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Life and Writings of Nguyễn Tường Tam

Život a dílo Nguyễn Tường Tama

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I aim not only to provide a comprehensive survey of the personality and life of Nguyễn Tường Tama - Nhất Linh in historical context, but also to analyze his literary work as part of the social and cultural transformation of Vietnamese society, investigating its roots in personal as well as historical context and examining its impact on the society, either directly, or indirectly, via inspiring further similarly motivated literature. In my analysis I have been inspired by the approach of New Historicism, the main assumption of which is that literature is historical, i.e. it is a social and cultural construct as well as its author. Through careful analysis of Tam's life (his family background, schooling in Vietnam and France, career as a journalist, writer and leader of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), and political activities) and his writings, with special focus on his depiction of women, it is apparent that Tam, despite his ardent advocacy of modernization of Vietnamese society and individualism remained to be a Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) and unwittingly reinstated many Confucian values in his novels. Examining Tam's life and work one is also confronted with two more general questions concerning the analysis of Asian literatures in the process of modern transformation and the complex relation of tradition and modernity.

Key words: Nguyễn Tường Tam (Nhất Linh), *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), *Phong Hoá* (Customs), *Ngày Nay* (This Day), Confucianism, tradition, modernization

ABSTRAKT

V této dizertační práci si kladu za cíl nejen poskytnout komplexní nástin osobnosti a života Nguyễn Tường Tama - Nhất Linhe v historickém kontextu, ale také analyzovat jeho literární dílo jakožto součást kulturní transformace vietnamské společnosti. Při rozboru jeho díla budu brát ohled jak na jeho životní zkušenosti, stejně tak jako na historický kontext, přičemž hlavním záměrem bude analyzovat přímý či nepřímý dopad jeho díla na společnost i jakožto vzoru pro podobně motivovanou literaturu. V mé analýze jsem se nechala inspirovat východisky nového historicismu, jehož hlavním předpokladem je argument, že literatura je historická, tj. je sociálním a kulturním konstruktem stejně tak jako její autor. Skrze pečlivý rozbor Tamova života (jeho rodinného zázemí, vzdělání ve Vietnamu i ve Francii, kariéry novináře, spisovatele a vůdce *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Literární skupiny za sebe-posílení), působení v politice) a jeho díla, především s ohledem na jeho vyobrazení ženy, je zřejmé, že navzdory jeho zaníceného prosazování modernizace vietnamské společnosti a individualismu, zůstával konfuciánským ušlechtilým mužem (*junzi*), který nevědomky znovu potvrdil mnoho konfuciánských hodnot ve svých románech. Skrze analýzu Tamova života a díla jsme též konfrontováni se dvěma obecnějšími otázkami týkajícími se výzkumu asijských literatur of procesu moderní transformace a komplexního vztahu tradice a modernity.

Klíčová slova: Nguyễn Tường Tam (Nhất Linh), *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Literární skupina za sebe-posílení), *Phong Hoá* (Zvyky), *Ngày Nay* (Dnes), konfucianismus, tradice, modernizace

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Life and Writings of Nguyễn Tường Tam

1. Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive perspective of literary, political and private life of one of the most outstanding personalities of Vietnamese cultural life of the first half of the 20th century. Nguyễn Tường Tam, known also under his artistic pseudonym Nhất Linh, significantly contributed to the modernization process of Vietnamese literature by establishing a literary group called *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) in 1932. He published his own writings and the work of other authors of the group in two magazines - *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day). Beside supporting young, promising writers in their creative endeavors, he is also an author of a large number of novels and several collections of stories that he wrote himself or in cooperation with his colleague and close friend Khái Hưng. Vietnamese literary critics have ignored his work and his literary legacy for a long time. Before the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) reforms launched in 1986 he had been excluded from the anthologies of Vietnamese literature. Nevertheless, he still remains to be one of the most popular and most read of Vietnamese authors. The negative perception of his novels and literary activities by the Vietnamese Communist literary critique was caused mainly by his political activities for which he abandoned his literary career in 1940. After he had failed to attain his political ambitions of a deep-rooted nationalist and leader of the nationalist party *Đại Việt Dân Chính* (Great Viet Democratic Party), he left the world of politics and devoted himself to literature again, mainly by promoting young literary talents and republishing the work of his *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group).

Nguyễn Tường Tam was born in July 25, 1906 as the third of seven children of a Confucian scholar who worked rather reluctantly in the French colonial administration. Since his family was forced to move often, he spent his childhood in many different schools, where he acquired his education under the influence of Confucian scholars, who due to their hatred of the French had left their positions in the state administration and dedicated their time to teaching the Confucian classics to the younger generation. It is said that already at that time Tam excelled in literary composition in literary Chinese. After having received the consent of his family, he continued his studies at the French Protectorate School in Hanoi. After his school leaving exams passed in 1923, he started working at the Financial Bureau in Hanoi, where he met Hồ Trọng Hiếu, his future close friend and collaborator, who would become one of the members of Tam's literary group and one of the most famous Vietnamese satirical poets of the 20th century.

In 1925 Tam became enthused over studying art and he applied to the newly opened École des Beaux Arts in Hanoi. Two years later he succeeded in obtaining a scholarship for study in France, where he spent three fruitful years 1927 – 1930, which were to become a major turning point in his life. He described his experience in a satirical travelogue called *Di Tay* (Journey to the West or Going to France), which is one of the most popular Vietnamese travelogues of this era. After having received the degree of Bachelor of Sciences, Tam returned to Vietnam with revived enthusiasm and with the intention to plunge himself into journalism. He wanted to establish a satirical magazine *Tiếng Cười* (Laughter), which was supposed to be a Vietnamese version of the French magazine *Le Rire*. However, the colonial administration, having to cope more and more often with the growing nationalistic movement in Vietnam, did not want to issue the permission. Therefore, in 1932 Tam did not hesitate to profit from the

opportunity of taking over the moribund magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs). He rented a small house in the village of Thái Hà on the outskirts of Hanoi, where he and his literary friends and colleagues would meet to work on the issues of the magazine. His two brothers Nguyễn Tường Long (later known under his literary penname Hoàng Đạo), the main theoretician of the group, and Nguyễn Tường Lân, who would become the famous novelist Thạch Lam, joined him in his endeavor. Among the other members of the group was the already mentioned satirical poet Hồ Trọng Hiếu, writer Trần Khanh Giur (known under his penname Khái Hưng), painter Nguyễn Gia Trí, and another famous poet, Nguyễn Thứ Lễ, famous under his nom de plume Thế Lữ.

This newly founded literary group, the slogan of which was “first comes pleasure, then utility” (*Trước vui thích, sau ích lợi*) dominated the Vietnamese literary scene for almost eight years 1932 – 1940. The writings of its members were published in the magazines of *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day). Since both the magazines aimed to revive Vietnamese intellectual life, they were conceived as forums for discussion on different topics, such as polemics about Confucianism or Western logic, discussions about the role and function of art etc. Despite the fact, that at that time there were many other magazines having the same objective, the main contribution of the magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs) was its satirical character. It was in fact the very first Vietnamese satirical magazine, the pages of which were sown with a large number of caricatures ridiculing the backward character of Vietnamese traditions, obsolete Confucian morality and the yesterdaysness of the Vietnamese peasant. It was of no surprise that it was the satire and severe criticism of the colonial administration that led to the magazine’s closure in 1935. Nguyễn Tường Tam substituted the magazine with another journal *Ngày Nay* (This Day), which had an almost identical content but lacked the strong satirical tone of its predecessor.

The intention of the Self-Strength Literary Group was to publish on the pages of both the magazines everything that was related to the modernization of Vietnamese society and also of literature. Therefore, they enabled the young poets of the *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) movement, who disclaimed the conventions of traditional Chinese poetry, which until then had dominated the Vietnamese literary scene, to present their works to the readership on the pages of their journal. Moreover, the group published novels and stories in the form of feature stories in their magazines. In these serialized novels one could find for the very first time in Vietnamese literature the individual psychology of main characters. Till then, the inner life of the literary characters had not been disclosed in Vietnamese belles-lettres. The modernity of the group's writings also consisted of a new literary style that disengaged Vietnamese sentences from parallelisms, rhymes and literary allusions inherited from the Chinese tradition. Thus, their work became comprehensible also to the younger generation, which had not pursued the traditional education. The modernity of their style also relied on the innovation of the Vietnamese language itself: systematic usage of personal pronouns, conjunctions, classifiers, etc. that till then had appeared in Vietnamese literature only sporadically.

With the outburst of the World War Two Nguyễn Tường Tam - Nhất Linh gave up his life of a writer and began to actively engage himself in politics. He became one of the leaders of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) and also the founder of the Great Viet Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*). In the years 1945 – 1946 he held the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hồ Chí Minh's provisional government. It was him, who led the talks with the French in Đà Lạt about the future and status of Vietnam in the French Union. He was also supposed to lead the Vietnamese delegation to the upcoming conference in Fointanebleau. Since he was convinced about the inconclusiveness of the negotiations

between both sides, he refused to take part and fled to China in 1946, where he engaged himself in futile political activities. Meanwhile, Việt Minh had driven his political party out of Vietnam and some of his closest friends had become victims of political purges. Nguyễn Tường Tam had a hard time to recover from the loss of his closest friends and he spent the following years in Hong Kong plunged in sorrow, unsuccessfully buried in alcohol, and in an overall apathy, sporadically interrupted by writing short stories.

In 1951 he definitely left political life and returned to North Vietnam, where he established the *Phượng Giang* publishing house, in which he republished his writings and the work of his colleagues from the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). In this period, he also started working on his autobiographical novel. After the Geneva Agreements in 1954 he decided to relocate to the South as many other non-Communist writers and intellectuals. He spent some time in Saigon at his brother's house and then left to live in Đà Lạt for some time due to his poor health. There he dedicated himself to searching for and growing orchids and slowly returned to writing. The result of which was a three volume novel about his revolutionary activities on the Sino-Vietnamese border in 1945, published in 1961 under the title *Giòng sông Thanh Thủy* (Along the Thanh Thủy river). After becoming weary of Đà Lạt, he moved back to Saigon with the intention to participate in literary life again. He concentrated mainly on publishing the magazine *Văn Hoá Ngày Nay* (Contemporary Culture), which he meant to conceive as a forum for young talents. In this time, Nguyễn Tường Tam himself wrote only little prose. He contended with answering letters to the editor and writing some poetry. Despite the fact, that he was no longer able to penetrate more fundamentally into the Vietnamese literary scene, his earlier work and

writings of the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) were still very popular in the South.

In spite of not taking any visible part in politics, he was to his surprise accused of taking part in the abortive coup against the regime of the president Ngô Đình Diệm in November 1960. In the next two years the Diệm administration did not bring up any charges. However, in 1962 Diệm administration decided to accuse Nguyễn Tường Tam and many others of treasonous activities as a warning to potential rebels. A day before his trial Nguyễn Tường Tam committed suicide by drinking a lethal dose of veronal with whiskey. Despite the fact, that no newspaper dared to publish this news, his children managed to make public his farewell letter, which was reprinted in the American journals *Newsweek* and *Time*. Many important personalities and thousands of people attended Nguyễn Tường Tam's funeral and Diệm's government fearing the negative reaction of the already dissatisfied public was quick to withdraw all the charges against Tam.

In the following years the perception of Tam's work was largely affected by the political circumstances in the country. After the positive reception of Nguyễn Tường Tam's work in the thirties, a temporary downfall followed. During the war against the French and later against the Americans, Tam's writing were severely criticized in North Vietnam mainly for its romantic character, its vague nationalist tendencies, absence of concrete propositions to solve the bleak situation of Vietnamese peasants fighting the oppression of the colonial regime. The cause for this outburst of negative assessments of his person and writings was his nationalistic and strongly anti-Communist stance and activities not only during his political engagement during the Second World War but also as a member of Hồ Chí Minh's

provisional government. For these and many other reasons Tam's name and work were omitted from anthologies of Vietnamese literature.

Despite the fact, that many articles have been written about Nguyễn Tường Tam - Nhất Linh's life, literary or political activities, many of these analyses retain only a partial character. Till now, there does not exist, maybe with the exception of Nhật Thịnh's monograph *Chân Dung Nhất Linh* (Portrait of *Nhất Linh*), a work that would provide a comprehensive perspective of his life, work and time, in which he lived and wrote. The objective of this thesis is to develop the topic in greater detail with the main emphasis being on Nguyễn Tường Tam's life and his journalistic and literary activities linked to the magazines *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day) in the 1930s. For these two journals reflect the intricate course of national emancipation and modernization of Vietnamese literature and society.

Thus, this dissertation aims to provide more than just a comprehensive portrait of Nguyễn Tường Tam as the analysis of Tam's writings can contribute to the study of the modernization processes of Asian cultures, which were incited by their clash with Western civilization in the first half of the 20th century. The analysis of Tam's writings and his political and social engagement in the broader historical context enables us to reach a more thorough understanding of the naissance of modern Vietnamese literature, the creation of which was closely tied to the changes in Vietnamese society and its emancipation. Examining Nguyễn Tường Tam's life and his writings we are a witness of his internal conflict between his distaste for the French colonizers on the one hand and his admiration for modern civilization embodied in the idea of progress, modern scientific knowledge, prosperity brought about by effective economy, the smashing of traditional social barriers and the ideas of

equality and individual freedom on the other. It is also a conflict between patriotism and the desire to free oneself of one's own backwardness and traditions that inhibit the freedom of the individual and impede social progress. In addition, in Nguyễn Tường Tam's life we can discern the tension between the desire to free oneself of tradition, which was paradoxically an unreflected source of moral values and also a driving force behind his social engagement. Careful reading of Nguyễn Tường Tam's writings and his life reveal that despite his rhetoric stressing the need for modernization, i.e. Westernization of all aspects of society and culture, in his actions he remained to be a true Confucian *junzi*.

1.1. Methodology

Taking into consideration the range of the topic, and especially Nguyễn Tường Tam's understanding of literature as being part of wider social and political movement of his time, I have chosen to write under some of the assumptions of New Historicism, which also studies literature in close relationship to society and historical change. The main line of reasoning is that art and society are connected. Thus art (in this case literature) and its creator (writer) cannot be understood outside of their cultural context. According to New Historicism: 1) Literature is historical, i.e. it is a social and cultural construct. Its proper understanding can be reached only when we comprehend the culture and society that produced it. (2) Literature is not a distinct human activity. Therefore it must be perceived as a particular vision of history. (3) Man / woman, just like the works of literature, is a social construct. He / she is a result of social and political forces. There is no such thing as human nature transcending history. (4) Consequently, the historian or critic analyzing any cultural production is also a prisoner of his / her own "historicity". No one can break free from the social formations,

ideological upbringing or social and cultural forces that created him (Meyers 1988-1989)

In the vast amount of New Historicist writings, I find especially stimulating Greenblatt's assumption that art (and thus also literature) as such does not exist, but is „made up“, i.e. the artist (or the writer) always works with art (literature) inherited from the preceding generations. He / she works with objects that are transmitted, changed, adjusted, modified or reproduced (Greenblatt 1999: 13). In its consequences, there is very little invention in literature (Greenblatt 1999: 13). Thus, on the basis of this premise there is no such thing as “original moment or pure act of untrammelled creation”, in which the “master hand shapes the concentrated social energy into the sublime aesthetic object“(Greenblatt 1999: 13). An act of such unbridled creation does not exist. On the contrary, the work of art is a product of a large amount of “extended borrowings, collective exchanges and mutual enchantments” (Greenblatt 1999: 13). Moreover, the piece of work is also a result of transpositioning certain things such as ordinary language, metaphors, ceremonies, dances, emblems, items of clothing, anecdotes from one culturally demarcated space to another (Greenblatt 1999: 13). Therefore, the piece of art cannot but reflect the context, in which it has been created.

1.2. Statement of the Research Questions

In analyzing the life and writings of Nguyễn Tường Tam I have been inspired by the approach of New Historicism. Given the fact that New Historicism is not a unified literary method, the submitted thesis cannot but be yet again another possible interpretation of Nguyễn Tường Tam's personality, his texts and his contribution to Vietnamese literature. The

objective of this thesis is to study Nguyễn Tường Tam's literary work as part of the social and cultural transformation, investigating its roots in personal as well as historical context and examining its impact on the society, either directly, or indirectly, via inspiring further similarly motivated literature. In addition, the New Historicist approach corresponds perfectly with Nguyễn Tường Tam's attitude to literary creation, as he too perceived literature as a salient factor of social transformation and did not aim to produce a timeless literary masterpiece. In fact, the texts that he produced were mostly *romans-à-these*, in which he aspired to address problems that plagued Vietnamese society of the time, be it the position of the individual within the extended family system, his/her right for personal happiness and freedom to make his/her decision concerning future or the role of the intellectual in bringing enlightenment and progress to the masses that still remained trapped in backward traditions.

The red thread of this thesis is the relationship of Tam's modernity to tradition. Despite the fact that Tam was an ardent proponent of modernization of the Vietnamese society as well as an advocate of radical individualism in Vietnamese literature, it became evident that he was in fact a true Confucian gentleman (*junzi*). On the pages of this thesis I would like to elaborate on the argument that Nguyễn Tường Tam was imbued with Confucian values more profoundly than he himself might have been aware of. It is my aim to reveal this paradox to the reader not only by analyzing the most important moments of Tam's life but primarily via his works, which as the analysis shows, were not such a radical breach with the tradition as they might seem at first sight. In fact Tam in many of his novels actually restored Confucian values.

1.3. Thesis Structure

In the first chapter “Historical and biographical context” I will provide a brief overview of the historical and cultural context in Vietnam of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the knowledge of which is crucial for a better understanding of Nguyễn Tường Tam’s life and his literary work. In this part I will also present a brief description of Vietnamese traditional society, its structure and the changes that were induced by the arrival of the French in the second half of the 19th century. A special chapter is dedicated to the structure and characteristic of the Vietnamese traditional family and the position of women since women and their emancipation from the oppressive extended family system were a major topic of Tam’s writings. Special attention shall also be paid to the system of education in colonial Indochina since Tam was its typical product – a man educated in literary Chinese, then learnt in French and Vietnamese. Thus, he was a man imbued not only with Confucian values but also by those of the West, a result of his further education in France. In order to better illustrate the context and the contribution of Tam’s work I will also focus on the question of language and script used in Vietnam and also on the development of Vietnamese literature, the modernization of which is often attributed to Tam and his group *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group).

