of intensive contemplation of Eastern-ness embodied in the mental image of Tagore. Lê Trung Nghĩa portrayed Tagore sitting at a table with a book (or a notebook) and holding a pen. Tagore was depicted looking at the book, but his eyes, which are looking at some infinite point, do not show that he was reading but imply that he is meditatively thinking. Again, the portrait does not capture Tagore from the front but from the side. Such a captured image of Tagore can also be seen in other photos during his trip to Saigon including in the article “Réception et lunch à l’ Hôtel de Ville” in *La Tribune Indochinoise* (June 24, 1929) and “Ảnh Tagore viếng lăng quan tả quân tại Bà- Chiểu” [Tagore at the Lê Văn Duyệt Tomb on Bà- Chiểu Street] in *Đuốc Nhà Nam* (June 25, 1929). While all figures seem to have been facing the lens, Tagore seems to have been looking at other infinite points. Again, Tagore was captured from the side instead of from the front. The long hair and beard with wide forehead and deep and penetrating eyes are basic characteristics of all photos of Tagore in Saigon, such as the images “Rabindrad Nath Tagore at 16 ans” (June 17, 1929), “Chez M. Diep Van Giap” [At the Villa of Diep Van Giap] (June 21,

1929), “Dans le salon de M. Nguyen Van Cua” (*La Tribune Indochinoise*) and “Chân dung Rabin Dranath TAGORE mặc y phục Annam, đầu bịt khăn đen, mình bận áo dài” [Tagore in Annamese Costume] (June 27, 1929), and “Ảnh chụp chùa Chetty tại đường Ohier” [Photo Taken at Chetty Pagoda] (June 29, 1929) in *Đuốc Nhà Nam*. Such portraits indicate the existing images of Tagore (as presented in descriptions of the ceremony) as a typical Easterner whose power lies in sophisticated thinking and serenity rather than in secular activities.

Secondly, the inclination to “numbness,” which refers to the passion of vague thinking and hoping, is also obvious in writings inspired by Tagore’s visit. Tagore’s speech about restoring ancient connections between Annam and India or the ancient Asian origins of Annam was successful in the sense that it made Annamese people aware of their once tranquil lives in ancient times. Such awareness stems from his supposed knowledge of India, and of Easternliness. Many interpretations of Tagore are echoes of Tagore’s description about the Asian origins of the Annamese land; they are subtly exaggerated by inferences and thoughts of Tagore and this land as symbols of spiritually dynamic peace and calm. The fact that this ambiguity and serenity were embedded into appreciations of Tagore seems to have been appropriate with Tagore’s reminder to the Annamites of their Eastern-ness and to Annamese writers of their serene traditions. Phạm Đình Khương in his paper “Thuyết bác ái và chủ nghĩa hòa bình” [The Theory of Humanity and Pacification] (25 June, 1929) in *Công giáo đồng thịnh* described the spiritual and solemn environment and the rising hope of peace and serenity in Saigon raised by Tagore’s visit:

These days, after a peaceful sleep, our morality and physicality are stronger...

These days, on the roads, all of our people including French, Indians (chà) and thousands of Annamites, relatives, friends and visitors have happy smiles on their lips. Are we too optimistic? Is a magical power helping us to find new humans in our area? No, it is not. People and things are the same. Our minds change. We are walking on the same road, but we are gasping for new air and voice into our lungs. The new air and sounds were brought to us by the winds from India. With the new air and sounds, we cease to be mentally tired; we have more energy. In a peaceful environment, hundreds of trees are flowering; people are peaceful.⁵⁶

This paragraph, which is full of universal images such as winds, air and trees, of adjectives referring to peaceful states such as “peaceful,” “harmonious,” and “flowering,” and romantically aggrandizing statements such as “people are harmonious,” and “Our minds change,” portray a placid and pastoral milieu, a milieu appropriate to the Indian origins in which Tagore was raised. Furthermore, the more universal terms and indefinite inferences such as “minds,” “voice,” “mentality,” and “energy,” seem to have imitated Tagore’s own rhetorical speech that is full of winged-words and statements, such as “blazing light at the sunny beaches,” “dreams and souls are beautiful as brocades,” or the “soul of India is dim.” There is no stated specific voice and ideology in this paragraph; instead, it is as if there was a narrator who keeps thinking in meditation. There are continuous ideological conversations between the narrator and a vague character, which might be more likely himself. His flow of thought is endless. There is only one organ for

⁵⁶ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

speaking mentioned in the image of “lips.” Instead, there is only quiet and soundless “smiles.” The implication of the smiles becomes the topic of infinite questions and thoughts: “Are we too optimistic? Is a magical power helping us to find new humans in our areas?” Even the description about excitements and hopes also reveals the preference of the unspoken state:

Oh my God, looking at the future gives us a lot of hope, hopes for a future for universal and human beings. It is clear that the hope is still there, so it is not good to be pessimistic. Being cynical is being destroyed by the vicissitudes of life... It is clear that life of human beings is a life of hope, a permanent hope. As long as humans will have hope, intellectuals should have hope as well. The theory of hope is not for personal interests of living people. Past heroes and kingdoms thought for their people’s peace.⁵⁷

In this Vietnamese nationalist writing inspired by Tagore, the dominant ideology is that the nature of human life is to keep up hope. Accordingly, the narrator appears to be one who maintains hope and dreams of the future. It reflects desired models of ideal intellectuals who love to think and hope, whose lives are more about streams of thinking or interior monologues, rather than speaking and acting out their thoughts.