In the second part of the first chapter, i.e. in the section called “Life of Nguyễn Tường Tam (Nhất Linh)”, particular attention shall be paid to Nguyễn Tường Tam’s personality, his family background, his schooling in France, where he was exposed to Western culture and literature. The contact with the West had an extensive and transformational effect on Tam’s life and future literary career since it was the experience and knowledge acquired in France that led him to the staunch conviction that

all aspects of life in Indochina must be changed, i.e. modernized, which meant Westernized completely. The second part of the chapter shall focus on his political career, i.e. his activities within the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and the *Đại Việt Dân Chính* (Great Viet Democratic Party), his subsequent flight to China and struggle against Hồ Chí Minh's government, his return to Vietnam and eventually also to the world of literature. The last part of the chapter shall cover his life in Saigon, his subsequent political activities that resulted in his suicide as a protest against president Diệm's regime.

The third part of this dissertation will focus on Tam's journalistic and literary activities. As many others before him Nguyễn Tường Tam was convinced that the most effective means of spreading new ideas was via his literary and satirical journals. Therefore, this chapter explores his journalistic activities upon his return from France, treating mainly his career of the editor-in-chief of the two most influential magazines of the 1930's in Indochina – the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazines. Attention shall also be paid to the members of the editorial office, most of who were significant personalities of Vietnamese intellectual life of that day, and the innovations in the spheres of literature and art that the magazines incited. I will also treat his establishment of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) and its ideological and literary orientation.

The concluding part of this section shall explore Nguyễn Tường Tam's literary production within *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). I will expand mainly on the topics of his novels and try to trace the relationship between the new and the old, the modern and the traditional by analyzing Tam's depiction of women. By concentrating on this topic I aim to reveal the paradox of Tam's life and writing, i.e. that despite his rhetoric,

Tam remained a true Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) and was not as radical in his writings as he seemed at first sight. On the contrary, in his novels, he probably unwillingly reinstated many Confucian values that he so loudly denigrated in many of his articles published on the pages of his *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazines.

1.4. Bibliographical Essay

As has been mentioned above, the objective of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive perspective of literary, political and private life of Nguyễn Tường Tam - Nhất Linh. Due to the fact that Tam undoubtedly belongs among the most outstanding and interesting personalities of Vietnamese cultural life, it is not surprising that there is an extensive amount of sources treating either his life or his literary activities within the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). However, there are only two monographs that would focus solely on Tam, his life, literary activities and the historical and social context. The existing literature treating Tam's life has only a partial character. We can find publications and articles of more or less commemorative character, in which his family or friends strive to record their memory of Tam. On the other hand, there are many critiques of Tam and his literary activities, which are rather ideologically biased. Both these types have two things in common: they are one-sided and only insufficiently cover all available resources on Tam. Thus, most of these writings provide only an incomplete picture of Tam either focusing only on his character, his literary activities or his political career. Given the above-mentioned arguments, it is my aim to reconstruct a more complex portrait of Tam covering all aspects of his life and literary production.

In this bibliographical essay I aim to offer a brief overview of existing literature covering Nguyễn Tường Tam's life and his literary endeavors. In the first part I will introduce sources in Vietnamese language. The other part of this chapter will provide a summary of sources in other Western foreign languages, especially English and French.

It is noteworthy to mention that despite the fact that Vietnamese literary establishment have ignored Tam's work and legacy, literature on Tam in Vietnamese is quite abundant. However, one must rise above the bias that one can discern either in the writings of his family members, closest friends and colleagues or in the works of Vietnamese Communist literary critics. In compliance with what has just been stated the only two monographs that exist on the topic of Tam, his life and work were published outside Vietnamese Democratic Republic and its successor Vietnamese Socialist Republic. The first one ever to be published is Lê Hữu Mục's *Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Nhất Linh (tức Luận đề về Nhất Linh)* (Life and Works of Nhất Linh, i.e. Thesis on Nhất Linh) (Huế: Nhận Thức, 1958), which as the date of publishing indicates was written still during Tam's life. The book is an insightful and plentiful overview of Tam's life and his writings till the year 1958. The other monograph and also the first complete account of Tam's life and literary activities was published in 1975 in Glendale in the United States. It is the most often quoted book *Chân Dung Nhất Linh (Nhất Linh's Portrait)* written by Nhật Thịnh. The structure and depth of this manuscript is almost identical with the first mentioned monograph written by Lê Hữu Mục in 1958. However, it does provide an overview of the last five years of Tam's life until his suicide in 1963.

Despite the fact that these two monographs provide extensive information and details of Tam's life, one must be a bit more careful when assessing

their validity. Lê Hữu Mục's *Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Nhất Linh (tức Luận đề về Nhất Linh)* (Life and Works of Nhất Linh, i.e. Thesis on Nhất Linh) (Huế: Nhận Thức, 1958) lacks bibliography and footnotes, thus one does not know where the author took his information from. However, when working with the text it is apparent that most of the book is built on the memoirs of Tam's family, friends and colleagues. The same applies to Nhật Thịnh's book *Chân Dung Nhất Linh* (Nhất Linh's Portrait). Even though, Nhật Thịnh does provide a short list of authors and their memoirs at the beginning of the book, but without exact bibliographical data. Therefore, when working with these two sources one must keep in mind their possible subjective and one-sided character.

Since the publishing of these two biographies no other Vietnamese author has attempted to produce a similar kind of monograph. However, after the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) reforms launched in 1986 the negative perception of his work has been slowly abandoned and books on Tam or on his writing have slowly started to reappear not only in Vietnam, but also in the West. However, the tendency that prevails is to endlessly re-publish collections of memoirs, articles or critiques, which had been printed many times before, rather than provide a more thorough work of research. Among such collections we can cite for example Thanh Việt's and Mai Phương's, *Nhất Linh – Cây bút trụ cột của Tự lực văn đoàn* (Nhất Linh – The Pillar Writer of the Self-Strenght Literary Group) (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hoá – Thông Tin, 2000), Mai Hương's, *Tự lực văn đoàn trong tiến trình văn học dân tộc* (Self-Strenght Literary Group in the Evolution of National Literature) (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hoá – Thông Tin, 2000) or Phan Cự Đệ's *Văn học lãng mạn Việt Nam (1930 – 1945)* (Vietnamese Romantic Literature, 1930 – 1945) (TP Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Giáo Dục: 1997), etc. Nevertheless, the most salient contribution of these publications is the collection of primary materials on Tam and his writings.

Memoirs of Tam's family members proved to be an invaluable source of information on his life, character, temper, relationships and professional life. His sister's Nguyễn Thị Thế, *Hồi Ký về gia đình Nguyễn Tường, Nhất Linh, Hoàng Đạo, Thạch Lam* (Reminiscences about the Nguyễn Tường Family: Nhất Linh, Hoàng Đạo, and Thạch Lam) (Saigon: NXB Sống, 1974) provided a lot of information on the life of the Nguyễn family and Tam's position within it as well as his first literary attempts. More important, however, is the monograph written by Tam's younger brother Nguyễn Tường Bách's, *Việt Nam, một thế kỷ qua* (Vietnam, a Century That Passed) (accessible at: <www.thuquan.net>, 1980), which is an interesting account of major political events in Indochina, on the background of which we have the opportunity to find out a great deal of information on Tam's private life, his professional career, the operation of his two magazines, his literary colleagues, his engagement in politics, etc. Another important source of information are the memoirs of Tam's son Nguyễn Tường Thiết, who published *Nhất Linh, cha tôi* (Nhất Linh, My Father) (Gardena, CA: Văn Mới, 2000). Since Nguyễn Tường Thiết was the only one of Tam's children to spend more time with his father, his book is yet again an extremely rich source of information on Tam and especially his private life, his return from China in 1951, his life in Saigon and his orchid-seeking adventure in Đà Lạt, and also his political activities in late fifties that resulted in his suicide. The recollections of Tam's nephews' Tường Hùng's "Người chú" (Uncle) and Thế Uyên's "Người Bác: Nhất Linh trong dĩ vãng một người trẻ tuổi" (Uncle: Nhất Linh in the Past of One Youngster), both republished in Phan Cự Đệ's *Văn học lãng mạn Việt Nam (1930 – 1945)* (Vietnamese Romantic Literature, 1930 – 1945) (TP Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Giáo Dục, 1997) also proved to be quite an important source on Tam's private life, his family relationships and the standpoint of his family members on his political and literary activities.

While the memoirs of Tam's family members furnish us with plentiful information on his private life, the recollections of his friends, colleagues and contemporaries prove to be an important source of data on his professional and public life. Tam's friend's and colleague's Tú Mỡ's, "*Trong bếp núc của Tự lực văn đoàn*" (In the Kitchen of the Self-Strength Literary Group) (Tập chí văn học, no. 5/6 – 1988 and Tập chí văn học, no. 1 - 1989) is an extremely rich and often quoted source, which provides us with information not only on Tam but also on his efforts in publishing his two magazines *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day), his activities within the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) but also his first steps into the political arena in 1939. We can find a very detailed account of Tam's activities as Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Đà Lạt conference in 1946 in Hoàng Xuân Hãn's memoirs *Một vài kí vãng về hội nghị Đà Lạt* (Several Memories about the Đà Lạt Conference) (Hà Nội: NXB Giáo Dục, 1996). On the other hand the memoirs of Tam's pupil and friend Nguyễn Thị Vinh in her *Nhất Linh và Xóm Cầu Mới* (Nhất Linh and the New Bridge Village) (accessible at: <www.vietmessanger.com>, 2002) provide us information on Tam's life in exile in Hong Kong, where he fled in 1946 and stayed till 1951, when his failing health and homesickness forced him to return to Vietnam. The recollections of Nguyễn Thị Vinh's husband Trương Bảo Sơn such as "Những kỷ niệm riêng với Nhất Linh Nguyễn Tường Tam" (Personal Experience with Nhất Linh Nguyễn Tường Tam), republished in the collection *Nhất Linh, người chiến sĩ - người nghệ sĩ* (Nhất Linh, Fighter – Artist) (California: Thế kỷ xuất bản, 2004) and "Triết lý tuyệt hảo trong cuộc đời của Nhất Linh Nguyễn Tường Tam" (Perfectionism in the Life of Nhất Linh Nguyễn Tường Tam), printed in Phan Cự Đệ, *Văn học lãng mạn Việt Nam (1930 – 1945)* (Vietnamese Romantic Literature, 1930 – 1945) (TP Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Giáo Dục, 1997) provide us with plenty of useful information on Tam's character, his way of work, his life in Hong Kong,

his return to Saigon and his efforts to reestablish himself on the literary scene of the Republic of Vietnam, etc. There are many memoirs of his friends and colleagues, which cover Tam's last days and his funeral, such as Bùi Khánh Dân's, "Khóc bạn" (Mourning a Friend), Nguyễn Hữu Phiêm's, "Nhớ về Nhất Linh" (Remembering Nhất Linh), Nguyễn Mạnh Côn's "Vĩnh quyết Nhất Linh" (Parting with Nhất Linh), etc. all published on June, 25th, 1966, in a special issue of the Văn (Literature) magazine.

Considerable amount of attention has also been paid to Nguyễn Tường Tam's literary activities. Vũ Ngọc Phan, one of the younger members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), wrote one of the first essays on Nguyễn Tường Tam's literary activities. It was published in his *Nhà văn hiện đại* (Modern Writers), (Hà Nội: NXB Khoa học xã hội, tập I, 1942), which has become a classic of Vietnamese literary criticism. The essay provides us with a brief biography of Tam's early years and focuses mainly on his first literary endeavors. Information of similar kind can be found in Thế Phong's *Lược sử văn nghệ Việt Nam - Nhà văn tiền chiến 1930 - 1945* (A Brief History of Vietnamese Art - Pre-War Writers 1930 - 1945), (Sài Gòn: NXB Vàng Sơn, 1959). In this history of Vietnamese literature, the author provides brief information on Tam's life and then focuses on his literary activities within the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), i.e. lists his work and then moves on to evaluate its style and contribution to Vietnamese literature. The most important and probably most conducive, however, is the work of Phạm Thế Ngũ, whose essays "Nhất Linh - Văn tài tiêu biểu của Tự lực văn đoàn" (Nhất Linh - Representative Talented Writer of the Self-Strength Literary Group) and "Tự lực văn đoàn" (Self-Strength Literary Group) in *Việt Nam văn học sử giản ước tân biên* (Newly Edited Concise History of Vietnamese Literature), (Sài Gòn: NXB Quốc học tùng thư, 1965) provide the reader with a great amount of information on Tam's life, his professional career of

a journalist and writer and also quite a comprehensive and unbiased analysis of his work not only within the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) but also within Vietnamese literature in general.

Working with materials on Tam and his work that were published in the period of 1947 to the early 1990's in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is somewhat problematic due to the extremely negative bias of the critiques. Given Tam's strong anti-Communist standpoint and his anti-Việt Minh activities, in 1947 Vietnamese Communists issued an order to all existing and affiliated cultural and literary groups to organize debates and write literary critiques denigrating Nguyễn Tường Tam and the work of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). Thus, this period can be characterized by a mass production of literary critiques of Tam's writing demeaning one novel or the other. However, the main motive behind these critiques was the fact that Tam was anti-Communist and thus considered an enemy of the state and the ruling party. Therefore, in these assessments Nguyễn Tường Tam is often portrayed as a prototype of a spineless reactionary coming from a bourgeois milieu, whose attempts of social reform proved to be only temporary (Nhật Thịnh, 1986: 151, Hiếu Chân 1970).

In the last few decades, Vietnamese literature has attracted the attention of scholars in the West. Before the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) reforms of 1986, when Vietnam started slowly to break out of its isolation, most of the scholarly research in the West had revolved around Vietnamese history and politics. However, after 1986 the attention started being shifted also to the field of Vietnamese literature. Thus, Tam as an eminent personage of Vietnamese history and literature also began to draw attention of the Western scholars. However, this research is only partial, limited to articles

on Tam's life or on his literary activities. Only a few do attempt to provide the reader with a more complex depiction of his character, life and work.

One of the first to introduce Nguyễn Tường Tam to Western readership was Stephen O'Harrow. In his short article "*Some Background Notes on Nhat Linh (Nguyen Tuong Tam, 1906 – 1963)*", published in the magazine *France-Asie/Asia*, (vol. 22, no. 193 (1968)), he focused mainly on the early life of Tam, his sojourn in France, his return to Indochina and his subsequent literary endeavors. However, it is apparent that most of the information was quoted from the above-mentioned Lê Hữu Mục's *Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Nhất Linh (tức Luận đề về Nhất Linh)*, (Life and Works of Nhất Linh, i.e. Thesis on Nhất Linh), (Huế: Nhận Thức, 1958). In 1986 James Banerian published one of the first anthologies of Vietnamese short stories published in English *Vietnamese Short Stories: Introduction* (Phoenix: Sphinx Publishing, 1986). One of the stories offered to the reader was Nguyễn Tường Tam's story *Hai vẻ đẹp* (Two Aspects of Beauty) with a page-long brief summary of Tam's life.

Throughout the 1990's the writings on Tam became more and more numerous. Neil Jamieson wrote one of the first endeavors providing more in-depth study. His book *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993) provides the readership with more comprehensive information on Tam, his life, his activities within the *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), his political endeavors, exile in China to his life in Đà Lạt and death in Saigon. Information, however, is scattered throughout the whole text. It is apparent that in reconstructing Tam's life Jamieson was grounded mainly on Nhật Thịnh's *Chân Dung Nhất Linh* (Nhất Linh's Portrait) (Glendale: Đại Nam, 1975).

A special place in the research of Nguyễn Tường Tam belongs to Australian translators and literary critics Greg and Monique Lockhart. In 1994 they published a translation of Tam's satirical travelogue *Đi Tây* and an informative, in-depth literary study "Broken journey: Nhất Linh's Going to France", published in the magazine *East Asian History* (no. 8, 1994), which proves to be a rich source of interesting information on Tam, his life, his publishing activities and the overall situation and atmosphere of colonial Indochina. In 1997 they also published a commentary and a translation of Tam's first stories "Dream of Tu Lam". It was printed in the international Australian literary magazine *Heat* (no. 5., 1997).

Since France has had the longest relationship with Vietnam, it is of no surprise that much of Vietnamese literature was translated into French. We can find reference to Nguyễn Tường Tam and his *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) in Maurice Durand's *L'Introduction à la littérature Vietnamiennne* (Paris: Édition G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1969), co-authored by Nguyễn Trần Huân. Marina Prevot's essay "Khai Hung et Nhat Linh, la nouvelle en marge de l'orthodoxie" published in Chen-Andro's, Curien's and Sakai's *Litterature d'Extreme Orient au XX. siecle*, (Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 1993) provides us with very brief biographies of Khái Hưng and Nhất Linh with emphasis on their joint literary activities in the first half of the 1930's. Marina Prevot then continued by publishing a bilingual edition of Nhất Linh's and Khái Hưng's short story collection *Tu dois vivre (Anh phải sống)* (Paris: You Feng, 1995). In the introduction yet again she submits biographical information on both the writers and provides a thorough analysis of their contribution to the modernization of Vietnamese literature with emphasis on the short story genre. There is also a modest, introductory chapter on the life and publishing activities of Nguyễn Tường Tam in the book *Hanoi*

1936-1996 (Paris: Autrement, 1997) written by Georges Boudarel (1926 – 2003) and Nguyễn Văn Ký.

In addition, it must be noted that more and more Vietnamese scholars now write in English or French and their work constitutes an important body of knowledge available on Vietnamese literature in the West. An extremely rich source on the development of prose in Vietnam in 1925 – 1945 is Bùi Xuân Bào's *Le roman vietnamien contemporain: tendances et évolution du roman vietnamien contemporain 1925-1945*, (Saigon: Tủ sách nhân văn xã hội, 1972). It is a useful source of information not only on the life and writings of Nguyễn Tường Tam but also on the work of his colleagues from the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) and their contemporaries providing a thorough study of Vietnamese literature and the context in which it was created.

A useful and comprehensive overview of the trends that dominated Vietnamese literary scene in the 1930s and 1940s is rendered in an article written by a leading Vietnamese scholar, literary critic and translator Huỳnh Sanh Thông. In his “Main Trends of Vietnamese Literature Between the Two World Wars” published in *The Vietnam Forum* no. 3 (Winter – Spring 1984) he provides useful and concise information on the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), their manifesto and literary production.

A monograph based on a PhD. dissertation of Hoàng Ngọc Thành *Vietnam's Social and Political Development as Seen through the Modern Novel*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1991) is an extensive overview of the development of Vietnamese fiction in the 20th century with emphasis on the analysis of the picture of society that it portrays and reflects. The book is an extensive and abundant source of information on literary trends,

authors and novels that dominated the Vietnamese literary scene. A large chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the analysis of the writings of the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). Thus, Hoàng Ngọc Thành provides a detailed overview of Nguyễn Tường Tam's short stories and novels with the emphasis on the salient questions that they put forward to the Vietnamese society.

Brief reference to the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) and also to Nguyễn Tường Tam is made in Hue-Tam Ho Tai's (1992), *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), in which the author shortly discusses the activities of the group as inducers of social change and reform of Vietnamese society.

On the other hand, an independent scholar Nguyễn Văn Ký in his *La société vietnamienne face à la modernité*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995) provides a complex picture of colonial modernity in Vietnam. The publication provides the reader with abundant information on the transformation of Vietnamese society that was incited by the arrival of the French and the introduction of Western culture. Special attention is paid to the changes that occurred on the literary scene with the emphasis on the development of journalism, modification of poetry, development of new genres like the short story and the novel, caricature, etc. Therefore, the book is an important source on Nguyễn Tường Tam and the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), their writings and innovations that they induced in the field of literature and subsequently of society.

Despite the fact that more attention has been paid to Nguyễn Tường Tam and his writings in various contexts, only a few translations of his work have been provided to the readership until now. As has been mentioned

above only a few of his short stories have been furnished to the readership in Western languages. We can mention the translation of his travelogue *Đi Tây* (Nhật Linh's "Going to France", *East Asian History*, no. 8 (December 1994) and *Dream of Tu Lam* in the magazine *Heat* (no. 5. 1997). James Banerian on the other hand translated Tam's short story *Hai vẻ đẹp* (Two aspects of beauty) into English. Banerian was said to be working on the translation of the novel *Đoan Tuyet*, but it has not been published so far. On the other hand Marina Prevot provided the translation of Tam's and Khái Hưng's short story *Tu dois vivre (Anh phải sống)* (Paris: You Feng, 1995). The latest book translated into French was *Lạnh Lùng* (Solitude) (Paris: Édition You Feng, 2006) rendered into French by Tâm Oùy.

Concerning Tam's journalistic activities, I have not had direct access to his magazines *Phong Hoá* (Customs) nor *Ngày Nay* (Today). Therefore, in reconstructing his journalistic activities, I was forced to rely on secondary sources or reprints of some of the issues in other publications.

As this bibliographical essay indicates there is a plethora of articles, essays and memoirs dealing with Nguyễn Tường Tam and his writings. However, most of the above-mentioned books deal with Nguyễn Tường Tam and his writings only partially often focusing on one aspect of his life – literary or political. The main objective of this thesis is to portray the personality of such a distinguished personage of Vietnamese literary history and his work as part of the interplay of forces shaping Vietnam's modernity. In addition, the main objective is to show that his work and the context within which it was created are related and cannot be understood separately from one another.

2. Contexts

2.1. Vietnamese National Distinctiveness: Between China and France

The Vietnamese trace the beginning of their civilization to the legendary Hồng Bàng dynasty (2879 – 179 B.C.) and the kingdoms of Văn Lang and Âu Lạc (258 B.C. – 179 B.C.), which stretched in the delta and the central part of the Red River. However, the development of these independent kingdoms was quickly marred by the expansion of the Chinese dynasty Han (202 B.C. – 220 A.D.) into the region. Northern Vietnam, thus, found itself under a thousand-year long Chinese dominion from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D. Inhabitants of the province Giao Chỉ, as the area of North Vietnam to the Col des Nuages was called, were, therefore exposed to the influence of Chinese culture and thought.

In the following centuries, the Viet displayed an ambiguous relationship towards their northern neighbor. On one hand, they always fought hard to oust the Chinese invaders and to secure the hard won independence.¹ On the other hand, they held the Chinese culture in high esteem and were always fast to adopt the achievements of the Chinese such as Confucian political and social forms, Chinese learning and literature, Confucian rationalism, Taoist mysticism, etc (Le Thanh Khoi, 1955: 105).

After much turmoil in the preceding centuries, the last Vietnamese dynasty Nguyễn (1802 – 1945) ascended the throne with the help of French missionaries and mercenaries. Europeans, who had hoped to gain some benefits for their services to the new emperor, were quickly disillusioned. The emperor Gia Long (1802 – 1820), in order to overcome decadence and disorganization so characteristic for the country in the previous centuries,

¹ The Chinese would invade Vietnam several times throughout the centuries. We can mention the invasions of the Yuan dynasty in 1258, 1285, 1288, of the Ming dynasty in 1407-1428; of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1788, etc.

did not open up to the Europeans, but oriented the country towards China aiming to make Neo-Confucianism the basis of national culture.

In the following fifty years the emperors Gia Long (reigned 1802 – 1820), Minh Mạng (reigned 1820 – 1841) and Thiệu Trị (reigned 1841 – 1847) systematically modeled the country after Ch'ing China, which was, paradoxically, in decline and would soon become helpless victim of the imperialist expansion. Thus, the formal structure of the Chinese state, the structure of its government, institutions and even the official administration terminology were adopted. Therefore, Vietnam became almost a smaller mirror image, an exact copy of its northern neighbor. The imperial palace in Huế was a replica of the Forbidden City in Beijing and the Vietnamese emperors reined the country from the walled inner palaces and sent out orders to the leading mandarins in the capital and other major cities. Not only was the administrative organization of the country fashioned after China, but many other features were adopted, if not copied, such as: tax collections, five year census registrations, forced labor, the creation of public granaries, etc (Fairbank – Reischauer – Craig 1973: 273). In accordance with the Chinese Confucian model, Gia Long also revived the civil service examinations. Moreover, in 1812 the code of law *Hồng Đức*, which had been in effect for centuries, was substituted by a new legal code known as *Hoàng Việt Luật Lệ* (or *Bộ Luật Gia Long*), a copy of the Manchu code of law of the Ch'ing dynasty.

Emperor Minh Mạng (reigned 1820 – 1841) continued systematically in reorganizing the country in accordance with its northern neighbor. It was him, who launched a Confucian revival in the society. Moreover, in 1825 after having thoroughly studied the Bible, he came to the conclusion that Christianity was not compatible with loyalty to the King and his *mandate of heaven*; therefore, he issued a number of Royal edicts banning

Christianity (Karnow 1980: 67). The prohibition of this religion went hand in hand with arrests and executions of Christian missionaries and their followers in the years 1833 – 1838 (Karnow 1980: 67). His successors would then continue along the same lines. This, however, gave the French a pretext to resort to violence.

French warships, which had arrived at the port Tourane (Đà Nẵng) in 1844, demanded the release of two detained missionaries and freedom to practice Christianity. The Vietnamese emperors had remained deaf to their demands, which led to a clash of the two parties. The Viets were not capable of resisting their technologically more advanced adversary. In 1863 the emperor Tự Đức (1829 – 1883, reigned 1847–1883) was forced to sign a treaty, which stipulated a compensation of 20 million Francs, the cession of three ports and three southern provinces of Cochinchina to the French. The latter then continued in their military campaigns and by 1867 the rest of Southern Vietnam fell into their hands and became a French colony called Cochinchina.

After having secured their position in the South the French started making all the necessary steps to conquer the rest of Vietnam. In the following twenty years they launched a series of military campaigns and step-by-step marched north gnawing away the territories from the imperial court in Huế. By 1882 – 1883 the French occupied North Vietnam, i.e. Tonkin, which in its consequences also led to a short Sino-French clash in the following years of 1884 – 1885. China, weakened by internal turmoil and efforts of European powers to dominate it, finally lost its traditional vassal state to the French.² The French then divided the country into three parts: the protectorates of Tonkin (North Vietnam) and Annam (Central Vietnam)

² After having crushed the Tay Son dynasty and unifying the territory, the new king of the new ruling dynasty Nguyễn, Gia Long (1802 – 1820) sent his envoys with tribute to China, where they were to seek the recognition of the Chinese emperor for their state. Vietnam thus again became a vassal state of the Ch'ing China.

and the colony of Cochinchina (South Vietnam). Moreover, they also annexed Cambodia in 1863 and Laos in 1893 and created a new entity, which would later be known as French Indochina.

The French formally maintained monarchy in all three countries, however none of the kings of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam had any power. The French colonial administration attributed the nominal heads of states with an allowance, which was supposed to cover the needs of the court. Even though the kings were empowered to issue their royal edicts, these were subject to the French censorship. The actual power in all five parts of the colony was in the hands of the so-called *résidents supérieurs*, who were subjected to the French *gouverneur général*, seated in Saigon and from 1902 in Hanoi.

In the beginning the French did not have a unified policy concerning the administration of their newly acquired colony and approach to local elites and cultural tradition they represented. Their strategy oscillated between cultural assimilation and cultural association. The former meant conforming the Vietnamese culture with the French to such an extent that children at schools were taught that they were the descendents of Gauls. On the other hand, the concept of cultural association emphasized maintaining and respecting Vietnamese traditional institutions. By this concept the French hoped to take advantage of the existing social structures and state institutions. However, this policy led only to the resistance of the state officials, who rather than to serve foreign invaders, chose to leave their posts at the Court or in the administrative apparatus and withdraw to the countryside. These feelings of opposition stemmed from loyalty to Confucian morality and xenophobia rather than from a concept of Vietnam as a nation-state (Yaeger 1987: 17).

The French, therefore, abandoned the policy of cultural association and systematically worked on effacing and deracinating the influence of Chinese culture. Vietnamese traditional institutions based on the Chinese model, such as the system of state administration and education, were abolished. In Cochinchina traditional schools had been disappearing fast from 1890, whilst the system of national examinations was abolished in 1915 in Tonkin and in 1918 in Annam (Hue -Tam Ho Tai, 1992: 33). Instead, the French introduced a rather disunited educational system, the aim of which was to produce interpreters and low-level civil servants for the colonial administration. Moreover, the French also aimed to substitute Classical Chinese (*wenyan*), which had been the language of the Vietnamese court and the state administration for centuries, with Vietnamese language written down in the roman transliteration, the so-called *chữ quốc ngữ*, which was to become the second official language of the colony after French language. Chinese was just too complicated and too time-consuming to learn for the French. In addition, the civil servants of the Nguyễn dynasty, who mastered the language, were unwilling to cooperate with the French. Moreover, the population itself did not master *wenyan*, thus it was difficult for the French to appeal to the population via this language.³

Moreover, at the turn of the twentieth century Vietnamese literati had the opportunity to read Chinese reformist writings that began to penetrate into Vietnam. Vietnamese mandarins thus gained the opportunity to discuss the basic issues of modernization thanks to these Chinese publications. It was also through Chinese translations that the Vietnamese scholars had the opportunity to read the works of the eighteenth century French philosophers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778), François

³ For a more detailed analysis of the language situation in Indochina see the following chapter.

Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694-1778), Charles Louis Montesquieu (1689-1755); social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer (1820 – 1903), the American Declaration of Independence and France's *Déclaration des Droites de l'Homme* (Yaeger 1987: 17). Having been acquainted and inspired by the thoughts from the West, the Vietnamese literati created reform movements whose zeal was beginning to perturb the French. In addition, the fervor of Vietnamese literati was even more enhanced by Japan's victory over China in 1895.

In 1895 Japan shocked the Far East by defeating China. This surprising victory not only astounded China but also many of the Vietnamese literati. Until then Japan had always been perceived as a small country in the realm of Chinese cultural influence. However, it was able to defeat China due to the fact that it was capable of capitalizing on knowledge taken from the West (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 20). As a result, a Western-oriented reform movement appeared in Vietnam. It was influenced by the writings of Chinese reformers Kang You-wei (1858 – 1927) and Liang Ch'í- ch'ao (1873 – 1929), which began to be available to the Vietnamese scholars around 1900 and 1901. It is quite paradoxical that despite the fact that the Vietnamese were under French colonial rule, it was through these Chinese texts that Vietnamese scholars were exposed for the first time to the thoughts of French François Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694 – 1778), Charles Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu (1689 – 1755), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778). It was also thanks to Kang You-wei (1858 – 1927) and Liang Ch'í- ch'ao (1873 – 1929) that the Vietnamese literati discovered the writings and thoughts of Charles Robert Darwin (1809 – 1882) (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 21).

This event as well as Japan's subsequent defeat of Russia in 1905 affirmed to the Vietnamese scholars that by acquiring Western knowledge and technology they could compete with Western powers and gain

independence. The West thus also became a vital source of inspiration for the subjugated nation. Therefore, it was vital for the French to regain control over the dissemination of Western thought that could paradoxically endanger their colonial project in Indochina. Therefore, the first step how to salvage their control over this process was to eliminate the knowledge of Chinese among the population as it was through illegal Chinese translations that the Vietnamese literati were acquiring knowledge that could lead to their emancipation from the French.

Acquiring knowledge of the West via Chinese translations was a rather paradoxical phenomenon of the Vietnamese emancipation process. Prior 19th century Literary Chinese was on one hand the language of the Chinese invaders, who periodically endangered the suzerainty of Vietnam, on the other hand it was the language of the Vietnamese court, the nobility and the mandarinates. In the 19th century Literary Chinese had also acquired a two-fold character: it was the language of ultra-conservative traditionalists, who opposed everything that came from the West, yet it also became a means of import and spreading modern thoughts and Western knowledge. As it was via Chinese translations that the Vietnamese literati could for the very first time read Western philosophers and acquaint themselves with Western thought and civilization.

Paradoxically, the introduction of French was to bear the same contradiction as Literary Chinese. On one hand French language was viewed as the speech of the foreign invaders, occupants of the country, their collaborators and the tool of forceful assimilation. On the other hand, French became an important means of acquiring knowledge of the West, of modern view of the world, of progressive thoughts such as social justice and liberty. French, thus, also became a relevant inspiration for the naissance of national emancipation movement.

However, the French observed all the signs of emancipation and resistance in Indochina with inquietude imposing their own laws and regulations. Moreover, they crushed down hard upon any kind of opposition. As the Communist propaganda would often later declare, life in Indochina became a “prison”, while the moderate nationalist Phạm Quỳnh (1892 – 1945) claimed that Vietnamese felt like foreigners in their own country (Yaeger 1987: 17; Lancaster 1961: 68). Indochina resembled a police state, where there was no freedom of movement (one had to obtain a passport if wanting to leave the region and exit visas were compulsory if one wanted to travel abroad); no freedom of expression or of press (in order to establish any new periodical, Vietnamese journalists had to cooperate with French, for only they could receive a license). The French Governor-General had the right to detain Vietnamese without trial and confiscate their property for the period of ten years (Lancaster 1961: 68). The police had absolute power and could carry out domiciliary visits without a warrant. Even Nguyễn Tường Tam’s family was several times the victim of such police acts. On the international level, the administrative organs in Paris controlled Vietnam’s foreign relations, civil administration and custom services.

The French occupation also meant a great economic burden for the local population. It was peasants in the countryside that were most affected. Firstly, due to the French abolition of state examinations and the implementation of a rather chaotic new school system, which resulted in closure of many village schools, the literacy of the rural population dropped dramatically by the 1920s (Lancaster 1961: 68). Secondly, in spite of the proclaimed ambitious programs of public works French economic interests in the region heavily burdened Vietnamese peasants. The French Gouverneur-General Paul Doumer (1857 – 1932) was convinced that the colony should produce crops and raw materials for the mother country

[France] and should not focus on industry. Thus, Indochina was only expected to provide export commodities such as: rice, tea, rubber, coal, ores, etc. This standpoint was encouraged by the foundation of plantations, anthracite mines and cotton-mills in the colony. However, the recruitment of labour force and working conditions were far from satisfactory and were easily abused.⁴

The French colonial administration burdened the colony with a series of taxes, which were the main source of income for the colonial treasury. Finances were badly needed for the modernization and construction of public works such as construction of railways, roads, hospitals, bridges, ports etc. In order to have finances the colonial administration introduced its monopoly on salt, alcohol and opium. Every village was obliged to buy these three commodities. This compulsory tax system was another concealed method of extracting even more resources from the colony.

The changes induced by the French, such as industrialization, increased money production, and the establishment of farms and plantations had a considerable impact on the composition of Vietnamese society. The traditional four strata of mandarins, peasants, workers and merchants (*sĩ, công, nông, thương*) were enlarged by the emergence of new classes. In Cochinchina one was witness to the naissance of a new class of Vietnamese landlords, bankers and merchants, who due to their collaboration with the French colonial regime succeeded in accumulating considerable wealth that allowed them to live a Westernized lifestyle in the cities of the colony (Lawrence 2008: 13).

At the same time French colonial regime brought about the birth of two other influential groups that were each to play a salient role in the

⁴ For a detailed description of working conditions see Murray 1992: 41-67.

transformation process of Vietnamese society. Firstly, it was the urban petty bourgeoisie – the intellectuals, teachers, journalists, clerks in the colonial administration, who due to their knowledge, often acquired in the West, began to question the traditional roots of their society and the role of France in their country’s “civilizing process” and set out on a new quest: to reform and modernize Vietnamese society and use the knowledge of the West as a means to overthrow the French colonial regime.