In addition to literary writings about political themes, literary criticisms of Tagore also show a special appreciation for a kind of intellectual numbness, which is represented in the form of sophisticated tranquility and sorrow, through “stream of consciousness” and “interior monologue.” The article “Ông Rabindranath Tagore” by Thạch Lan (*Phụ*

⁵⁷ “Thuyết bác ái và chủ nghĩa hòa bình.” *Công giáo đồng thịnh* June 25, 1929. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

Nữ Tân Văn, June 27, 1929) is full of appraisals of nobility and philosophy of Tagore's vague quietness and sadness:

He also describes sorrowful souls, but not the secular sorrow of imperial girls [Kiêu] and prostitutes; his sorrow is ambiguous. His wandering sorrowful soul is easy to find heart to heart understandings in its infiniteness. It is a sorrow which both sings and is reasonable and which both drops tears in eyes and smiles on lips. Smiles imply philosophy and concern. As told by Roman Roland in his translation of Tagore's novel, although Tagore is passionate in his meditation, his eyes are still watching and his lips are still smiling at this world.⁵⁸

Here, the beautification of sorrow lies in the fact that it is expected to address the universality that does not belong to a specific individual, class or gender. In other words, the beauty of sorrow goes beyond the mundane and is in harmony with a supernatural world that cannot be named. In addition, the beauty of sorrow is also described as thoughtful sorrow, an appreciated sorrow. It supposedly does not make sounds; rather, it is durable quiet that is appreciated. The love for sorrow is not only presented in the topic but in the writing itself. The poetic writing with rhythmic sentences and the use of literary allusions such as imperial girls [Kiêu] and prostitutes align it with a kind of meditated sorrow.

The pattern of sorrowful rhythm in writings about or inspired by Tagore was also apparent in the early reception of Tagore. Comments about Tagore's creative writing are

⁵⁸ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

full of sorrowful feelings. In 1924, Trương Trúc Đình recalled his reading Tagore's play "The Cycle of the Spring," focusing on sorrow as part of human nature:

One day, in a winter day, when my heart was as dull as the dark clouds and as cold as the frosty northern winds, I read Tagore's play... [Tagore]'s poetry is like the cry of that new-born child. It is a response to the cry of the Universe. There is life in [his] song, which cries 'in joy and in sorrow, in work and in rest, in life and in death, in victory and in defeat, in this world and in the next, all hail to the 'I exist'...' After that, I felt the heavy dullness in my heart lift. Since that time, I have often taken great pleasure in reading Tagore's books; I tried to read all the books by Tagore that I came across and each time I felt the same lightness" (Thuc 364).

The remarkable aspect of the paragraph is the duration of the author's passion for Tagore's writings; the essential interest of his life became the contemplation of meanings of poetry as ideologies of supernatural sorrow and happiness. For this author, the ideal lives of people should be suffused in pleasures brought about by poetry and philosophy and by vague sorrows about the general world and human beings.

The pleasures of mental numbness, which refers to the preference for hidden sorrows, hopes and thoughts over material history or social politics, also appears to have caught the attention of the translator Nguyễn Giang in his translations of Tagore's literary writings from French into *quốc ngữ*. Two *quốc ngữ* translations of Tagore's literary writings (*Subha* and *My Fair Neighbor*) are more about the romance of passiveness, quietness, reticence, sorrow and imagination. The two main female characters of the

stories are both numb: there is no hint of spoken sounds from them. In *Subha*, the girl was numb when she was born; in *My Fair Neighbor*, the widow is not numb but she never talks. Although their presence is the focal point of other gazes (of an invisible narrator and two male characters), their lives and thoughts are rendered through the imagination of others. Accordingly, the only visual strength and beauty that these women have is supposedly numbness itself; numbness becomes the merit of beautiful femininity. Such an appraisal of numbness is obvious in *Subha* when it offers a concrete philosophical articulation of numbness:

When we express our thoughts in words, the medium is not easily found. There must be a process of translation, which is often not exact, and then we fall into error. But black eyes need no translating; the mind itself throws a shadow upon them. In them thought opens or shuts, shines forth or goes out in darkness, hangs steadfast like the setting moon or like the swift and restless lightning illuminates all quarters of the sky. Those who from birth have had no other speech than the trembling of their lips learn a language of the eyes, endless in expression, deep as the sea, clear as heaven, wherein sunset, light and shadow play. The numb have a lonely grandeur like Nature's own. Wherefore the other children almost dreaded Subha and never played with her. She was silent and companionless as the noontide.⁵⁹

The philosophy of this paragraph shows the denial of language or more literal forms of thinking in favor of denotive, suggestive and abstract ideologies. The focus on the ability

⁵⁹ This is English origin by Tagore.

of the eyes to talk for numb people appears in order to provide the numbness its own power.

Similarly in *My Fair Neighbor*, the stress on the magical power of the widow's eyes (a widow who never talks) in revealing her internal world is to sharpen the aesthetics of quietness:

It was a hot summer afternoon. One of the fierce and fitful nor'-westers was threatening. Black clouds were massed in the north-west corner of the sky; and against the strange and fearful light of that background my fair neighbour stood, gazing out into empty space. And what a world of forlorn longing did I discover in the far-away look of those lustrous black eyes! Was there then, perchance, still some living volcano within the serene radiance of that moon of mine? Alas! That look of limitless yearning, which was winging its way through the clouds like an eager bird, surely sought—not heaven—but the nest of some human heart!⁶⁰

The quietness allows the condition of possibility for poetic compositions.

Poet-like, I would reply: 'They come from my imagination; for, as you know, truth is silent, and it is imagination only which waxes eloquent. Reality represses the flow of feeling like a rock; imagination cuts out a path for itself.'⁶¹

Tao Đàn Tạp chí [Poetic Association Journal], an apolitically literary and culturally oriented organization, founded in 1939 by Lan Khai and contemporary

⁶⁰ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

⁶¹ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

prominent literary writers and translators from Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China⁶² issued a Vietnamese version of Tagore's novel *The World and the Home* in seven volumes (No. 6-13) in 1939. A novel about the failure of a nationalist experiment of making women's voices audible and their activities visible seems to have fit with the set tone of the products of the journal that are more unrealistic, romantic and emotional. The translation of *The World and The Home* is also consistent with the pronounced role of being a cultural organ focusing on art and ideology; the Vietnamese soul is, accordingly, ideologically and artistically oriented. Consequently, the translation is a promotion of the voicelessness supposedly typical for the native.