The second social group that saw the light of day was the working class, which strove especially in the urban centers where industry was slowly developing. Even though it was still very small in numbers in the 1920s, with the course of events it would become a very important vehicle of social change and a force that everyone in Vietnam had to count with.

The 1920s brought a new sense of economic stability to French Indochina. The colony, which in the first years of existence had been unprofitable for the French, finally started yielding results. The French investments in the region grew rapidly and the plantations of coffee, tea and sugar cane generated considerable profits (Jamieson 1993: 90). Even though, the basis of the economy of the colony was agriculture, industry and mining started developing substantially. Nevertheless, the wealth that was generated by the colony had nothing to do with building the national economy, since most of the profits ended up in the pockets of the French and their companies (Jamieson 1993: 90).

In contrast with the economic success of the 1920s, paradoxically most Vietnamese had less to eat since the rice production was not able to keep up with the growth of the population, exports and heavy taxes imposed on the rural population (Jamieson 1993: 97). All the spheres of Vietnamese society were permeated with the feelings of malaise, depression and

bitterness. French, who controlled economic and social life of the country, had ousted the representatives of the mandarin class from the policy-making apparatus (Lockhart 1996: 10). Clerks and official servants, many of whom had acquired their education in the West, substituted them. They, imbued with the ideas of democracy and equality from the West, soon became disillusioned by the French employment policy. They more than often found themselves deprived of the job opportunities that they merited, since those were given to far less efficient Frenchmen. Moreover, the salaries that they received for their work were humiliating. This was the result of the French colonial policy, which stipulated that even “the lowest-ranked representative of France must receive a salary superior to that of the highest Indochinese official employed in the colonial administration” (Fall 1967: 32-33) Thus, feelings of inferiority, humiliation, resentment and frustration began to pervade the Vietnamese newly emerging urban petty bourgeoisie.

This was also due to the French incapacity to “match their actions to their rhetoric” (Jamieson 1993: 98). The representatives of the new Vietnamese urban middle class, who had acquired their education in the West and thus could compare the differences of the French and their values in Europe and the contradictory policies that they put forth in Indochina, started calling for greater freedom of speech, assembly, press, and access to better jobs, equal pay and participation in the political processes (Jamieson 1993: 98). This restlessness resulted in the foundation of the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) at Christmas in 1927 in Hanoi. The activities of the party were loosely based on the teachings of Sun Yat-sen and later Kuomintang, even though there seem to have been no contacts between the two parties prior 1931 (<http://www.vietquoc.com/history.htm>). The program of the party did not focus on legal reforms since its primary objective was the organization of an armed uprising, which would topple

the French colonial regime and gain independence and democracy (<http://www.vietquoc.com/history.htm>). The party appealed to the frustrated and dissatisfied intellectuals from the urban middle class and its membership grew rapidly.

Three years later, the aspirations of *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and its supporters resulted in a ferocious attack at the citadel of Yên Bái February 9th – 10th, 1930 (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 68). The offensive was suppressed very harshly by the French. On February 14th the French air force bombarded the village of Cỗ Âm, where the members of the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) had found refuge. On February 20th, the militia in Hải Dương province, east of Hanoi, captured Nguyễn Thái Học (1903 – 1930), the leader of the party. The subsequent French military and civilian crackdown saw military security increase and a wave of arrests followed. On June 16th, 1930 the leader of the uprising Nguyễn Thái Học and other fourteen leading members of the party were beheaded by the guillotine. Those who survived fled to China, where they established an exile or the so-called overseas *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*. In about twelve years time Nguyễn Tường Tam would join forces with them.

The feelings of frustration caused by the failure of the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and the following French repressions were even more aggravated by the Great Depression of 1929 – 1930, which also affected Indochina as well as other countries in the world. The Great Depression caused substantial increase of unemployment and an overall further deterioration of standards of living of all social strata in the country (Nguyen Van Marshal 2004: 217). In addition, agriculture in Indochina was also ailing, which had a negative impact on the state of society for 90 per cent of the population still lived in the countryside

(Lockhart 1996: 10). The price of crops, such as rubber and rice, fell dramatically. Many small businesses went bankrupt and a great number of small farmers lost their land due to their incapacity to pay their debts (Jamieson 1993: 89).

Even though the French succeeded in muffling the voices of the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party), it was becoming more and more difficult for them to suppress the growing opposition of the Vietnamese, partially also fueled by the gloomy economic situation. Another turning point in the resistance to the French was the establishment of the *Đông Dương cộng sản đảng* (Communist Party of Indochina) by Hồ Chí Minh (1890 – 1969) in 1930. The political activities of the Communists resulted in the establishment of the famous Nghệ An and Nghệ Tĩnh Soviets in the traditionally poorest provinces Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh. By early 1930 there were approximately 300 communist organizers in the above-mentioned provinces mobilizing the workers and peasants to protest against the constantly deteriorating conditions (<http://libcom.org/history/1930-1931-the-nghe-tinh-revolt>).

The demonstrators called for a moratorium on the payment of the head tax and the return of village communal lands that were occupied by affluent landowners. Their demands were ignored, which resulted in an outburst of riots, attacks on government buildings, pillaging and burning markets and destruction of tax rolls. The chaotic situation led to a rapid disintegration of government authority in the region. Moreover, on September 12th, 1930, over 6000 peasants were incited to launch an attack on the provincial capital Vinh (Dunn 1985: 6).

The French realizing the seriousness of the situation brought in Foreign Legion troops to suppress the rebellion and French planes bombed a

column of thousands of peasants heading toward the provincial capital. Security forces rounded up all those suspected of being Communists or of being involved in the rebellion, staged executions, and conducted punitive raids on rebellious villages. By early 1931, all of the Soviets had been forced to surrender and the French set out on a systematic eradication of any signs of political resistance. Of the more than 1,000 arrested, 400 were given long prison sentences, and 80, including some of the party leaders, were executed. By the summer of 1931 French secret police Sûreté reported that more than 2000 Communists had been killed and more than 51 000 were detained in prisons (Hlavatá et al. 2008: 144). The retaliation of the French colonial apparatus was so harsh that it became known as the White terror of 1931 (Dunn 1985: 6). Thus, it is not surprising that these actions resulted in a constantly deepening ambiance of bitterness and hatred among the Vietnamese towards the French.

The French colonial administration was much aware of the gloom that pervaded the subjugated society and tried hard to brighten up the situation by organizing all kinds of social events such as art exhibitions, carnivals, fairs, sport activities etc. In order to divert the population the French slightly loosened their grip of the press. While only forty new periodicals in the romanized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) were established between 1926 and 1930, another four hundred journals of all types appeared on the scene throughout the 1930s (DeFrancis 1977: 217). One could come across not only general interest newspapers but also all kinds of specialized magazines focusing on various topics such as literature, art, cinema, science, fashion, sport etc. Due to this development Nguyễn Tường Tam was able to publish his magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs), which was conceived as humorous and satirical aiming to offer a little cheerfulness in times of pessimism.

Regardless the efforts of the colonial administration to divert the omnipresent depression, the enthusiasm of Vietnamese youth had been broken and they were coping with a feeling of helplessness and inferiority. A Francophile and one of the leading journalists of the 1920s Phạm Quỳnh described the sense of powerlessness that pervaded the youth subsequently: “Nothing in the country seems to be clearly defined. Concerning the spiritual domain, it is very unsteady. Almost all the ancient norms are in ruins while new principles have not been established yet. The hierarchy determining the value of man in the society is disrupted: when judging man we do not know which criterion to refer to, when appreciating things we do not know what to lean upon” (Phạm Quỳnh 1923: 94, cited from Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 70-71). His statement illustrates the direction of debates that would preoccupy the society in the coming years, i.e. the old versus the new, the traditional versus the modern, the Western versus the Eastern.

Since the intellectual elites of the country were not able to revolt against the political system in the country, they focused their attention to the existing cultural forms, social institutions, and Confucian conservatism. These new voices engaged themselves in debates about the basic value conflicts, which were irresolvable for many Vietnamese, who had got a taste of the Western worldview that was so much incompatible with the society they lived in. Nguyễn Tường Tam would be one of these voices and he would present his ideas not only on the pages of his magazines but also in his novels.

In 1936 the overall situation in Indochina changed since the Popular Front (1936 – 1939) came to power in France. This change of politics had undeniable repercussions not only in the political but also social and cultural spheres of life in Indochina. From that year onward the processes of emancipation in the French Union became more and more visible as one

of the consequences of the relaxation of repression in the colonies that had been initiated by the socialist Prime Minister Léon Blum (1872 – 1950) (McHale 2003: 23). Moreover, the French colonial administration abolished censorship. Thus, the number of newspapers and magazines multiplied. According to the French statistics, there were 110 dailies, 159 magazines and other periodicals in Indochina in 1937, whilst every year their numbers increased. Furthermore, many political prisoners were released and open political activities of the Vietnamese were allowed. Therefore, many political, social and cultural associations appeared on the scene. Nguyễn Tường Tam and his group would not lag behind and also establish their Ray of Light Association (Hội Ánh Sáng), the aim of which was to spread enlightenment among the poor and solve their housing issues.

However, the overall relaxation in the colony would not last long. As the World War II was looming over Europe and Asia, the French yet again were fast to curb the freedom in Indochina. Many associations and journals ceased to exist and the French Sûreté renewed its monitoring of potentially disruptive individuals. Many Vietnamese intellectuals gave up their jobs and fled to China where they engaged in political maneuvering aiming to prepare the ground for Vietnamese independence and ousting the French from Indochina. Nguyễn Tường Tam was to be one of them.

2.2. Structure of Vietnamese Traditional Family and The Position of Women

In their writings Nguyễn Tường Tam and his literary group *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) aimed their critique especially at the Vietnamese traditional society, the extended family system and the

oppressed position of Vietnamese women. In order to better understand the content of their criticism, I furnish a brief characteristic of the structure of Vietnamese traditional family and the position of women in it.

Family is defined as a group of people directly linked by relations of kinship, in which the adult members are responsible for the upbringing of children (Giddens 1999: 156). The family is the most important of social groups and institutions and is considered to be the fundamental building block of social structure and also the basic economic unit. It is based on the legitimate coexistence of husband and wife, and therefore the most important purpose of family is to ensure reproduction (birth of children), the subsequent socialization (up-bringing and education) of children, passing down of the current cultural patterns and values, etc.

The traditional Vietnamese family can be characterized by the following features:

It was polygamous, i.e. polygynous. Polygyny (*đa thê*) had been a common feature of the Vietnamese society since the 11th century and was abolished only in 1945. Polygyny is a custom of kinship allowing a man to have more than one wife. In traditional Vietnamese society, polygyny was more common among the elder and powerful men (who were members of the nobility and the mandarin). The main reason behind the existence of polygamy was the desire of families to have many children, especially boys, who would continue the line of the family (*nói dôi*). Despite the fact that girls were also warmly welcomed, the boys were nevertheless preferred in accordance with the proverb “To have a son means to have something, to have ten daughters equals to nothing” (*Nhất nam viết hữu, thập nữ viết vô / Một con trai là có, mười con gái là không có.*) (Vasiljev 1999: 159). This perception and appreciation of male and female

descendants was characteristic for all Confucian societies. Therefore, not having a son was considered as a transgression of filial piety (*bất hiếu*). If the legitimate first wife (*thê, vợ cả*) could not bear a son, then the husband had the right to take a second wife (*thiếp, vợ lẽ*). Before the 19th century the husband had the right to choose the second wife (or a concubine). However, after the 19th century he had to have the approval of his legitimate wife, if she found out that she could not bear any children. According to Đặng Thanh Lê the widespread efforts to continue one's lineage was tragic not only for the first wife (*thê, vợ cả*), because in a certain way she lost her husband after the arrival of the concubine (*thiếp, vợ lẽ*), and at the same time it was disastrous also for the concubines, for they lost their children, who by law belonged to the husband's household, which was taken care of by the first wife (Đặng Thanh Lê 1996: 196).

Marriage in Vietnam was not based on the premises of romantic love but on the necessity of giving birth to children, who would then continue the bloodline of the family. Thus, thorough attention was paid to the question of marriage not only by the immediate family but also majority of the kinsfolk. One can characterize traditional marriage in the Vietnamese society by a proverb "Where the parents say, the children will settle" (*Cha mẹ đặt đâu con ngồi đấy*). Love did not come into play at all. If the children were not satisfied with the choice of their partner they did not have many options how to solve the situation. The expected behavior was to surrender to the demands of the family. The other extreme solution was to sever the ties with the family and leave home. However, such behavior was perceived as an expression of lack of filial piety (*bất hiếu*) and ungratefulness. Therefore, many young people did not have the courage to stand up against this oppressive reality and follow their heart. There were two main reasons why the whole family engaged itself in the choice of the

partner: firstly, it was necessary to ensure the birth of offspring (especially the male) but also to accomplish a better social status of the family.

Vietnamese traditional family was patriarchal, i.e. all the power was concentrated in the hands of the father who was the uncontested head of the family. Originally, his power over other members of the family (especially over his wives and children) was absolute, i.e. he had the right to sell, hire out or to pawn his children to his creditors. On the other hand, the main obligation of the wives and children was to manifest their respect to the man and through their work contribute to the expansion of the family property. The father also had the right to decide the future fate of his children, i.e. he was active in their upbringing, choice of vocation and especially the life partner.

The Vietnamese family was also mostly neo-local, i.e. the newly wed couple usually moved into a new household away from the parents. However, this rule did not apply onto the first-born son. The first-born son and his wife were expected to stay at the house of the man's parents, in order to take care of them in their old age and continue in the cult of ancestors. The other siblings had the right to move away and establish their own household provided that they had reached the age of fifteen according to the Lê legal code. However, from the Confucian point of view this behavior was classified as a lack of filial piety (Insun Yo 1990: 81) In Vietnamese traditional society matrilocality was also quite a common phenomenon, i.e. the newly wed couple settled in the proximity of the wife's parents or the son-in-law moved into the household of his wife's parents. From the perspective of Confucian morality, such patterns of behavior were undesirable. Nevertheless, this type of coexistence lasted till the 19th century.

In the Vietnamese society every individual has had and has two families (*hai họ*): the paternal family, i.e. „inside relatives“ (*họ nội, nội tộc, họ dòng tộc*) and the maternal family, or the „outside relatives“ (*họ ngoại, ngoại tộc*) (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1995: 21). Both the families were equally important and one had to hold both the clans in due respect.

The most common type of family in Asia was the so-called extended family, i.e. more generations lived under one roof. As for the number of family members living in one household, we can detect a few differences when comparing the families of noble and common origins. The families from higher social classes were often more numerous, since their financial background allowed them to feed a larger number of relatives under one roof, i.e. the noble families were often extended. The children were not allowed to leave the house of their parents, which was due to the reluctance of the family to divide property. Such a situation would of course arise, the moment one of the children wanted to establish its own households, which would in its consequences mean the need to split the family fortune. The moral imperatives of such families were based on Confucianism; therefore many scholars call this type of families as Confucian - *gia đình nhà nho* (Trần Đình Hượu 1996: 335). Such families were found in the higher levels of Vietnamese society and were oriented outside, i.e. towards the Chinese culture; therefore, the influence of Confucianism was much stronger there. This type of family was patriarchal and the position of women was traditionally weak and subordinate.

On the other hand, the peasant families, i.e. *gia đình trung nông*, were often nuclear, i.e. formed by the members of only two generations – parents and their children (Trần Đình Hượu 1996: 335). The children, apart from the eldest son, were allowed to leave the family and establish their own households elsewhere. It must be noted, however, that this spatial

separation of parents and children did not free either side of its obligations and responsibilities. Moreover, while the most important relationship in the Confucian families (*gia đình nhà nho*) was the relationship between the father and the son, in the peasant family (*gia đình trung nông*) the most salient was the husband-wife relationship (Insun Yo 1992: 82). Unlike the Confucian family, the women in the peasant families were often almost equal to their husbands and also enjoyed greater freedom, which was caused by the fact that Confucianism and its values penetrated into this social strata more slowly.

Nevertheless, the redistribution of gender roles attributed the man with a more dominant position in the social sphere. His role was to be the breadwinner of the family, while the woman had to take care of the household and any public social activity was theoretically denied to her. Despite the fact that traditionally, Vietnamese women had enjoyed greater freedom than their counterparts in China or Japan, their fate still remained uncertain. Throughout Vietnamese history the destiny of Vietnamese women was dependent on the decisions made by their parents, elder relatives and husband.

Undoubtedly, the family was the corner stone or the basic unit of Vietnamese society. As such it can also be characterized by collective identity, i.e. the children were not taught to develop their individuality. It was the considerations of the family that were always put forward rather than the needs of the individual, his or her right for freedom and personal happiness. In accordance with this, the most important moral principle that the parent-children relationship was based on was the concept of filial piety - *hiếu*. In the imperial edict from the 17th century focusing on social and familial morality, filial piety (*hiếu*) was on the second place in importance straight after the loyalty to the emperor (*trung*) (Insun Yo 1992: 75). From

this point of view, a lack of filial piety (*bát hiếu*) was considered as felony.⁵

Therefore, straight from the very beginning a Vietnamese child was taught filial piety (*hiếu*). Moreover, the necessity of obedience and respect for one's parents was also stressed in the concept of moral debt (*ơn*). Thus, Vietnamese children were obliged to obey, respect and honor their parents, to put their needs and the needs of the family before their own, they should be able to sacrifice their own personal happiness for the happiness, well-being and prosperity of their parents. Moreover, the children were obliged to love and please their parents and be ready to take care for them when sick or old. If they failed to do so, they were to be accused of the lack of filial piety (*bát hiếu*) and were ostracized not only by their family members but also by the society itself. Hand in hand, with the concept of filial piety the children were instructed to pay respect to all the elderly people in the family and society.