This beauty in the inability to speak seems to have found its consonance with the aesthetic principle of the New Poetry Movement (1930-1945⁶³), that beauty lies in the quietness. Although it is complicated to justify whether Saigon or Hanoi was more traditional, it is undeniable that in literary practices, the aesthetics of numbness pervaded the New Poetry Movement, which embraced mostly poets from Tonkin and Annam rather than from Cochin China.⁶⁴ In the collection *Vietnamese Poetry* (Thi Nhân Việt Nam) by Hoài Thành published in 1942, while the poems of only two Cochin China writers (Đông Hồ and Mộng Tuyết) were more exciting for expressing their thoughts,

⁶²Critics included Phan Khôi, Thiệu Quang, Lê Quang Lộc, Trần Thanh Mai, Hoài Thanh, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, Ngô Tất Tố, Nguyễn Văn Tố and writers and artists including Đông Hồ, Lan Khai, Lưu Trọng Lư, Vũ Trọng Phụng, Nguyễn Tuân .

⁶³Officially, the history of Vietnamese literature was written based on political history. The assumed periods of literature coincide with historical periods.

⁶⁴ It is notable that although the colonial policy for the enlightenment of the native past was embedded in the responses to Tagore's visit in Saigon and had been applied theoretically throughout Indochina from 1897, it was more successful in Tonkin and Annam. According to Roberts in his publication *The History of French Colonial Policy (1870-1925)*, Cochin China had the misfortune to be the first part of the peninsula to be placed under French colonization, so "everything native was so completely uprooted that it could not, as in Tonkin, ultimately predominate over the extraneous French ideas" (420).

others were deemed to contain quiet and sorrowful patterns. In one model of female beauty in poetry::

Clouds are hidden in the air, birds fly away
Spleenful sky, resent departure
There are young girls who do not talk
Leaning on the door, what are they thinking about?

(Xuân Diệu- “This is the Autumn”)⁶⁵

Poetry was pervaded by the quietness embedded within the eyes:

You sit by the window
I stand by the following wall
Looking at each other in tears
The departure is coming soon.

(Thế Lữ)⁶⁶

Both nature and human beings keep their feelings inside. Quietness pervades supposedly beautiful poems. In the poem “Long River” (Trường Giang) there is only the vague sound of a far off village and market; in “The Sound of a Crow in an Autumn Night” by Quách Tấn there is only the amorphous sound from clouds. Poems of Mộng Tuyết, one of the Southern poets selected, also have the same sense of quiet, but it is easier to know the reason for such quietness:

Recalling yesterday night’s story, I am shy
Moon light pervaded the tranquil pool

⁶⁵ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

⁶⁶ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

Where I and the moon were taking bath

....

Suddenly I saw you come

From the bamboo fence

Quickly putting on the towel, I ran

You asked - What is it?

- Nothing, but I feel

- Little shy, but I do not know what shyness is

(Mộng Tuyết - *Shy* - 1936)⁶⁷

Although there are expressions referring to “ambiguity,” including “nothing” or “little shy,” the poem is not inclined to intellectual or mental numbness in the sense that the character audibly voices “not knowing” and she clearly addresses that she is shy and she is quiet.

Meanwhile, it is difficult to figure out what exactly the emotion of characters is in Northern and Annamese poetry. The question of whether characters are sorrowful or happy is also vague in the poetry. Xuân Diệu (1916-1985), considered to be a king of Vietnamese love poetry, wrote the short story “Tỏa nhị Kiều,” to address the existing fashionable numbness dominating the lives of young girls and intellectuals. Like the two females in the translated short stories by Tagore, the two female characters in the story by Xuân Diệu never speak; the only hints to show that they are living beings exist solely in their gestures including light movements of lips (light smiles) and eyes. Throughout the

⁶⁷ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

life, Phan, the only male intellectual in the story, just quietly moves back and forth in the ladders of the building and sometimes moves his lips fuzzily:

Sometimes, Phan climbs the ladder. I see something in the corner of his lips which is like one sixth of a smile. However, it is enough to make me happy and think. I think of Quỳnh, who is too quiet with peaceful eyes, which are like nothing... She is so quiet that sometimes I feel sorry for her. I can not hear any words from her – maybe it is because I do not have chances to hear her speaking. It might be the fact that Phan and Quỳnh are in harmony as they are like two “nothing” persons that match each other.⁶⁸

Like the widow in the short story of Tagore, the female and male characters in the story by Xuân Diệu do not talk although they are not physically numb.

Not only do quietness and tranquility cover the New Poetry Movement; the sorrow and pleasure of literary creation that are visible in the translations of Tagore’s literary writing also become its dominant aesthetic state. The paragraphs above from the two short stories by Tagore show special attention to the ability and pleasure of loneliness, of beauty and meditation about deep and invisible levels of the world and human beings. The narrative voice is imagined to be passionate for abstract thoughts of the world as represented by specific things in the world such as eyes and the fate of normal people.

However, these thoughts are intensively about supernatural or unrealistic issues such as the moon, sea, universe, and poetry, which are detached from secular concerns

⁶⁸ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

such as miserable caste conflicts. Such innocuously and quietly undefined romanticism appears to have been the merits of good poetry and good poets; the philosophical couplets in the collections of Vietnamese New Poetry are those with such abstract philosophies of sadness:

Today the light sky is higher
I am sad but I do not know why I am sad
...Silent the sunset, melancholy the sunset
Though nothing happens, it is lightly sad.⁶⁹

Xuân Diệu

The quiet tone seems to have been canonized by *The Tale of Kieu*, which is about a numb prostitute in early modern period, a national poem.⁷⁰ The merits of the national literary character include peace, tranquility and obedience. For a long time, Vietnamese poetry and prose found their aesthetics and romance in pain (as in the unfortunate life of Kieu) and ambiguous sorrows (lyrical characters in New poems).

Such appreciations of intellectual numbness and sadness in the literary writings of Tagore and writings inspired by Tagore found harmony with the contemporary literary compositions of New Poetry and “Romantic Prose,” and appears to have had its origin in the Orientalist philosophy Tagore presented, as mediated by the colonial Vietnamese press and scholarship. Such origin can be seen in the first scholarly and sustained research on Tagore, *Thi hào Tagore: Nhà đại biểu văn hóa Á Đông* [The Great Poet

⁶⁹ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

⁷⁰ *Nam Phong*, sponsored by the French administration launched essays on *The Tale of Kieu* on volumes 34, 35, 36, 38, 133, 287, 308, 344, 351, and 383 in 1923.

Tagore: Representative of the East] by Nguyễn Văn Hải (Tri Tân xuất bản, 1943).

When writing about Tagore's early life, Nguyễn Văn Hải focused on activities that Tagore had participated in to show that he was more interested in things that did not belong to a specific nation, such as winds, the moon and trees, through which he could see something universal. Tagore's idea of poetry was presented in *Prabhât Sangit and Sandhyâ Sangit*, which showed the transformation from the idea of universal sorrow to the happiness in seeing the harmony between separate things. Tagore's idea of transcendental humanism, as the book shows, is not only presented in his poetry but also in his practical activities including his public philosophical speeches of harmonious relations between East and West and his founding of the universal university Santiniketan.

The book by Nguyễn Văn Hải offers another possible reason why numbness becomes an aesthetic in the reception of Tagore. The book describes *Sâdhanâ*, a principle in Tagore's poetry, which might have been the supposed origins of literary life in Vietnam:

[In India,] it is not about the truth coming from sciences, but from sympathetic souls, from souls to souls. It does not provide people with the power of acquired knowledge but the happiness of being beyond all rules of things that are at the same state. Those who do not go beyond the sciences to understand the universal never understand that people have their eyes and spirit in nature" (Hải 9).⁷¹

⁷¹ *Sâdhanâ* (Thực hiện đời người).

The attitude of Indians toward reality is that there is an essential unification of the universe and human beings. That unification is acquired from the minds of people, which can create the sky, planets, light and people in its relations to the outside world (Hải 9).⁷²

It is possible to find the link between understandings of *Sâdhanâ* and the literary receptions of Tagore, which appear to have been more about the power of numbness, of eyes and of internal thinking. In the essential oneness in the universe, words might create boundaries and distinctions that become non-sense, while imaginations and internal thoughts pervade the literary life of pre-war Vietnam

Tagore's Vietnamese reception favoring the spirituality (or a kind of mental numbness or indifference) that Nguyễn Văn Hải focuses on in his writing on Tagore is also found in the concept of *divandevatâ*. The concept, which stresses on the transient nature of life, can be used to explain the reason of the pervading quiet sorrow in literary receptions of Tagore and in contemporary Vietnamese literary life:

The latent myth in Tagore's soul helps us to embrace the long life of the Creator...

What is endlessness? All is transitory in this life. Nothing in this life is endless,

but it is life that is endless. It is right to think that nothing is completely

destructive but it will wear a new form to contribute to the endless creation. High

in the sky or deep in the sea, although the boundary is endless, there is unison the

world of sound. In this normal life, there are corners for love and the erotic...

Living is not bounded in this life. This life! Oh my God! It just lasts one second in

⁷² Ibid., 9. This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

the infinite space... As soon as we are born, we are near the death. Vitality and Death circularly create the endless life and unite all entities. It is known that the self is immortal; despite death, the self is everlasting. Therefore, there is no need to fear doing good things. In addition, if you cannot complete these good things in this life, you can have them done in next life. So, go ahead to do good things.⁷³

It seems that the way Nguyễn Văn Hải understands Tagore is in his explanation of the existing literary life that is full of hopeful and romantic numbness.

Although there are debates about why there was a dominance of romanticized sorrow and intellectual numbness in pre-war literary life,⁷⁴ it is undeniable that the reception of Tagore from the literary side echoes the French colonial stereotype of

⁷³ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English. This is the Vietnamese version of the quoted paragraph:

Tức là cái bí quyết tiềm tàng trong tâm linh Tagore, nó giúp thi hào thấu triệt được cuộc sống muôn năm của tạo hoá.

Thế nào là cuộc sống muôn năm ?

Tất cả đều mong manh phù bạc trên cõi đời. Chẳng có gì là vĩnh cửu hết, nhưng “cuộc sống rất muôn năm!”

Nhận xét theo một triển vọng chính chắn, chẳng có gì là tiêu diệt được trên đời. Mà tất cả đều mãi mãi khoác lấy những hình thức tân kỳ để đạt tới một tạo tác viên miến.

Trên trời mông lung và dưới đáy sâu của biển cả, dẫu đời chẳng hề hay biết, cũng đã có sanh hoạt một thế giới của âm hưởng.

Còn trên cõi tạm này, bao giờ cũng có hoạt động một khu vực của lòng yêu thương của ái tình.

...

Vì cuộc sống không phải là đã giới hạn vào thời đại này đâu. Thời đại này ? Than ôi! Nó chỉ là một chớp nhoáng trong cái quang không vô tận...

... Cứ kể ra một phút chúng ta sanh hoá cũng là mỗi phút chúng ta vượt gần ở sự chết. Sự sống và sự chết tuần hoàn tạo thành cái kiếp sống bất dĩ và kéo tất cả vạn vật lại thành một hợp nhất.” (Hải, 4)

⁷⁴Textbooks from Vietnam try to attach these states to nationalist issues, such as the loss of the nation or the hopelessness of intellectuals in saving their nation from French colonialism, etc. Nguyễn Văn Trung, in his book *French Colonialism in Vietnam – Myths and Facts (Chủ nghĩa thực dân Pháp ở Việt Nam: Thực chất và huyền thoại)* published by Nam Sơn Xuất Bản, Saigon, 1963, shared the same ideas with post-war official interpretations of pre-war literary life. The author analyzes French scholarly books of Vietnamese literature and culture to reveal colonial political strategy attached to appreciations of sorrowful writings and literary creations.