The life of a Vietnamese woman in the traditional Vietnamese society could be divided into three stages: 1) as a young girl she learns from her mother the duties of an efficient and exemplary wife, who will one day be obliged to take care of the household. In accordance with this, a girl was always educated at home and usually did not have the right to pursue her studies at schools, which were reserved for men only; 2) once wed, as a daughter-in-law, a girl was subordinate to her mother-in-law, who took over the responsibility of leading, educating and supervision of the girl. In the Vietnamese society, this period was usually the most distressful for a

⁵ Among other transgressions of filial piety we can mention e.g. accusation of one's parents; disobedience of parents education; insufficient care of one's parents; marriage, adultery and other kinds of entertainment during the mourning period for one's parents; not wearing mourning attire during the mourning period; concealing or giving false declaration of death of one's parents.

women, since the relationships between the daughter and mother-in-law tended to be strained; 3) once a woman took upon herself the role of the wife, she could finally enjoy the respect not only in her family, but also among the neighbors (Đặng Nghiêm Vạn 1999: 35).

Vietnamese women were taught to be subordinate and subservient to men in accordance with the rule of “three subjections” (*tam tông*) of a woman. Throughout her life a woman in a Vietnamese traditional family held a submissive position: for an unwed woman she had to obey her father (*tông phụ*), married she was subjugated to her husband (*tông phu*), and widowed she had to obey her son (*tông tử*), i.e. *tại gia tông phụ, xuất gia tông phu, phu tử tông tử* (Đỗ Hoà Hới, 2001: 473). Moreover, a woman was also expected to have “four virtues” (*tứ đức*), i.e. in order to be considered as virtuous or good, she was obliged to have the following characteristics: *phụ công* (dexterity in women’s tasks), *phụ dung* (modesty, femininity, elegance), *phụ ngôn* (pleasing in conversation), *phụ hạnh* (well behaved).

Among one of the main obligations of a Vietnamese woman was to give her husband a son. Even though, traditionally children in Vietnam enjoyed love of both the parents and grandparents, it is undeniable that the boys were preferred more than girls. Nevertheless, even the birth of a girl was perceived as a joyous event since women had always been a crucial working force, who supported the whole family with her labor. The significance of female labor is even indicated in Vietnamese proverbs, e.g. “Not even all the riches can match a first born daughter” (Lê Thị Nhâm Tuyêt 1975: 83). Therefore, the childhood of girls was always more difficult than that of the boys, since they were kept closer to home, were obliged to actively help out in the household. The boys on the other hand enjoyed greater freedom and education of which the women were traditionally deprived.

It must be noted nevertheless that in Vietnamese traditional society, families who did not have any male descendants were perceived as ill fated. Not to have a son meant a serious offence against filial piety. The overall preference of male progeny is characterized by the proverb “To have a son means to have something, to have ten daughters means nothing” (*Nhất nam viết hữu, thập nữ viết vô / Một con trai là có, mười con gái là không có.*) (Vasiljev 1999: 159). This stems also from the fact that the eldest son would often stay at the house of his parents and continue in the cult of ancestors, while a girl was obliged to leave the family after her marriage and move into the household of her new husband. Therefore, it was often said that “A girl is a child of other people” (*Con gái là con người ta*) or that “A girl belongs to a different clan” (*Nữ nhi ngoại tộc*) (Nguyễn Văn Chính 1999: 162).

As has been stated above, marriage in traditional Vietnamese society was not an affair of the betrothed couple but of the whole family. Love often did not play a salient role. Moreover, marriage in traditional society could be characterized by the proverb “Children sit where their parents tell them to” (*Cha mẹ đặt đâu con ngồi đấy*), which yet again indicates that the choice of the partner was more in the hands of the family rather than the child concerned. If the children were not satisfied with the choice of the spouse they had only one option and that is to leave the family, which however was viewed as a serious transgression of filial piety.

The main reason behind such fervent initiative in the selection of spouse and arranging the marriage was the need to ensure the birth of male progeny, who would continue in the cult of ancestors. Therefore, it was often said, “You get married because of children” (*Lấy vợ vì con*) (Lê Thị Nhâm Tuyết 1975: 137). Hence, male celibacy was unacceptable in Vietnamese society, since it was perceived as lack of filial piety. On the

other hand, women who did not get married in order to take care of their younger siblings or aging parents were viewed with respect (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1995: 29).

As has already been mentioned, great attention was paid to the selection of the spouse so that both the betrothed “were equal and matched one another” (*Bằng vai, phải lứa*) (Hà Văn Cầu 1992: 35). Riches were one of the factors that were considered in the selection. Nevertheless, possessions were not regarded as that important. The indifference towards wealth in the choice of the life-partner is indicated in the proverb “Marriage regardless of wealth” (*Giá thú bất luận tài*). On the other hand it was education and the prospective position at the court that was more sought after. A proof of such standpoint is the fact that affluent families had the tendency to marry their daughters into poorer families, who had a clever and talented son that had a high chance of succeeding at the civil service examinations. Thus, the father-in-law then arranged and financed the education of his son-in-law hoping that he would succeed at the triennial examinations, gain a position at the court and strengthen the position and the influence of the family.

In Vietnamese traditional society, the freedom of women to choose their life-partner was determined by the economic situation of the family and its status. In general women from the higher social strata, heavily influenced by the Confucian morality, had very little freedom in selecting their partner and thus had to conform to the will of her parents and marry the person they considered appropriate. These arranged marriages were typical for the families of scholar-officials or mandarins of the court or men-of-means, who sought to enhance their social positions or gain more influence.

The organization of such marriage in the higher social strata was carried out through a go-between (*ông mối, bà mối, mai nhân*). Usually, it was a person of a certain age, who was well informed of the situation of the two families interested in marriage. A go-between was inevitable since the Confucian morality demanded the separation of boys and girls the moment they reached the age of ten. Moreover, girls from this social stratum were obliged to live in the household as the proverb “Girls should stay behind closed doors” (*Con gái cửa gài then đóng*) indicates (Insun Yo 1990: 56). Thus, the upbringing and preparation for the future life of boys and girls proceeded separately and they were deprived of the possibility to meet each other. It was very common that the couple had not seen each other before the wedding.

On the other hand the Vietnamese folkways were not so rigid and did not punish free relations of girls and boys, who had the opportunity to meet each other during festivals and fetes. Thus, the young people from the lower strata had more occasions to meet and find a suitable partner. However, such ways became unacceptable in the 15th century, when Confucianism became an official ideology of the state. Moreover, in 1471 the king Lê Thánh Tông in accordance with the principle that “Men and women have a different place and responsibilities” (*Nam nữ hữu biệt*, nebo také *Nam nữ thụ thụ bất thân*) (Toan Ánh 2002: 383) published an edict, in which he prohibited men and women to spend time together. Another royal edict from the 17th century condemned the “fleeting couplings in the manner of forest animals and birds” (Vasiljev 1999: 163). Nevertheless, none of the edicts succeeded in changing the ways of the commoners. In accordance with the Vietnamese proverb “Even the commands of the king must surrender to the customs of the village” (*Phép vua cũng thua lệ làng*), the representatives of villages argued that they had to maintain their traditions and practices in order to protect the village against ill fate.

Therefore, women could continue to move about freely, visit their neighbors, work in the fields, sell at the markets and take part in the village festivals without scandalizing.

Due to this relative freedom of movement, women from the lower strata did have more opportunities to select their partner without the assistance of a mediator, as the historian Lê Trắc indicated in his writings *An-nam chí lược* (Short Notes on An-nam) (Lê Thị Nhâm Tuyết 1975: 121). Nevertheless, even their choice of spouse had to be agreed to by their parents.

As has been mentioned above the main objective of marriage was to provide progeny and the continuation of the clan. However, the wish of the Vietnamese to have a concordant, harmonious and happy conjugality is characterized by the proverb “A concordant married couple can dry up the South China Sea” (*Thuận vợ, thuận chồng tát bể Đông cũng cạn*) (Toan Ánh 2002: 431). From the Confucian morality point of view, the couple should at all times treat each other as if they had just met and pay due respect to each other, even though the woman had a subordinate position in this relationship.

Unlike the husband, who enjoyed freedom and extensive rights, a wide range of obligations and regulations curbed the liberty of a wife. Firstly, she was obliged to live with her husband at a place determined by her parents-in-law. Secondly, she was expected to serve and obey her husband, listen to his rebukes and strive to eliminate her faults. The proverbs “The husband is the king, the wife is the servant” (*Chồng chúa, vợ tôi*) or “The man gives orders, the woman obeys” (*Chồng xướng vợ tùy*) need no further commentary (Đỗ Hoà Hới 2001: 299).

The law paid great attention to the question of fidelity. However, it must be noted that just like in other societies and cultures, in Vietnam in this case double standards were also applied. In accordance with the proverb “A talented man can have five, seven wives, but a faithful wife must have only one husband” (*Tài trai lấy năm, lấy bảy, gái chính chuyên chỉ có một chồng*) one of the most important obligations of a woman was to be faithful to her husband under all circumstances, while the man could have as many wives he wanted (Lê Thị Nhâm Tuyết 1975: 141). Therefore, the infidelity of a woman was strictly punished and the law obliged the man to leave his wife. However, wife had not right to accuse her husband of being infidel. Since in Vietnamese traditional society having more wives was not perceived as unfaithful behavior. However, the man was obliged to take care of all the wives and express his interest in all of them. He had no right to leave his first-rank wife, since she was dependent on him.

By law, a wife was obliged to mourn her husband for three years after his death. This regulation stemmed from the conviction that the wife should stay loyal to her husband even after he dies. The life of the wife in mourning was tied down by a number of strict rules and directives, the breaching of which was severely punished, e.g. a widow was not allowed to listen to music or take part at joyful feasts and fetes, etc. Moreover, it was desirable that once widowed the woman should never remarry again. On the other hand, the widower was not obliged to respect the length of the mourning for his deceased wife by law and could remarry as he wanted, etc.

Moreover, the fate of a woman in marriage was dependant on the fact whether she was a first-rank, second-rank wife or only a concubine since each of these positions had different obligations and rights. Only the first-rank wife (*thê, vợ cả*) was perceived as a full-fledged member of the family

and theoretically had an equal position to her husband as the proverb “The first-rank wife is equal to her husband” (*Vợ chính là người ngang bằng với chồng*) indicates. In theory, the woman could not take an active part in the cult of ancestors, but she had the right to occupy the same position as her husband in all kinds of ceremonies. Moreover, she had the right to sit at the same table with her husband; a privilege, which the second-rank wives, and concubines were deprived of.

The first-rank wife was not necessarily the first wife the man had married. It was quite common that the first-rank wife came to the family after the man had married and acquired several second-rank wives or concubines. Hence, first-rank wife was expected to accept the presence of other women in the households. Moreover, she was obliged not to be jealous – since jealousy was one of the reasons of repudiation of a wife. She was even required to feel compassion for the other women since in general the fate of the second-rate wives and concubines was an unhappy one.

The first-rank wife was also expected to be the real lady of the house and therefore, was often called an “inner commander” (*nội tướng*). She was responsible for the financial matters of the house, she covered the costs and expenses, took care of the rent collection, etc. In reliance with her husband, she also had the right to make decisions about the destiny of her children and was active in arranging marriages. However, it must be noted that in Vietnamese Confucian families, i.e. from the higher social strata, the woman was obliged only to take care of the household and her family, i.e. the husband, children and in-laws. On the other hand, in the families of the commoners, the role of the first-rank wife was more salient since women were often more economically active and thus an important source of income for the family.

Apart from taking care of her husband's household, the wife was expected to give birth to a son, who would continue in the descent. Moreover, she was also considered as the mother of all her husband's children, i.e. even of those he had with his other wives or concubines, who were obliged to call her "respected mother" (*mẹ già*) or "real mother" (*đích mẫu*).

On the contrary, the second-rank wives (*thiếp, vợ lẽ*) were not perceived as equal members of the family; they were viewed rather as an addition to the family (*thiếp gia*) (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1995: 41). In the *Gia Long* law code from the 19th century the second-rank wives were even called *thứ thât*, or *trắc*, which meant "the person, who eats nearby but sleeps close" (Lê Thị Nhâm Tuyết 1975: 141). As has been mentioned above, there was only one first-rank wife, but the number of second-rank wives was not determined and depended on the economic situation of the husband. Rich men often had five to seven wives; each of them having her own dwelling. Prior to the 19th century Vietnamese men had the liberty to choose their second-rank wife without the consent of the first-rank wife. However, in the 19th century the situation changed, since the man needed the permission of wife. Moreover, she often engaged in the selection if she could not have children of her own.

There were several reasons why the first-rank wife took part in the selection of second-rank wives or concubines - the first being the need to have male progeny, who would continue in the family lineage. Secondly, with the arrival of a second-rank wife, the position of the first-rank wife within the family improved substantially; until then she had the lowest position being subordinate to all the male family members and her mother-in-law. Therefore, the arrival of a second-rank wife often meant a certain alleviation of the first-wife's lot in the family and the possibility to delegate most of the chores and responsibilities upon the second-rank wife.

There were many ways how to get a second-rank wife. Firstly, many poor families literally sold their daughters, since marrying a daughter off was a way of getting financial means. If the family found itself in a bad economic situation, the father as the head of the family had the right to sell not only his children but also his wife as is indicated by the proverb “Sell a wife and guarantee with children” (*Bán vợ đợ con*) (Lê Thị Nhâm Tuyết 1975: 121). Moreover, another proverb *Thú thê mãi thiếp*“ or „*Vợ cả thì cưới, vợ lẽ thì mua*“ (You marry the first rank wife, the second-rank wife you buy) clearly indicates that the second-rank wives were often bought. Therefore, only poor, pregnant girls or young widows, who had only a small chance to get married again, often became second-rank wives. Girls from higher social strata were spared of this lot.

Nevertheless, it was the lot of the concubines (*nàng hầu, tỳ*), which was the least enviable. This category of women was also often bought into the family. Even though, the concubines had the chance to become second rank wives, if an appropriate wedding ceremony was carried out. In Vietnam, concubines were most often found only in higher rank families since polygamy was not very widespread among the commoners due to its financial exactingness.

In Vietnamese society the role of the woman in the family became even more salient after the death of her husband. The widow substituted the man as the head of the family, even though she was theoretically subordinate to the eldest son. She could not leave the household, but had to stay and take care of her children and her in-laws, if they were still alive. Despite the fact, that the legal codex did not treat the question of the widow in great detail, the widow was obliged to mourn her husband’s death for the period of three years (27 months). In case she remarried she would automatically loose her children, which would remain in the care of the husband’s

relatives. The law encouraged widows not to re-marry even though the mourning period had passed, expecting them to stay with the husband's family. These faithful wives were then rewarded in many ways, e.g. by a gift of property, or by the title *Tiết Hạnh Khả Phong* (Honors to Faithful Widow).

2.3. Changes in the Structure of Vietnamese Society After the Arrival of the French

Throughout centuries, Vietnamese society had been in an endless intercourse with its northern neighbor, China. The relationship that the Vietnamese had towards the Chinese was traditionally ambiguous. On one hand, the Chinese were the feared invaders that endlessly strove to annex the Vietnamese kingdom to their own realm – an objective that the Vietnamese had always defied. On the other hand, the Vietnamese always perceived the Chinese and their culture as an example to be followed. A typical trait of Vietnamese society was to adopt all the Chinese achievements the moment they had ousted the Chinese out of their country. Moreover, as the French started penetrating the country, Vietnamese emperors once again turned to their northern neighbor with the aim to strengthen their own rule by re-instating traditional ideals. Therefore, the beginning of the 19th century in Vietnam was a witness to the restoration of Chinese influence and Neo-Confucianism.⁶ Therefore, it is not surprising that Vietnamese society of the 19th century and its structures were imbued with Confucian norms and imperatives. The most important were the five relationships, i.e. the subordinations of subject to ruler, son to father, wife

⁶ For more information on this topic see e.g. Fairbank, John – Reischauer, Edwin – Craig, Albert 1973: 273-276.

to husband, and younger brother to elder brother and the mutual respect between friends.

At the pinnacle of Vietnamese traditional society was the emperor who ruled with the “*mandate of heaven*”. The rest of the population was stratified into four social groups on the bases of education and occupation: scholar-officials or mandarins (*sĩ*), peasants (*nông*), artisans (*công*) and merchants (*thương*). As the following proverb indicates *Nhất sĩ, nhì nông* (First are the mandarins, the peasants come second), it was the scholar-officials and then farmers who enjoyed the greatest respect in the society (Trần Đình Hượu 1991: 32).

In theory, anyone in Vietnamese society could become a scholar-official or mandarin. The country’s officials were recruited into the administration through a rigorous system of civil service examinations that were theoretically open almost to everybody. Once one gave proof of the knowledge of literary Chinese, Chinese literature and philosophy by passing the triennial examinations, he became a holder of a degree and an accredited scholar and thus could apply for a post in the imperial civil service and thus become a part of the ruling class.

Theoretically, the mandarin class was an open social group, i.e. even the commoners who through education acquired the necessary knowledge could also apply for the examinations. In practice, however, it was difficult to penetrate into this social group. In order to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills one had to undergo years of academic preparation, which the commoners unlike the sons of the scholar-officials could not afford to do. Hence, despite the fact that the posts in the imperial civil service were not hereditary, they did in fact often end up in the hands of the

scholar-officials family members. Thus, education, as a mobility channel, remained to be a preserve of the scholar gentry.

With the arrival of the French the Vietnamese traditional society and family started to change. After the French had managed to enforce their rule in the country, they resorted to a large number of reforms that had repercussions in almost all spheres of the society. One of the first steps of the French was the imposition of a new administration system, which resulted in curbing the powers of the Vietnamese emperor. Hence, as the emperor lost his privileges, the ruling class of mandarins did too. This was also partially achieved by the reform of educational system and the abolishment of the civil service examinations – in 1863 in Cochinchina, in 1915 in Tonkin and in 1918 in Annam.

By the turn of the 19th and the 20th century the French had succeeded in consolidating their power and stabilizing the overall situation in Indochina. Since then they began a slow process of introducing Western education and disseminating Western knowledge among the population. Moreover, in accordance with the French efforts of extracting profits from their new colony the processes of industrialization, urbanization, increased money production and commercial agriculture were introduced. Hand in hand with these changes induced in the economic sphere, the structure of Vietnamese society also underwent a tremendous transformation. The traditional four strata of mandarins, peasants, workers and merchants (*sĩ, nông, công thương*) were enlarged by the emergence of a Vietnamese urban petty bourgeoisie and the working class.

French efforts to extract resources from their colony went hand in hand with the introduction of commercial agriculture and the setting up of vast plantations. Some of these new agricultural estates were in the hands of

French companies or citizens. However, a new class, the absentee landowners, which emerged on the scene, owned most of these cultivated areas. This new Western-oriented and urban class lived mostly in Hanoi and Hué and slowly transformed itself into Vietnam's first modern industrialists and entrepreneurs by investing their revenues from land and usury in the newly developing light industry and medium-sized trading enterprises (Lancaster 1961: 68).

However, the business scope of these entrepreneurs remained limited since the French were systematic in their efforts to limit the subject of business of the Vietnamese *nouveau-riche* only to land ownership and usury (Lancaster 1961: 68). The French jealously guarded the spheres of banking, commerce and industry in their own hands, while the Chinese, whose population in Indochina had increased substantially during the French colonial rule, retained control over the export trade, rice-busking mills and inland transport (Lancaster 1961: 67). Nevertheless, the surpluses derived from plantations and usury allowed the Vietnamese landowners to provide their children with Western education in facilities provided by the French, which would then enable them to take part in the local administration and national affairs.

Under such circumstances a new white-collar group, which took up the subordinate positions in the French colonial administration, appeared on the Vietnamese scene. The growing number of schoolteachers, merchants, free-lance journalists and writers soon enlarged the group of Vietnamese interpreters, clerks and civil servants. Their lines were also expanded by the growing number of their family members and children, who gained their diplomas and degrees from prestigious French schools in the colony

or in France itself.⁷ These people, imbued with Western values, especially rationality and individualism, would then become the target group of writings of Nguyễn Tường Tam and his literary group.

It must be pointed out that this new class made up mostly of Western educated intellectuals and their families did not mesh well with the rest of the society. Due to their Western education they had problems identifying themselves with the Vietnamese society and its values, which they often perceived as very backward. On the other hand, the French did not accept them either since they considered the population of the colonies as second-rate citizens. The feelings of confusion and bitterness were also enhanced by French policies, which the Vietnamese found restrictive in many aspects. Firstly, the French systematically placed obstacles in their quest to enlarge their economic activities (Lancaster 1961: 67). Secondly, looking closely at the educational system that the French had implemented, the Vietnamese came to the conclusion that the French “*mission civilisatrice*” was just another hoax. The facilities that the French established after the disintegration of the traditional national examinations certainly did not accelerate the formation of the new intellectual elites of the country.⁸ In 1924 only 6 200 boys and 1 000 girls out of 600 000 children of school age were attending schools (Lancaster 1961: 67). Since the members of the urban class felt cheated out and deprived of the education, to which they attached great importance, many of them sent their children to study in France.⁹ These people would then return home imbued with Western ideas

⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the growth of the Vietnamese middle-class see e.g. Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 102–110 or Jamieson 1993: 89-99.

⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the new education system see Kelly, Gail: 1982. *Franco-Vietnamese Schools, 1918 – 1938*. Madison. (Wis.: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin).

⁹ For a detailed analysis of Vietnamese students’ lives in France see McConnell, Scott: 1989. *Leftward Journey: the Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919 – 1939*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers).

and trigger profound changes in Vietnamese society and Nguyễn Tường Tam would be one of them.

Vietnam has always been an agricultural society. During the French colonial era 90 per cent of the population remained to be peasants (*nông dân*). Nevertheless, one could perceive an ongoing process of their alienation from their land caused mainly by the French establishment of plantations (Lockhart 1996: 10). Hence, many people were forced to leave their native villages, move to the rapidly developing urban centers and seek new jobs there. This mass movement of people stood at the root of an emerging new class – the working class. These people, who had left the countryside voluntarily or forcedly, then worked as miners, railway workers, mechanics, carpenters, cement workers, electricians, barbers, coolies, rickshaw pullers, servants, workers in the new industrial enterprises, etc. According to estimates, in 1930 the working class constituted only about 2 percent of the adult workforce (Jamieson 1993: 91). However, it was incoherent and lacked the sense of class-consciousness just like the urban petite bourgeoisie. This was to change slowly from 1930, when Hồ Chí Minh (1890 – 1969) established the *Đông Dương cộng sản đảng* (Communist Party of Indochina) in Hong Kong, which would take the lead in the struggle for national liberation from the French colonial rule.

Prior to the arrival of the French to Indochina, the Vietnamese society was divided into four traditional strata of mandarins, peasants, workers and merchants (*sĩ, nông, công thương*), the everyday life of which was to a larger of lesser degree imbued with Confucian values. With the arrival of the French into the region and the economic changes that their presence induced Vietnamese traditional society slowly began to change. It was

enlarged by a small, yet very privileged class of wealthy landowners and business, who profited greatly from their collaboration with the colonial regime. Shortly, two new classes saw the light of day. It was the urban petit bourgeoisie and the working class, whose leading representatives having been inspired by Western thought and civilization set out on a path that was to lead to the modernization, emancipation and liberation of Vietnamese society from the French colonial regime.

2.4. Languages and Scripts

Vietnamese language had to wait until the turn of the 19th and 20th century to be accepted as a language of literature and culture. After having been under one thousand year long direct Chinese rule (111 B.C. – 938 A.D.) Vietnamese culture became profoundly influenced and molded by the culture of its northern neighbor. One of the manifestations of this influence was the adoption of literary Chinese (*Hán văn, wenyán*) as the official and scholarly script of the country. Literary Chinese became the script of the ruling elites and administration. Vietnamese language on the other hand was perceived as lowly and unworthy of attention. For centuries it did not even have its own written form. Nevertheless, as the time passed by two different scripts of the vernacular were created. The first form became known as *chữ nôm* (demotic characters or demotic script). The second script was *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language) and was based on the Latin alphabet.

*Chữ nôm*¹⁰ (demotic script or demotic characters) is an archaic script based on the usage of literary Chinese (*Hán văn, wenyán*). However, it is still unclear when the Vietnamese created it. According to some sources, the new writing system had existed as early as the 8th century A.D. (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1995: 273). As maintained by the imperial annals *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục* (Synopsis of Vietnamese general history ordered by the king) Vietnamese literati were already using this obsolete system of writing as early as the 13th century. The first piece of literary work written in the demotic script is said to have appeared in 1282. The minister of Justice at that time Nguyễn Thuyên was said to have composed a charm in the demotic script, which was subsequently thrown into the Red River to drive out an aggressive crocodile (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1995: 273; DeFrancis 1977: 23-24). According to further comments in the *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục* (Synopsis of Vietnamese general history ordered by the king), Nguyễn Thuyên apparently excelled in composing poetry in this script and was said to have been imitated by many (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1995: 273).

During the 14th century, the usage of demotic characters became more frequent in literary production.¹¹ At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Hồ Quý Ly, who usurped the throne and established the new Hồ dynasty (1400 – 1407) even tried to substitute literary Chinese as the script of the civil service examinations with the demotic characters (*chữ nôm*). The usage and knowledge of the demotic script thus became a compulsory part

¹⁰ *Chữ nôm* is also often referred to or translated as “demotic characters” or “demotic script”, since these characters were used to write down the vernacular of the common people. It is also translated as “southern characters”. In order to be more precise, I shall translate *Chữ nôm* as “demotic script.”

¹¹ It is known that in 1306 on the occasion of the marriage of the princess Huyền Trân with the king of Champa there was an upsurge of literary production in vernacular using the *chữ nôm* (demotic characters) at the court. Courtiers were to produce a large amount of satirical poems in *chữ nôm* (demotic characters) mocking the marriage of a “pearl” with a “savage king” (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1995: 273).

of the examinations. Nevertheless, this reform did not evoke any positive reaction from the Vietnamese literati and officials. After the fall of the dynasty and the ascendance of the new Posterior Lê dynasty (1428 - 1788), literary Chinese regained its position of the official script of the country. Demotic characters were, on the other hand, reduced only to a tool facilitating the study of literary Chinese (DeFrancis 1977: 30).

It must be noted that the knowledge of the demotic script was limited only to the ruling elites and scholars, since the main prerequisite for mastering it was the knowledge of literary Chinese. Nevertheless, it allowed the Vietnamese literati to express themselves in their own language and enabled them to reach out to the ordinary people. Even though, the script was based on Chinese characters and was incomprehensible to the commoners, when read aloud they could understand it. Thus, the demotic characters became the script of social protests since it was much easier to appeal to the people via *chữ nôm*. This led to the subsequent ban of the script by the Posterior Lê dynasty (1428 - 1788) in 1663, 1718 and 1760.

During the following Tây Sơn Dynasty (1788–1802), which was founded by three brothers of common origin, there was a final attempt to elevate the demotic script to the script of the ruling elite and of the civil service examinations. However, the following Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1945) and its founder Gia Long (1802 – 1820) reversed this attempt. This step was quite paradoxical. Before becoming emperor, Gia Long had encouraged the usage of the demotic script. However, after ascending the throne, he reverted to literary Chinese (Hannas 1997: 83-84). This was one of the manifestations of his orientation to China and its culture as a reaction to the aggressive politics of the French, who had helped him seize power. Moreover, his successor emperor Minh Mạng (1820 – 1840) encouraged a strong Confucian revival. He promoted Chinese classical studies and even

took steps to innovate the civil service examinations (Fairbank – Reischauer – Craig 1973: 274). He introduced the examinations for the *tiến sĩ* degree (*jìnshì* in Chinese, i.e. metropolitan graduate with honors). Even though the production of large geographies, histories and encyclopedia compendiums in literary Chinese flourished at the court, poetry written in demotic characters also remained very popular with the Vietnamese scholars. It enabled them to give vent to personal feelings and thoughts that would be difficult to convey in literary Chinese. Thus, the 18th and 19th centuries were witness to the inflorescence of literature written in the demotic script.

The demotic characters can be divided into two groups on the basis of their creation: the first group are characters borrowed from literary Chinese on account of their phonetic similarity; the second category are composite creations based on the usage of one Chinese character as semantic indicator, and another as phonetic indicator pointing to the pronunciation of Vietnamese. The creation of demotic characters was quite complicated and inconsistent often depending on the talent and literary style of the writer, as well as on the region he came from and the period in which he lived (Duong Quang Ham (1941/ 1968): 113 – 17; DeFrancis 1977: 24-26). To this day the demotic characters have never been standardized despite the fact that the first call came in 1867. Roman Catholic scholar, reformer and proponent of modernization of Vietnam, Nguyễn Trường Tộ (1830–1871) propounded a standardization of the demotic script. Nevertheless, his new writing system was turned down by the Emperor Tự Đức (reigned 1847 – 1883) (DeFrancis 1977: 101-105).

After the French had established their rule over Indochina, they strove to curb the influence of Chinese culture and, therefore, systematically discouraged or even banned the use of literary Chinese (*Hán văn, wenyán*).

The decline of literary Chinese went hand in hand with the declension of the demotic script since its knowledge was based upon the initial and thorough mastering of literary Chinese (DeFrancis 1977: 101-105). Thus, the knowledge and usage of the demotic script gradually fell into oblivion as its place was taken by another script of the vernacular.

This new script became known as *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language).¹² Its creation is ascribed to Catholic missionaries, who needed an effective medium for the evangelization of the population. It had been created as early as the 16th century. The first man who received credit for its systematization and standardization was the French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes (1591 – 1660). During his stay in Vietnam in 1624 – 1644 he built on the previous efforts of Gaspar d’Amaral and Duarte da Costa and on the basis of their Portuguese-Vietnamese dictionaries created his own spelling system. It was introduced in his *Dictionarium annamiticu, lusitanum et latinum* (Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary) published in Rome in 1651. The system that he had proposed was to become after minor changes induced by the bishop Pigneau de Béhaine (1741 – 1799) the current script that is used in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, the latinized script had to wait until the 20th century to become generally used. We can distinguish three main reasons for the slow dissemination of this new writing system. Firstly, Alexandre de Rhodes (1591 – 1660) and other missionaries did not create it in order to disseminate it among the population. It was apparently devised only for their own purposes as a tool for learning Vietnamese language (Schafer - Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh 1998: 761). Secondly, the slow diffusion of the new script was also caused by the inconsistent and chaotic language policy in the educational system of the French colonial administration, which kept

¹² I shall be using the term „latinized script“ in the following paragraphs.

changing in accordance with personal convictions of individual French officials (Schafer - Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh 1998: 761). The third reason behind its slow circulation was the standpoint of the Vietnamese elite itself, since many literati perceived it as the script of the collaborators with the French colonial regime (Schafer - Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh 1998: 761). On the other hand literary Chinese and the demotic script were viewed as scripts of resistance (Schafer - Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh 1998: 761), which explains the manifest upsurge of literary production written with these scripts at the turn of the 19th and 20th century in Vietnam.

The situation changed radically after Japan had defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905. Thereafter, Japan became an inspiration for Vietnamese literati, who started streaming into Japan in order to witness the successes of Japanese modernization based on the adoption of Western ideas. The first Vietnamese revolutionary Phan Bội Châu (1867 – 1940) was therefore one of the many, who set out on the journey. In Japan he had the opportunity to meet with many intellectuals, among whom we can name, e.g. the Chinese scholar, journalist, philosopher and reformist Liang Ch'í-ch'ao (1873 – 1929). Phan Bội Châu had already been acquainted with Liang Ch'í-ch'ao's work since between the years 1901 – 1904 he had read his writings such as *Wu-hsu cheng pien*, *Chung-kuo hun* and his newspapers *Hsin-min ts'ung pao* (Marr 1980: 99). Therefore, he was much looking forward to meeting this Chinese lodestar. Despite the fact that Phan Bội Châu had met with many Chinese and Japanese intellectuals and personages, the conversations with Liang Ch'í-ch'ao (1873 – 1929) proved to be the most inspiring. Liang Ch'í-ch'ao advised Phan Bội Châu and other Vietnamese nationalists and reformists to focus primarily on the education of the people and prepare it for the right moment in which they would overthrow the French colonial rule (Marr 1980: 99).

Under Liang Ch'í-ch'ao's influence Phan Bội Châu wrote a treatise *Tân Việt Nam* (New Vietnam) in 1907, in which he stood up for the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) and demanded it to be introduced into the educational system in Vietnam. He was the first Vietnamese nationalist to have done so. As has been stated above, most of the Vietnamese literati had perceived it as the script of the collaborators and if they resorted to learning it, then it was always in secrecy. Thus, by defending the latinized script Phan Bội Châu elevated it into a weapon to be used against the French, since literary Chinese and the demotic script (*chữ nôm*) could appeal only to a very limited scope of the population. According to some estimates, at the end of the 19th century, only 3 to 5 percent of the population mastered literary Chinese and the demotic script (*chữ nôm*) (DeFrancis 1977: 19).

Phan Bội Châu's call was heard out. In March 1907 Vietnamese nationalists obtained the permission from the French colonial administration to open the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause), the aim of which was to spread the usage of latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) among the population. The school quickly gained popularity and even though the French closed it down in January 1908, its impact on the population and its acceptance of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) was undeniable.¹³

2.5. System of Education and its Transformations

Historian Joseph Buttinger described the education system in Vietnam prior to the arrival of the French subsequently: "All of the country's

¹³ For more information on the dissemination of the latinized script see the following chapter: System of Education and its Transformations

officials were scholars and all scholars, whether in government service or not, were morally obliged to teach the young. No village was without a school, no school without its qualified teachers and no gifted pupil was denied access to attend an institution of higher learning” (Buttinger 1967: 46). Moreover, Vietnamese system of traditional education had been modeled after the one in China. Thus, the main focus was on acquiring knowledge of Confucian classics and their language, i.e. literary Chinese (*wenyan*). Pupils between the age of six and ten underwent the so-called “low learning” (*tiểu học*), which comprised of copying Chinese characters and their interpretations based on the Book of filial piety (*Hiếu Kinh*). The educational methods at this level comprised rote learning by repetition, which were aimed at imbuing the student with moral maxims. At the age of ten the students commenced studying the second level, known as “high learning” (*đại học*), which constituted of thorough learning of Five Classics (*Wujing, Ngũ Kinh*) and Four Books (*Sishu, Tứ Thư*). Having mastered the knowledge of the above-mentioned texts, one could apply for taking the civil service examinations.

In theory, the civil service examinations were open to everybody, i.e. even to the commoners. Thus, at first sight the educational system seemed quite democratic. Nevertheless, it did possess certain flaws too. Even though there was at least one small school in every village, there was no unified curriculum effective throughout the country. Therefore, the content of education was dependant on the quality and knowledge of the teacher. Despite the fact that education was theoretically accessible to all boys of talent, it was more in favor of the rich or those, who came from a civil servant background. Most of the population, due to poverty, was not able to provide education for their children. Moreover, the methods of educating also tended to be far from perfect. As William Duiker puts forth: “Confucian education often degenerated into formalism and a ritualistic

concern for recitation of texts rather than a comprehension of and dedication to the content. It was an education for rote learning. If in theory the Confucian gentleman was wise, compassionate and fair, in actuality he was often arrogant pedant who paraded his learning and exhibited more contempt than compassion for his intellectual inferiors” (Duiker 1983: 66).