Annam and Eastern-ness. Ethnographic writing on the Vietnamese mentality by French academics did exist:

These Việt-nameese were docile and tranquil. Patient, they venerated the universe in each of its signs. The rain spoke to them, as did the moon and the wind... Certain summer nights when signs were revealed, the village rustled with happy moans. Man and woman were in accord with the universe (Christophe Bataille 70).

In addition, the thick book on Tagore by Nguyễn Văn Hải, as admitted by the author, owed its overall arguments and citations to French references. On the first page of the book, Nguyễn Văn Hải stated that this book is in honor of “Prof. Nguyễn Lương Khiết,” who lent him many rare documents brought back from France for him in order to write this book. In the introduction, Nguyễn Văn Hải expressed his gratitude to foreign teachers for motivating the love for Tagore among “us”:

We are mostly rationalist, so it is very difficult for us to master Tagore’s ideologies. The reason why we could love Tagore – it is not a guarantee that we could comprehend him – is due to teachings by foreign teachers. Most of them are English, French. I am especially grateful for the Indian scholar Sushil Chandra Mitter, a professor of Ripon College in Calcutta, who explained [Tagore] to us. Now I want to bring what I learned [from these teachers] to my dear readers... Because Tagore has a lot of writings in Bengali... this book mostly uses translations by Prof. Mitter. The book editing Tagore’s works, *La Pensée de Rabindranath Tagore*; (Préface de Sylvain Lévi; Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1930), is the best resource for us as a base

for writing this book (Hải, 5).⁷⁵

It is Nguyễn Văn Hải who hoped that his book was to serve the rising celebrations of Eastern values among Western intellectuals after World War I, when he states that “we clearly see winds of great ideologies blown from East to West... I wish that great winds will never stop so that they can reach the realm of Vietnamese literature!” (Hải 7). The column “New Books” of the journal *Tri Tân tạp chí* [Understanding the New] volume 97 in May 1943 introducing Nguyễn Văn Hải’s book provides more indication of the vital role that French knowledge played in shaping the literary reception of Tagore in Vietnam:

Despite of the French versions of the novels of *tiên sinh* (Mr.Tagore) such as *La Maison et le monde*, *A quaire voix* with introductions by Romain Rolland, Léandre Vaillat, etc. giving brief information about Tagore’s career and regardless that the thin French book included only ten published pages in Saigon in 1924, there has not been a book delving more deeply into *tiên sinh*. In short articles, there are several, scattered in different newspapers that not many people know. Eventually, the article by Trúc Đình in Nam Phong in May 1924 became the most important one. *Phụ nữ tân văn* in the South and *Văn học tạp chí*⁷⁶ in the North used to have articles about *tiên sinh* but they are very cursory [in comparison with the book by Nguyễn Văn Hải].⁷⁷

⁷⁵ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

⁷⁶ We cannot find this newspaper in Worldcat.

⁷⁷ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

To conclude this section, it can be said that the visit of Tagore failed in offering a nationalist project, but succeeded in providing and promoting an Orientalist model of an Asian nation, which was typical of supernatural and universal physicality and mentality; the reception of Tagore in literary practices was the product of colonial knowledge. In the same way, the aesthetics of numbness, which refers to preferences for quietness, internalized thinking, and sorrow, show deep and broad influences of the powerful colonial discourses of its colony and of the natives. The power of colonial discourse was not only indicated facts, as Foucault explained that, “the more you see power everywhere, the less you are able to speak thereof” (in Merquior 116). The power of colonial discourse also revealed itself in the way that the native learned to love being quiet, to love being voiceless; in other words, the voicelessness becomes an aesthetics and a moral in Vietnamese literature and in Vietnamese life.

Section 5:

The Reception of Tagore in the Post-August Revolution Cultural Productions of Vietnam – Other Regimes of Truth

Although the *Document* by the Communist Party published in 1946 recognized the tremendous welcome that it received in the Inter-Asian Relations Conference in March in Delhi hosted by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, there is no document found about receptions of Tagore in particular and any Indian authors in general in Vietnam from 1945 to 1954. From 1954 to 1975, the works and ideologies of Tagore started to appear in literary, cultural and political tables in both northern and southern governments as a symbol of peace movements. However, while the receptions of Tagore in the French colonial period were completely replaced by socialist receptions of Tagore in the North which were reinforced by socialist regimes, in the South, the tone of reception of Tagore as a symbol of East and West collaboration seems to have been maintained in literary and political writings.

In the North, from 1961 to 1986, appreciations of Tagore tended to have been in accordance with the nationalist fights against the colonialism, which refer to issues of class conflicts, fighting the United States and the southern Vietnamese government, and building socialism in the North. Accordingly, Tagore and his works were employed as a political tool of the peace movements adopted by the Vietnamese communist party in its “efforts for the common fight against the French and American aggressors and effectively contributed to bringing the Vietnamese people’s resistance to a glorious end” (in Phan, Thiên Châu 3). The Vietnam People’s Peace Congress was founded in the mid-1950s

following the set-up of the World Peace Council (WPC) in 1950 to join peace campaigns led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union opposing invasions of American imperialism. Ho Chi Minh defined the task of the Vietnam People's Peace Congress at an international level as "joining the world peace movement," supporting the "movement for national independence and all movements for unity and territorial integrity," and "strengthening friendship with all peoples" (in Phan, Thiên Châu 20). To realize the tasks defined by Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnam Peace Committee promoted international exchanges via mail and publications to "endorse the principle of peaceful co-existence and actively support the establishment of diplomatic, cultural and economic relationships between Vietnam Democratic Republic and all [pro-socialist] countries" (in Phan, Thiên Châu 4). In 1958, Ho Chi Minh and governmental and parliamentary delegations of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam visited Calcutta (India), where they commemorated Tagore at the R. Tagore Memorial House in Calcutta. As stated by Dr. Le Dinh Tham, Chairman of Vietnam Peace, in his report to the Vietnam People's Peace Congress on August 16th 1958, the trip consolidated the friendship between India and Vietnam for the glorious end of mounting imperialist invasions led by the US. The hundredth birthday of Tagore actively celebrated by the Vietnamese writers in the Artists; Union and by the National Commission of Social Sciences was among the other cultural anniversaries proposed by the World Peace Committee. The celebration also followed initiatives for a peace movement identified by Ho Chi Minh:

to support the Indian people's struggle to recover the territory of Goa, the Japanese people's struggle to recover the island of Okinawa, and to 'develop and

establish friendly relations between our people and the people of two neighboring countries ... India, Indonesia and Burma, the peoples of Asia and Africa, the French people and peace-loving people around world over' (in Phan, Thiên Châu 20).⁷⁸

In Vietnamese literary life, the concern for the “national cause” was similar to fights against sorrow and numbness; approaches to Tagore’s works embraced the issue of marginal people such as laborers and farmers. The Association of Vietnamese Writers published a 53 page-anthology of translations of Tagore’s poems. The book *R. Tagore* (Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa, 1961) included translations of Tagore’s poems and short stories by Cao Huy Đình and La con, both prominent scholars working for the National Commission of Social Sciences (under the National Commission of Sciences), and set the tone for the Vietnamese reception of R. Tagore from then onward. That is, it set the tone for the socialist or Marxist receptions of Tagore’s writings. Any argument about Tagore’s writings made by postwar Vietnamese scholars shows its authenticity with references to Vietnamese Marxism, such as class struggle, freedom for laborers, anti-capitalism, and constructing “con người mới xã hội chủ nghĩa” [“new socialist type of men.”] In the book’s introduction, Cao Huy Đình and La Con write:

The patriotic poetry of Tagore is full of light and delight. However, some poems convey his vague sorrow. That is the common sorrow of the Indian nation. The reason for the sorrow such as that pointed out by Marx fifty years ago: ‘This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of

⁷⁸ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history” (Đình 365).⁷⁹

According to Đình, *Gitanjali*, that was once considered the poem of universal harmony, reflects the desire of India to escape from “the hunger, disasters, the caste system, feudal religions... imperialism and capitalism, which rudely oppress people” (Đình 370).⁸⁰ The novel *The Home and the World*, which appreciates Western knowledge, is explained by Đình, when he describes “the stuffy lives of Indian society under feudal and colonial regimes” (371).

Points about Tagore’s writings in the textbook *Indian Literature* by Lư Đức Trung conjures up the merits of a moral life supposed by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Those merits, defined by Phạm Văn Đồng, the former vice-president of DRV, in his report at the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1955 include “the love for the fatherland and the people, the haters of the imperialist aggressors, reactionary and feudal traitors, the true internationalism, the determination to overcome any difficulty, to fulfill one’s duties” (in Phan, Thiên Châu 36). The analyses about Tagore in the textbook, which focus on specific topics such as respecting for “labor class,” “industrial thrift,” “brighter countryside life,” the “love for people and life,” and the attitude of anti-war, are in concurrence with the merits of a moral life promoted by Phạm Văn Đồng and the communist party.

⁷⁹ This passage, as said by Đình, is from the article “The British Rule in India” by Karl Marx, first published in the *New-York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853.

⁸⁰ This is my translation from Vietnamese to English.

In contrast to the tendency in the North to attach Tagore's writings to specific tasks of socialism building, receptions of Tagore in the South appear to have shared the reception of the French colonial period. While writings and translations of Northern intellectuals focused on short stories and novels, which seems to have made it easier for them to be explored in ways that could support the development of socialism-building, publications of Tagore in the South are more poetic and philosophical works. These southern translations include *The Gitanjali* (translated by Phạm Hồng Dung, Phạm Bích Thúy, Sài Gòn: Nguồn Sáng, 1969 and 1971), *Sadhana* (Nhu Hạnh translated, Sài Gòn: Kinh Thi, 1969), *Fruit Gathering* (Lien Hoan translated. Sài Gòn: Đại Nam Văn Hiến, 1971), *The Gardener* (Đỗ Khánh Hoan, translated, Sài Gòn: An Tiêm 1969-1986; Sài Gòn: Ba Vì, 1969 -1971 - 1972 - 1973 – 1974), *Gitanjali* (Đỗ Khánh Hoan, Sài Gòn: An Tiêm, 1972; Sài Gòn: Ba Vì, 1969 - 1971 - 1972 - 1973 – 1974), *The Gifts* (Đỗ Khánh Hoan, Sài Gòn: An Tiêm, 1972; Sài Gòn: Ba Vì, 1969 - 1971 - 1972 - 1973 – 1974), *The Fugitive* (Lê Thanh Hoàng Đan translated, Sài Gòn: Nhà xuất bản Trẻ, 1973), and *Sadhana* (Nguyễn Ngọc Thọ translated, Sài Gòn: An Tiêm, 1973).

It is easy to recognize that while Northern researchers picked up some short stories, novels and poems to build collections on Tagore in order to form a concrete mental concept of Indian literature in the way of allying it to the rising socialist policies, Southern writings tended to be more concerned with introducing the longer writings of Tagore in their complete versions. The publications are more about apolitical topics similar to Tagore's reception during the French colonial period, such as universal love,

universal humanism, poetry and religion, and individuality and universality. Their maintenance of the image of Tagore as a symbol of political pacifism seems to echo Western, particularly American concepts of the prominent role of Indian ideology in constituting the Vietnamese mentality. Brian Michael Jenkins (1942), who once served as advisor to General Creighton Abrams, commander of military operations in Vietnam, wrote that the influence of Tagore on Vietnam nationalism is one mainstream ideology alongside the Chinese one.

Following in the tradition of resistance, the Vietnamese have developed their own pattern of resistance warfare. This pattern is based upon the classic Chinese works on warfare by Sun Tzun (from whom Mao Tse-tung drew some of his inspiration), Mao's own work on revolutionary warfare, and the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore. Forty years ago Tagore *predicted that the morally and spiritually superior civilization of the East eventually would triumph over the ruthless materialism and overmechanized West*. This provided comforting assurance to the Vietnamese, who usually were faced with numerically and materially superior enemies, and relied on guerrilla warfare and tenacity to grind down the enemy's determination to continue the war. To this philosophical base can be added the Vietnamese predilection towards organizing along secret society lines, a willingness to employ terrorism, and the use of traditional base areas in the remote areas of Vietnam (Jenkins 19-20).

The preservation of peacefully spiritual values of the Vietnamese mentality that Tagore supposedly promoted in his visit to Saigon also appears to have been the conceptual map of the Indian government in the 1960s. That might have been the version of Vietnam that the southern government of the Republic of Viet Nam wanted to portray in order to call for international support to fight against communism. On November 27, 1969, the Indian Vietnam Humanitarian League was founded to support Vietnamese who “are fighting the communists.” In the meeting attended by Phan Quang Dan, Minister of the government of the Republic of Viet Nam - the chief guest, members of Indian Parliament, diplomats from other countries, journalists, citizens of Delhi, and the Venerable Dharam Wam (the Chair), M.L Sondhi recalled Tagore’s speech in Saigon as an indicator for the long relationship between India and Vietnam in his speech entitled, “Standstill on all Forms of Violence.”

The concept of universal peace that Tagore promoted also finds its echoes in the founding of Vạn Hạnh University by the government of the Republic of Viet Nam in Saigon in 1969. The model of Vạn Hạnh University seemed similar to Tagore’s universal university. In the speech opening the first year of the Faculty of Social Science and of all the Faculties of Van Hanh University, Venerable Thích Minh Châu stressed the universality of acquired knowledge. He wanted to build a super-national university, where “the spirit of the university is a spirit of universality, a spirit covering all the activities of man in every sphere, everywhere and at every time.” Even Thích Minh Châu seems to have avoided a national or citizenly concept of his subjects; instead, he used general philosophical nouns including creative “entities,” “intellectual life of the

collectivity,” and “man in all his aspects” (*Vạn Hạnh Newsletter*, 7). The project of such a university sounds similar to Tagore’s project of an international college, Visva-Bharati. Visva-Bharati, Tagore projected, “[would] be the connecting thread between India and the world... I want to make that place *somewhere beyond the limits of nation and geography* – the first flag of victorious universal humanism will be planted here” (Tagore, *Selected Letters* 179). The Indian Embassy in Vientiane (Laos) sent a letter to the Board of Vạn Hạnh University mentioning Tagore, who devoted his life to “the worship of learning in spite of woosings of politicians in their ages” to appreciate the purpose for intellectual development and peace of the university.

Such apolitical and non-nationalist trends in literary and social receptions of Tagore in Saigon show an intellectual attachment to colonial knowledge by Tagore, and thus, a Western concept of the native/Oriental. That is different from the North, which promoted Tagore from socialist perspectives in order to erase colonial remnants in its culture. The differences in appreciations of Tagore in Northern and Southern Vietnam echoed the different political and economic disciplinary powers operating on each area. While the North was under socialist politics and economy, the South was often associated with Western capitalism, which allowed it not necessarily to ignore cultural aspects that appeared in the French colonial period.

However, since 1986 the new regimes of truth -- the policy of renovation in economic systems and literature⁸¹ – have recollected and recuperated the reception of

⁸¹Đổi mới “opened the way to new forms of ownership and management, including a resurgent private sector and market, decentralization of management, and expansion of economic ties with the non-socialist world.” (in Tuan 256), and especially making Vietnam actively join in the growing economic globalization and international competition. The National Strategy of Social and Economic Development 2000-1010

Tagore as the symbol of universality. The return of colonial knowledge on Tagore, which is re-named in labels such as universal, or West-East collaboration, etc, in the context of global appreciation in Vietnam reveals the lingering colonial ideologies.

Today in Viet Nam, Tagore's writings are appreciated from a non-nationalist view. *Tagore is a Knight Who Makes the Dust and the Sunny* (*Literature Studies Review*, volume 6, 2001), *The Universe and the Ego in Poetry of W. Whitman and R. Tagore* (*Literature Studies Review*, volume 8, 2007) by Lê Từ Hiên, *Rabindranath Tagore, His Career and Character* (Information and Cultural Publishing House, Hanoi, 2005) by Đỗ Thu Hà, and *Rabindranath Tagore in Vietnam [Rabindranath Tagore and Indian Renaissance]* (Hanoi: Publishing House of National University, 2007) by Nguyễn Văn Hạnh, have returned to universal issues such as individuality and romanticism. Western concepts, such as comparative literature, stream of consciousness, the short story, and narratology are applied to interpret Tagore's writings by Vietnamese scholars. In addition, Northern and Southern writings and translations have begun to be included in the same publications about Tagore. Tagore anthologies published in Hanoi have started to include translations and writings of Tagore published under the government of the Republic of Viet Nam. Two volumes of anthologies of Tagore's works edited by Lưu Đức Trung and published by Nhà xuất bản Lao Động – Trung tâm Ngôn ngữ - Văn hóa

issued in the Ninth National Congress 2000 announces: “[Vietnam] must be active to join in the international economy, take its advantages to develop itself.” In the field of culture and literature, Resolution Number 05/2005/NQ-CP by the Government promoted “socialization (*xã hội hóa*) of cultural, medical, educational and sport activities” and was adopted to make literary and cultural activities participate in the logics of the free market and globalization to financially contribute to the national economic development.

Đông Tây, Lao Động in 2004 contain translations of Tagore's works by Đỗ Khánh Hoan and Như Hạnh.