When the French took over the southernmost provinces of Vietnam, which were to become the colony of Cochinchina, they hoped to maintain the original structure of administration. They wanted to take advantage of the Vietnamese mandarins to run the country for them. However, most of the officials, who had been appalled by the emperor Tự Đức’s (reigned from 1847–1883) signing of the Treaty of Saigon (1862), gave up their posts and retreated to their native villages or fled to the central and northern parts of the country, which were not under the French rule yet. Thus, the French were forced to face the issue of being in charge of the administration themselves and the first problem that they were to encounter was the communication with the population.

Since the French perceived Chinese too hard and too time-consuming to learn, they recruited interpreters from the Collège d’Adran, an institution set up to train Vietnamese to learn the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) for religious purposes. In addition, the students of the school were obliged to master Latin. However, they hardly knew a few words in French, thus in the end their services were useless. Since the school was not able to provide enough efficient personnel, the French authorities founded another training center – Collège des Interprètes - in 1861, the aim of which was to teach the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) to French officials and train Vietnamese interpreters not only in mastering the new script but also French language.

Even though the French introduced the latinized script into the school system, their primary objective was to promote French as the language of instruction and administration. Nevertheless, the French language and education policy was quite unsystematic and was often dependant on the standpoints of individual French governor-generals. Thus, education policies emphasizing the usage of French or the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) would often change from one term of office to another.

In 1864 the French Admiral-Governor Charles-Marie de La Grandière founded a small number of primary schools in Cochinchina for Vietnamese children to learn read and write the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), as well as a small number of French language schools run by priests. In order to oust the still prevailing influence of the Chinese culture and language, the French abolished the system of civil service examinations in 1865 in Cochinchina. Later they resorted to the same measure also in the northern and central parts of Vietnam, i.e. the civil service examinations were abolished in 1915 in Tonkin and 1918 in Annam.

Such steps incited a wave of protests from the Vietnamese officials, who hoped to drive the French out of the country. At first, the language of their movement was literary Chinese (*Hán văn, wenyán*) and resistance and satirical poetry was written in this language. Nevertheless, the mandarins started using *chữ nôm* (demotic characters) in order to appeal to the masses. Thus, in this period one is also a witness to the efflorescence of literature written in the demotic characters.

The language and educational policies of the French differed in the southern and northern parts of Vietnam. In the north and the center, i.e. in Tonkin and Annam, the French were at first more prudent in discarding the use of literary Chinese. This was due to the fact, that Tonkin and Annam

had a longer tradition of political, economic and social contact with China than Cochinchina, which had been annexed to the country only in the 18th century. Thus, the usage literary Chinese in Tonkin and Annam was essential for the effective functioning of the local administration.

At first, Paul Bert (1833 – 1886), the French Minister of Education, tried to win over the indigenous elites by promoting literary Chinese instead. One of the first steps undertaken in this endeavor was the establishment of the Tonkin Academy in Hanoi in 1886, the aim of which was to preserve the Chinese Classics and at the same time translate European books into Vietnamese language using the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) (DeFrancis 1977: 131). The Academy consisted of forty Vietnamese scholars and an unlimited amount of other associates, to who certificates in French and Chinese were attributed (DeFrancis 1977: 124). Apparently, the school was a huge success among the Vietnamese literati.

At the same time French language was also being gradually introduced into traditional schools and incentives were offered to students who had passed examinations in French. This was done through Vietnamese teachers who were first obliged to learn the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), before proceeding to study French. Apparently, the program met with a huge success among the teachers, and within a year hundreds of schools were opened to satisfy the growing demand for education (Ness 1987: 80). However, the plan ended abruptly after Paul Bert had unexpectedly passed away in 1886. Within two years after his death almost nothing of his reforms was left and the Tonkin Academy also ceased to exist.

The following years of educational reforms in all three parts of the country were marked by chaos and often-opposing policies, since the French themselves had differing opinions on the languages of instruction. In 1890 at the Colonial Congress, the question of language was one of the issues to

be on the agenda. Étienne Aymonier (1844 – 1929), the French representative for the French protectorate of Cambodia, advocated only the direct teaching of French in schools of Indochina rejecting the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) as having no value for the Vietnamese learning French (Ness 1987: 81). The situation was complicated even more since the French were not unanimous on the type of French to be taught, i.e. there were those that advocated the usage of simplified French that was being suggested for schools in French colonies in Africa (Ness 1987: 80).

This idea, however, did not have many proponents. The French colonials came to the conclusion that standard French should be taught and that its instruction should be preceded by teaching the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) first. However, throughout the colonial period the French were unable to unify the system of instruction, thus the issue of introduction of French language to schools was never really resolved (Ness 1987: 80). It was common to start with teaching the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) and then at a certain point to introduce French language. The process was dependant on the availability of teachers of French language, the quality of which was often poor. According to statistics from 1885 and 1890 out of 30 000 children enrolled in public schools, 27 000 were learning latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) while only 3 000 studied French (DeFrancis 1977: 140). Even though, the French had even issued a decree in May of 1881 offering French citizenship to those who expressed knowledge of French language and culture, the appeal remained without an answer (Ness, 1987: 83). By 1906 only 254 Vietnamese became French citizens (DeFrancis 1977: 141). The main reason behind the cold shoulder that the Vietnamese had given to the French offer was their perception of French language as a symbol of alien and oppressive rule. Moreover, at that time most of the Vietnamese *litterati* had a similar standpoint towards the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*).

Japan's defeat of China in 1895 and Russia in 1905 had a profound impact on Vietnamese literati and their perception of Western knowledge and culture. The Vietnamese literati, who until then had expressed their resistance to the French only by hostile silence, realized all of a sudden that nostalgia was not enough to keep the spirit of resistance (Hue-Tam Ho Tai 1992: 20). In this respect, Vietnam, just like China and Japan had done before, started opening the doors of its cultural life and taking greater interest in the knowledge of the West. Just as the Japanese and Chinese before them, Vietnamese scholars realized that their traditional values could not hold one's own against the Western ones. Some of them went as far as considering their own culture as insufficient in comparison with the West. Just like their Chinese and Japanese counterparts, Vietnamese literati came to the conclusion that their culture, social institutions and thought had to undergo profound changes if they wanted to compete with the West. This change of attitude was radical indeed. Therefore, a new group of scholars, whom M. Durand's and Nguyen Tran Huan call as the "moderate collaborators", appeared on the scene (Durand – Nguyen Tran Huan 1985: 110). These men perceived the French presence as temporary and called for mutual cooperation that would induce a reform of Vietnamese society (Durand – Nguyen Tran Huan 1985: 110).

In 1904 the first Vietnamese revolutionary Phan Bội Châu (1864 – 1940) established the *Việt Nam Duy Tân Hội* (Association for modernization of Vietnam). Shortly after, he set out on a journey to Japan, where he wanted to acquaint himself with the development and results of the Japanese modernization process. While he was on his way, he received news of another significant event in the international political arena. In 1905 Japan defeated Russia and this unexpected victory astonished the world. This Asian triumph revived the fading hopes of Vietnamese scholars and enlivened their interest in knowledge of the West. One of the consequences

of the newly gained ardor was the establishment of the *Đông Du* (Journey to the West) movement. Within its operation, many Vietnamese intellectuals and students went to Japan, where they tried to familiarize themselves with the knowledge of the West and ways of its integration into an Asian society.¹⁴

Moreover, it was also Phan Bội Châu, who initiated a sudden change of attitude of the Vietnamese elites towards the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). In 1907 during his sojourn in Hong Kong he wrote an essay *Tân Việt Nam* (The New Vietnam), in which he called for the introduction of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) and vernacular into the school system. His appeal was heard out by the reformers assembled around the private *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) in Hanoi. Thanks to their effort the vernacular gained its recognition among the intellectual elite and the masses.

The private *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) was not the first private school to be opened in North Vietnam. In the preceding twenty years the French had established eight private schools in Hanoi and the surrounding provinces, which were attended by about 1 800 students (Marr 1971: 163). They also had not hindered the private educational endeavors of a few scholars and wealthy merchants and had issued permits for several private schools to operate. There were at least six private establishments in Hanoi and its suburbs that taught the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), literary Chinese, mathematics, geography and chemistry (Marr 1971: 163). However, these schools were intended for the

¹⁴ For a thorough analysis of Vietnamese-Japanese relations in this period see Karlová, Petra: 2006. *K otázce vztahu Japonska a Indočíny na začátku 20. století*. [Concerning the relations of Japan and Indochina at the beginning of the 20th century]. (A doctoral thesis submitted to the The Faculty of Arts, Charles University).

sons of mandarins and wealthy landlords and their primary goal was to prepare them for their subsequent study in France (Marr 1971: 164).

The main objective of the new *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) was to be quite different. It was inspired by the concept of a Japanese training institution called Keio Gijuku, which had been founded by a well-known Japanese reformer, journalist and teacher Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835 – 1901).¹⁵ The outstanding Vietnamese reformer Phan Chu Trinh (1872 – 1926) considered this University as a cradle of Japanese modernization force and decided to establish a similar institution in Vietnam. After the Vietnamese reformers had succeeded in obtaining permission from the French colonial apparatus, the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) opened its classrooms to its first students in March 1907.

The school aimed to bring enlightenment and increase literacy among the Vietnamese population. The movement, which also invited women and girls to participate – a rather unusual move for Confucian scholars – soon gained recognition and popularity from the public. Beside the objective to increase literacy of the population, the school aimed to promote the usage of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), reform the civil service examinations, support talented students, modernize industry and develop print and journalism in general (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 48-49). In addition, the school published its own teaching materials on various topics such as mathematics, science, geography, hygiene, political history, economy, French and Chinese languages etc., which it distributed free of charge to

¹⁵ This training institution was established in 1858 as a private school in Edo by one of the most important Japanese reformers, journalists and teachers – Fukuzawa Yukichi. For more information on the institution see e.g. Benjamin, Duke: 2009. *The history of modern Japanese education: constructing the national school system, 1872 – 1890*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press).

other schools or bookstores (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 48-49). Moreover, a committee for translation of books from Chinese and French was established as a part of the school. Unfortunately, the translations from Chinese have been lost apart from some short songs (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 48-49).

Under pressure of the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) the French were forced to open up more educational facilities, partially also due to fear of leaving the education in potentially dangerous hands of private Vietnamese schools. Thus, in 1907 the University of Hanoi, the very first university in Tonkin, opened its doors to public. Students could study at four faculties: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Sciences, School of Law and Administration and the School of Civil Engineering (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 55).

On the day of its opening many enthusiastic teachers and activists from the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) attended the first classes. However, the lectures were deliberately conducted only in French and in Tonkin of the time, there were only two men whose French was proficient enough for them to follow (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 70-71). Thus, disappointment pervaded the lines of Vietnamese activists. The school soon closed down only after one semester of existence – the reason being a lack of students. According to the estimates, there were only about 200 students attending the school (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 55). This event only confirmed the suspicion of the majority of the Vietnamese intellectual elite that the proverbial French “*mission civilisatrice*” was only a farce.

The *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) quickly gained great popularity. At the time of its inflorescence it had about 400 to 500 regular students (Marr 1971: 164). Its lectures were also

widely attended by the general public. However, its existence was short-lived - despite the overall positive reception by the population. The French, taken aback by its initial success, perceived it as a threat to the social order, mainly for the suspicious nationalistic activities of its leaders. Therefore, they were quick in closing the school down after only eight months of its activity. Most of its leaders like Lương Văn Can (1854 – 1927), Nguyễn Quyền (1869–1941), Dương Bá Trạc (1884 – 1944), were arrested and their writings confiscated (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 70-71). Although the existence of the school was rather “ephemeral”, the movement managed to arouse social awareness in the minds of the population. Its representatives succeeded in spreading the usage of the vernacular and its latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). Thanks to a large number of translations they had managed to enrich the vocabulary of Vietnamese language and to create a new writing style. Concerning the political impact, these enthusiasts, most of who ended up in jail after the closure of the school, had brought up and had formed the future generation of reformers and revolutionaries.

Inspired by the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) many similar private institutions were opened through out Tonkin and Annam, such as Mai Lâm Free School, the Ngọc Xuyên Free School in Tonkin and Dien Phong, Phuc Binh and Phuc Lam Free Schools in Annam (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 75). The French, who were observing the educational efforts of the Vietnamese with suspicion, were forced to react and tried to satisfy the Vietnamese craving for new knowledge by establishing similar schools to *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause). One of these new establishments was the Học Quý Tân Trường in Hanoi (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 70-71).

Under such circumstances, the French were continuously forced to reconsider the educational system. In 1908 the Conseil de

Perfectionnement de l'Enseignement Indigene (Council for the Improvement of Education of Indigenous Persons) concluded on several reforms, in which the French hoped to ameliorate their four level system of primary education, which consisted of three years of elementary school (le cours préparatoire), three years of primary school (le cours élémentaire), four years of upper primary school (le cours moyen) and three years of secondary school (le cours supérieur) (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 54). The reforms included limited secondary education (le cours supérieur) for talented Vietnamese, the introduction of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) as the language of instruction and offering French language only as a free choice subject in primary classes (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 70-71; Ness 1987: 85). This reform attained some success, since in 1909 there were about 10 000 students in these schools (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 79-80). Five years later there were more than 46 000 students attending the schools, thus the numbers almost quintupled in four years (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 79-80).

In the same year, i.e. 1908, the French Résident Superier of Tonkin founded a publication committee, the main aim of which was to oversee editing and publishing of modern textbooks corresponding with the colonial policy in Indochina (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 79-80). The main goal of this endeavor was to gain greater control over the ideas that circulated in the society and thus prevent “dangerous” thoughts from Japan and China from infiltrating the society. Hand in hand with the operation of this committee censorship strengthened, since even primers for Chinese pupils in Chinese schools were pedantically scrutinized whether they did not contain any subversive ideas (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 79-80). At the same time more Vietnamese educators were called upon to participate in the creation of textbooks, in which the French and Vietnamese collaboration was emphasized (Vũ Đức Bằng 1973: 81). The reason that

was stated in one of the textbooks for children was that “Vietnam, a small state bordering on big nations, could not survive without the protection of Great France and could not achieve modernization without the prestige of French education and culture”(Đặng Thai Mai 1961: 100).

Thus, the curriculum in Franco-Vietnamese schools provided information mainly on France, its history and literature, while denigrating Vietnamese culture labeling it as backward and primitive. Nguyễn Tường Tam’s travelogue, which is an extremely rich, yet oblique source of information on French Indochina, gives the following description of the content of French education to which the Vietnamese had been subjected in the colonial schools:

When I landed on French soil and looked around at the scenery, I didn’t see anything strange at all. The vegetation, houses, objects, people: it was as though I had seen them all before, seen them in a former life. This made me think that “I had been a European.” I don’t say this boastfully, because, according to the doctrine of reincarnation, I muse have been doomed by my since as a European to rebirth as a lowly Annamese photographer who traveled on the deck of an ocean liner. Perhaps when I was in hell, my keeper had forgotten his duty to make me eat the special rice gruel that would erase my memory. But after thinking about it carefully, I knew this was not the reason why France was so familiar to me. I had read many books about France and seen many paintings of it.” (Quoted from Lockhart 1994: 108)

Despite focusing mainly on France, the curriculum did provide information on Vietnamese language, history and literature. However, the quality of these subjects remains unclear and must have varied from teacher to teacher, school to school and region to region (Ninh 2005: 50).

Nonetheless, it was not until the year 1917 that the French managed to create a definite educational system in Vietnam. After the new Governor-

General Albert Sarraut (1872 – 1962) had ascended his post, a new colonial education system was introduced in Indochina, as he and his associates aimed to launch “colonization by means of books”.¹⁶ As the figures indicate, the new education system proved effective, since the numbers of enrollments at public schools soared dramatically: in 1900 there were 1, 595 students, in 1915 – 2,442 students, and after this new system had been put into effect the numbers of students increased substantially, as in 1920 there were already 30,394 students, in 1925 – 41,062 students, and in 1930 – 62,558 students (Seng-Yeuy 2003: 118).

However, even education in the Franco-Vietnamese school system was designated mainly for the children of the elites. Majority of the children in school age did not have access to education. For out of a total of more than 2 million children of school age, there were less than 200 000 seats in public schools in 1924 (Truong Bửu Lâm 2000: 94). In Tonkin, which was governed as a French protectorate, students attending the Franco-Vietnamese schools were recruited from the traditional and colonial elites (Ninh 2005: 52). In Annam, the central region, the students came from midlevel civil families and traditional elites (Ninh 2005: 52). While, in Cochinchina, which was a colony under direct French rule, the children attending schools were recruited mainly from the ranks of *petites fonctionnaires*, who preferred to send their children to French schools and then straight to France for further studies (Ninh 2005: 52).

However, almost ninety percent of children who had entered the elementary school (le cours préparatoire – grades 1 to 3) were not destined to continue their schooling (Marr 1971: 35). This was due to the poverty of their families, difficult accessibility of schools in the

¹⁶ For a detailed structure of the four level educational system see the PhD. dissertation of Seng-Yeuy (Alex) Mo 2003: 116 – 118.

countryside and very strict examination system that instead of promoting educational process rather stifled it (Marr 1971: 35). The content of the curriculum of the first three grades was also quite limited. The students were only expected to master reading and writing in the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) and some basic knowledge of the French language (Marr 1971: 35).

The students, who managed to continue their studies at a higher level, i.e. primary school (*le cours élémentaire*, grades 4 – 6) were challenged by slightly different problems. Firstly, they were expected to master French. However, most of the indigenous teachers had quite poor French language skills themselves. Moreover, the main objectives of education at this level also seemed quite contradictory. The system strove to imbue the students with French cultural and behavior norms, and at the same time underpin Vietnamese traditional morality and teach students how to talk properly to their colonial masters (Marr 1971: 35).

As the figures indicate only a very small number of students made it to the primary school level. In between 1920 – 1939 only about 130 000 students completed these grades (Marr 1971: 37). Most of the graduates then took up low-ranking jobs of local functionaries, copyists, clerks, shopkeepers, petty brokers, or teachers. These people would then form the core of recipients of periodicals, leaflets, pamphlets, etc (Marr 1971: 37), i.e. the readership of Tam's magazines.