More indicative of the return of the colonial reception of Tagore is the re-publication of the book *Thi hào Tagore: Nhà đại biểu văn hóa Á Đông* by Nguyễn Văn Hải after more than 60 years of being forgotten, and the current international celebration of Tagore's hundred-and-fiftieth birthday in Hanoi. The conference on R. Tagore's works and life (Nov 9, 2011), held by the Indian Embassy in Vietnam in cooperation with the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, addressed issues that were once addressed by French officers and Cochinchina intellectuals in the visit of Tagore 83 years earlier. Ranjit Rae, the Indian Ambassador said: "R. Tagore is a global citizen. He does not believe in limited nation-state-isms. He does not want this world to be cut into separate pieces because of narrowness" (Unpublished Papers of the Conference of R. Tagore in Hanoi, November 2011). Supporting that idea, Phạm Quang Vinh, the minister of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asserted that Tagore presents great ideas of combining peninsular nations and other countries all over the world, between East and West. Nguyễn Xuân Thắng, the director of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences also said that in the context of new challenges brought by economic and cultural globalization, Tagore is recalled as a humanist who brought colonized countries the belief in international equality, global integration, and exchanges among civilizations (Unpublished Papers of the Conference of R. Tagore in Hanoi, November 2011). The return of the French colonial reception of Tagore appears within the current reoccurrence of pre-war knowledges of books such as *Mon voyage secret à Lhassa* (M. W

Montgomery) translated by Đoàn Trung Côn in 1929 (republished by Hương Trang Culture Enterprise, 2003) and *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* G.Coedès) translated by Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ [“Cổ sử các quốc các quốc gia Ấn Độ hóa ở Viễn Đông.”] (Thế giới, 2011).

The issue is that the return of the colonial reception of Tagore and other knowledge seems to have renamed the terms of Tagore’s colonial reception, such as universality and transcendental humanism, with ones which are more global, such as “globalization” or “multi-national culture” or trans-nation. It is clear that those terms that are dominant in the conference are likely a new jar for old wine. This similarity challenges the possibility of 'total liberation' for the colonies from colonial power. The return of the colonial reception of Tagore in the new technology of power (new terms) shows that the issue of knowledge is not about knowledge in and of itself, but about who governs it and in which way they deploy knowledge to constitute current politically and economically acceptable propositions. The regimes of globalization in economics and in culture are decisive in the current appropriation of the colonial knowledge of Tagore.

Conclusion

Continuing numbness... “Colonial power is everywhere” (Foucault)

Aesthetic numbness as a typical merit of Eastern cultures continues to have currency among cultural-political constitutions and in daily life in present day Vietnam. Textbooks of Indian and Eastern literature and culture in Vietnam have been circulating discourses of the spiritual, Oriental and rationalist, Occidental produced in the late Eighteenth Century in European academies. Phạm Tấn Đắc, a researcher in Southeast Asian Studies, in his classic book for every student, *Văn hóa Ấn Độ* [Indian Culture] is consumed by the idea that India is typical for its strength in transcendental philosophy; meanwhile Western people are more about technology and sciences.

On the individual level, the return of colonial perceptions of Tagore, which refer to the pattern of same numbness in cultural and literary productions, will need more research. The duration of colonial knowledge of the Oriental is currently visible in professional and personal lives of Vietnamese. Eight years ago, I served as a teaching assistant in the Group on Asian literature in the Department of Literature and Language at the Hanoi University of Education. In a funny conversation, one faculty member from the group on Western literature made a joke with me in front of others: “C. do you have a darling? You should share with people.” While I did not know how to answer, Dr. ML., who specializes in Indian literature and was the leader of the Asian literature Group said, “She is an Oriental; the Oriental loves thinking rather than speaking out.” Dr. ML, is also famous among the faculty for her gentleness, quietness and readiness to obey any tasks given to her without complaints and questioning. The appraisals of quietness or

voicelessness in the professional space show the durable remnants of the colonial project of culture from one hundred years ago. People have continued to feed their minds with considerable appraisals of numbness, or voicelessness; in other words, living in the current Vietnam, the subconsciousness of people is filled by colonial suppositions of Orientalized Vietnamese merits that have been institutionally and personally propagandized.⁸²

The issues that still need to be addressed involve the “new technology of power” of the revolutionary regimes, as the contents of colonial knowledge do not necessarily change with revolution. For total liberation, as Fanon once addressed, we need further studies to disclose enduring practices of the “new technology of power” of the revolutionary regimes in maintaining colonial obsessions in textbooks and in instruction of the way of gestures and thinking.

⁸²The Association of Vietnamese Woman (AVS), which was set up in 1930, highlighted its first current goal is educating Vietnamese woman to preserve traditional moralities Vietnamese woman (Website of AVW). Current nationalist projects are still focusing on the merit of voicelessness of an ideal woman. The famous contemporary cook, Anh Tuyết, who is appreciated as the keeper of Hanoi people’s soul through traditional dishes, conceptualizes the image of Hanoi/Vietnamese/Eastern female. The most important beauty of a woman is being at home. She is always the person who sits close to the rice steam to give rice to her relatives and to observe the steam to see if it is sufficient for all family members. When giving rice to her relatives, she must give the oldest first... She must give the rice with both hands and with polite greetings. When eating, the girl should never take the most delicious food, but vegetable. The girl must pay attention on eating manners. She must hold chopsticks lightly; she must not deepen her chopsticks into the bowl of fish sauce. What makes people hate the most at the girl is that she makes noise when chewing food and making saliva to splash out. The gesture of sitting must be proper in the sense that she does not look downward and she does not keep a space between her two legs. When the meal finishes, the girl must be the first person who cleans up the stuff. Then she brings a sink of water for her parents and grandparents to wash their hands. Then she brings the dessert for them. Then she brings the teeth sticks for them. Taking those activities shows that Vietnamese girl was educated carefully” (Hòa).

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