Only a very small number of students had the privilege and resources to complete the four years of upper primary school (*le cours moyen*, grades 7 - 10). In 1920 only 2,430 children enrolled into these schools (Marr 1971: 37). Eighteen years later their numbers barely doubled to 4, 552 students – a proof of overall inaccessibility of higher education in colonial Indochina.

Less than half of all these graduates would then become publicly active and be considered as members of the intellectual elites (Marr 1971: 35). Most of them would take up jobs in the colonial administration and blend in with the existing system.

Those, who had reached even higher, i.e. to the three years of secondary school (le cours supérieur, grades 11 – 13) were even less numerous. There were only 83 students in the whole country, who enrolled into such schools in 1923 (Marr 1971: 37).

There were not many institutions where the graduates could continue to pursue their university degree. The French exasperated by the constant demands of the Vietnamese to upgrade formal education, re-opened the University of Indochina, better known as University of Hanoi, in 1917. However, this schooling establishment was conceived to provide practical education rather than education of a higher level (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 55). The school's four faculties were enlarged by the establishment of School of Commerce, School of Navigation and Fishing, Teachers College and School of Agriculture and Forestry (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 55). In addition, the existence of Faculty of Arts was abolished. On the other hand, the School of Zoo pharmacy separated itself from the Faculty of Medicine. Despite all these reforms, the number of students studying at the institution reached its peak in 1921 – when the amount of students amounted to the figure of 492 (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 55). This means that, university education remained inaccessible for most of the students of Indochina.

The 1920s in Indochina were also witness to an exodus of Vietnamese students heading to France to pursue their higher education. The French had started preparing a program that would create scholarships for Vietnamese students to study in France and not in Japan as early as 1908.

This was a reaction to the Franco-Japanese treaty signed in June 1908, in which the Japanese pledged to expel Vietnamese students studying in Japan, where they were, according to the French, exposed to seditious ideas. However, the number of scholarships was very limited in number.

It was especially after the year 1926 that students started streaming out of Indochina; and Nguyễn Tường Tam was to be one of them. We can distinguish several reasons for this “mass departure” even though statistics reveal that the number of Vietnamese students studying in France was still quite low.¹⁷ Firstly, it was the reason of the 1926 students strikes that broke out in Saigon. As a consequence many students found themselves expelled from their schools. The only place where they could continue their studies was France, since education officials in France were either not willing or incapable of cooperating with their counterparts in Indochina (McConnell 1989: 51). At the same time, however, the journey to France, gained a totally different meaning than before. For many students from Indochina, especially from Cochinchina and its capital Saigon, the journey was perceived as a patriotic gesture (McConnell 1989: 51). This standpoint was the result of France being seen as a model of modernity and science, moreover significant Vietnamese nationalists and reformists, such as Phan Chu Trinh (1872 – 1926) and Nguyễn An Ninh (1900 – 1943), had recently returned from France (McConnell, 1989: 51). Others, on the other hand chose to travel to Canton, where Hồ Chí Minh had founded the Revolutionary Youth League, Vietnam’s first communist-oriented organization, which aimed to form a front to fight the French colonial authorities in Vietnam. However, studying in China seemed more perilous than in France,

¹⁷ According to the statistics provided by the French secret police, the number of Vietnamese students in early 1930 barely reached 1556 (Marr 1984: 40).

especially after the Kuomintang – Chinese Communist Party split in 1927 (Marr 1971: 40).

The other reason that encouraged the rise of Vietnamese students heading to France had been a certain relaxation of visa procedures in Indochina initiated in December 1924 (McConnell 1989: 52). Prior to that, everyone wanting to travel abroad was obliged to obtain an authorization to leave the colony from the office of the Governor-General of Indochina. After this procedure was abolished, the only documents that the students needed were their scholastic record and a visa in their passport. Students from rich families could, therefore, travel to France only with tourist visas, while the less fortunate accepted all kinds of odd jobs on the ships (McConnell 1989: 52). We can mention, e.g. Hồ Chí Minh who had traveled to Europe working as assistant cook on board of the steamer *Amiral Latouche-Tréville* (Duiker 2000: 46).

It must be noted that in reality the exodus of Vietnamese students to France is exaggerated. Even though the French authorities never managed to compile exact statistics of the number of Vietnamese students in France, according to rough estimates there were only 600 students studying in France in 1925 (McConnell 1989: 52). In the next four years the number rose only to 1,700 (McConnell 1989: 52). These students came to France from three different backgrounds. The first group of students was made up of the children of Vietnamese notables employed by the French colonial administration that had a mandarin background but chose to collaborate with the colonial regime. The second set of students comprised of those expelled from schools for disciplinary or scholastic reasons after the 1926 student strikes. These students came from lower-middle class – their parents working as teachers, merchants or low-grade clerks. The last arrays of students were the children of rich

landowners that one could describe as the *nouveau riche*, i.e. they were very affluent, uneducated and status-conscious (McConnell 1989: 54).

The students were scattered in about nine locations in France, such as Bordeaux, Aix-en-Provence, Montpellier, but most of them concentrated in Paris (Marr 1971: 40). Gradually, a significant minority of Vietnamese students started taking part in diverse French organizations, left-wing associations, clandestine political activities, meeting Vietnamese sailors in major French ports, who smuggled printed materials to Indochina for them (Marr 1971: 40). Moreover, in May 1930 after the French colonial authorities had mercilessly crushed the Yên Bái uprising in Tonkin, hundreds of Vietnamese students dared to express their disapproval and demonstrate in front of the Lycée Palace (Marr 1971: 40). The French were fast to react. The protests were followed by a wave of arrests and many Vietnamese students found themselves being shipped back to Indochina. Nguyễn Tường Tam was one of them – despite the fact that he is not known to have participated in any political activities at that time.

Upon completing their education in France, the students were expected to return to their motherland where they would take up jobs in the colonial apparatus and yieldingly serve the French. However, most of them came home imbued with revolutionary ideas and instead of submitting themselves to the colonial system they set out on a journey to reform and modernize Vietnamese society with the sole aim of reclaiming their country from the French colonial bondage. Nguyễn Tường Tam would become a typical protagonist of such a group. In addition literature would become the most effective tool in his struggle for the modernization of Vietnamese society.

2.6. Vietnamese Literature from Tradition to Modernity

Nguyễn Tường Tam created his writings and carried out his political activities in an era during which Vietnamese literature along with society were undergoing a radical transformation caused by the clash of Vietnamese traditional society with Western civilization and its values. Nguyễn Tường Tam himself played an important role in this change. In order to present Tam's contribution, it is important to present Vietnamese literature in a broader historical context. It must be noted that the naissance of modern literature in Vietnam, as well as in other Asian countries, was preceded by the development of journalism and translations of Western literature, which then resulted in first prose in the vernacular language.¹⁸ Given the above-mentioned statement, this chapter will be divided into two parts: "Journalism and Translation in Vietnamese Literature" and "New Fiction in the Vernacular and Subsequent Literary Debates."

2.6.1. Journalism and Translation in Vietnamese Literature

Despite the fact, that Europeans had been penetrating the area of Vietnam since the sixteenth century, the influence of Western thought and literature became more apparent only at the end of the nineteenth century (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2000: 30). Until then, Vietnamese literary production had been under the profound influence of Chinese literature. Nevertheless, the tendencies in Vietnamese literature in the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century were quite plentiful and various. The literati continued

¹⁸ For a thorough of such processes in Asian countries, such as China, Japan, Iran, see Černá et al.: 1976. *Setkání a proměny: vznik moderní literatury v Asii* [Encounters and Transformations: the Birth of Modern Literature in Asia]. (Praha: Odeon).

to write in literary Chinese (*wenyan*) and most of their production comprised of poetry, chronicles and specialized treatises. The literary field was still dominated by the literary genres taken over from Chinese literature, such as *phú* (fu, descriptive poetry, prose-poem), etc. Apart from that, Chinese novels written in vernacular became extremely popular with the educated strata. The most popular were the stories of knight-errant (*yu-hsia* or *hsia-k'e*; in Vietnamese *hiệp-khách*) and scholar-meets-beauty stories (*ts'ai-tzu chia-jen*; in Vietnamese *tài-tử giai-nhân*) (Schafer - Thế Uyên 1993: 857). Probably influenced by these two traditions Vietnamese literati developed a new literary form known as *truyện thơ nôm*, i.e. novels in verse written in Vietnamese language using the demotic characters (Schafer - Thế Uyên 1993: 857).

It is noteworthy to say that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of inflorescence of literature written in the demotic script (*chữ nôm*). This was due to the political situation, in which many different factions competed for popular support. Since the ordinary people did not understand Chinese literary language (*wenyan*), the only way to reach out to the people was through the demotic characters (*chữ nôm*), which the peasant could not read but could understand, when it was read aloud to him. Therefore, scholars who were not employed in the state administration found a liking for creating poetry in demotic characters) and long sentimental pieces of literature in verse (*truyện thơ nôm*).

The most common topics of these versed romances in demotic characters (*chữ nôm*) were love and Confucian morality (honesty, filial piety, loyalty, friendship, conjugal fidelity, etc.) (Yaeger 1987: 31). Most of them belonged to the scholar-meets-beauty fiction and their plot could be summed up subsequently: a talented scholar meets a beauty; they fall in love, but are forced to overcome many obstacles and misfortunes, before

they are happily reunited together due to their moral character (Yaeger 1987: 31). The nineteenth century was a witness to the emergence of many similar stories such as *Kim Vân Kiều* (Kim, Van and Kieu), *Lục Vân Tiên* (Story of Luc Van Tien), *Nhị độ mai* (Twice Blooming Plum-tree), etc. The most famous of these was the story *Kim Vân Kiều* written at the beginning of the 19th century by Nguyễn Du, which was elevated to the rank of a national classic in the 1920s.

The nineteenth century Vietnam was a witness to the French invasion of the country. In 1862 the emperor Tự Đức (1829 – 1883, reigned 1847 – 1883) was forced to sign the Treaty of Saigon with the representatives of the French Empire, in which he ceded Saigon, the island of Poulo Condor and three southern provinces (Biên Hòa, Gia Định and Định Tường) to France. The population was shocked by this act and overnight movements of resistance broke out throughout the country. Many Confucian scholars gave up their posts in the state apparatus and preferred seclusion in their native villages, where they worked as teachers and healers. In connection with the resistance movement against the French, which had erupted in the southern parts of the country, there was also an upsurge of protest literature (Jamieson 1993: 44). In M. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan's terminology, the so-called "Confucian patriots" appeared on the scene (Durand – Nguyen Tran Huan 1985: 110). Among these scholars were many personages such as Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822 – 1888), Nguyễn Khuyến (1835 – 1909), Trần Tế Xương (1870 – 1907) and many others (Durand – Nguyen Tran Huan 1985: 110). In their satirical and political poetry written in demotic characters (*chữ nôm*), these men would castigate everybody, who cooperated with the French and did not join the resistance movement. These men well-versed in literary Chinese had preferred to write in demotic characters (*chữ nôm*) since it was a more effective tool in

reaching the masses rather than literary Chinese, which only a few could understand.

After Japanese victory over China in 1895, and over Russia in 1905, a number of Vietnamese literati, who realized that in order to be able to compete with the West, they must first be acquainted with the Western knowledge and modernize their society. Therefore, a new group of scholars, who M. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan call as the “moderate collaborators”, appeared on the scene (Durand – Nguyen Tran Huan, 1985: 110). These men gave vent to their opinions on the necessity of collaboration between the Vietnamese and the French in the newly emerging press. Prior to the arrival of the French to Indochina press as such did not exist. However, soon after the French had strengthened their position, mainly in Cochinchina, they started publishing the very first newspapers in the area.¹⁹

However, the first journals were not published in Vietnamese language, but rather in French and Chinese, the *Bulletin Officiel de l'Expédition de la Cochinchine*, and the *Courrier de Saigon*.²⁰ These magazines were published under the sponsorship of the French Governor of Cochinchina and were apparently targeting not only the French, but also the traditional literati elites. The French intended to make use of the press to reinforce their position in Indochina by disseminating French culture and providing the local population, as well as the French inhabitants, with governmental communiqués, news and information related to the reforms of administration, which the French colonial apparatus was undertaking.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive overview of Vietnamese press from its naissance to 1945 see Huỳnh Văn Tông: 1994. *Lịch sử báo chí Việt Nam từ khởi thủy đến năm 1945*. (TP Hồ Chí Minh: Khoa Báo Chí).

In accordance with their goal in April 1865 the French started publishing the very first newspaper in Vietnamese language and using the latinized script.²¹ The *Gia Định Báo* (Gia Dinh Journal) was a modest four-page monthly that provided its readers with official communiqués, passed edicts and news of the region. Despite the fact that the editorial office comprised of Vietnamese, it had the support of the French colonial administration. Their backing of the journal was clearly stated by the governor of Cochinchina Admiral Pierre-Gustave Roze (1812–1882) in 1865:

This journal is intended to disseminate among the indigenous population all the news worthy of their attention and to provide them with some knowledge of the current cultural matters and of developments in agriculture. The inspectors of native affairs have informed me that the *Gia Dinh Journal* has the enthusiastic support of the population, and in many localities small children who are literate in quoc ngu have been reading the paper aloud to their parents. This monthly publication will be of irrefutable usefulness, and it will contribute to the replacement of our language and of Chinese characters, which are understood only by a minority of officials (Huỳnh Văn Tông 1994: 30, cited from Jamieson 1993: 68).

The words of Admiral Roze illustrate the French intention of promoting the usage of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) in order to replace the usage of literary Chinese as an official language. The knowledge of literary Chinese was limited only to the narrow strata of Vietnamese literati, who at the beginning were not willing to cooperate with the French. Thus, the French colonizers were forced to find another medium of communication with the local population. The urgent need of orienting the Vietnamese towards France was a constant preoccupation of the French in Indochina. Paulin

²⁰ For more details on these journals see Huỳnh Văn Tông: 1994. *Lịch sử báo chí Việt Nam từ khởi thủy đến năm 1945*. (TP Hồ Chí Minh: Khoa Báo Chí).

²¹ Vietnamese scholars differ in determining the exact date of its apparition. For more information about their opinions see Huỳnh Văn Tông 1994: 26 – 27.

Vial (1831 – 1907), Director of Governor 's Cabinet of Cochinchina illustrated this concern subsequently:

From the first days it was recognized that the Chinese language was a barrier between us and the natives; the education by means of hieroglyphic characters was completely beyond us; this writing makes possible only with difficulty transmitting to the population the diverse ideas which are necessary for them at the level of their political and commercial situation. Consequently we are obliged to follow the traditions of our system of education; it is the only one, which can bring close to us the Annamites of the colony by uncalculating the principles of European civilization and isolating them from the hostile influence of our neighbors (Bouchot 1925: 35-37, cited from DeFrancis 1977: 77).

During the first four years (1865 – 1869) E. Potteau headed the *Gia Định Báo* (Gia Dinh Journal) editorial office. Under his supervision the newspaper was a rather dry publication focusing only on informing about government edicts, decrees, administration materials and domestic affairs presented from the point of view of the colonial authorities (Huỳnh Văn Tông 1994: 29). However, after a well-known scholar Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký²²(1837 - 1898) replaced him, the content of the journal changed dramatically. The editorial team comprised Tôn Thọ Tường (1825 - 1877), Trương Minh Ký (1855 – 1900) and Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của (1834 – 1907), who after the death of Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký replaced him in the position of the editor-in-chief (Huỳnh Văn Tông 1994: 29).²³

It is noteworthy to say that it was no coincidence that Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký and Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của were appointed to the editorial team of the *Gia Định Báo* (Gia Dinh Journal). Both were Christians and owed their education to the French. Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của had also studied literary Chinese till the age of fifteen. After he had entered Catholic seminary in

²² For more details about Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký's life and writings see Jamieson 1993: 69-71 or Vũ Ngọc Phan 1989: 21 – 26.

²³ For more details about Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của see Jamieson 1993: 69 – 71.

Saigon, he re-oriented himself to the study of French and acquired knowledge about Western civilization.

Petrus Truong Vĩnh Ký was also taken care of by a Catholic missionary, who owed his life to Ký's father, who had saved him from being persecuted by the Imperial Court for having spread Christianity. After the abrupt death of Ký's father, he took Ký to Phnom Penh, where Ký pursued his schooling in a Catholic seminary. Ký then continued in Penang in Malaysia, where he continued to learn more about Asian and European civilizations. Extremely talented he soon mastered more than fourteen languages. He was said to have studied Greek, Latin, Japanese, Hindi, Vietnamese, literary Chinese and French. In 1863 he was sent to France to the Court of Napoleon III as an interpreter of the Vietnamese Imperial Embassy headed by the Grand Counselor Phan Thanh Giản (1796 – 1867). There, he had the opportunity to meet leading French intellectuals among which we can mention the writer Victor Hugo (1802 – 1885) and writer, philosopher, and historian Ernest Renan (1823 – 1892). (Académie des sciences d'outre-mer, 1985: 200) During this visit Ký started reflecting about European civilization and potential advantages of French presence in Vietnam. He came to the conclusion that the French were undoubtedly stronger and more advanced and the Vietnamese rather than fighting them should set them as an example to follow (Jamieson 1993: 71). Therefore, he was a perfect candidate to attempt to build bridges between the French colonizers and the subjugated Vietnamese population. It was the press that was envisaged to help him in the endeavor.

The primary aim of the first journals in Indochina was to promote a peaceful coexistence of the subjugated Vietnamese and their French colonizers; it contributed saliently to the development of literature written in the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). Petrus Truong Vĩnh Ký and his

colleagues aimed to promote new learning, to develop the new latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), enrich the vocabulary and encourage the people to learn the new system of writing (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 1994: 30). Behind Ký's efforts to disseminate the new script based on the alphabet imported from the West was his conviction that Vietnamese language was faulty, impoverished, incomplete and lacking modern vocabulary (Yaeger 1987: 27). According to other scholars, who were focusing their attention on the language question, the linguistic poverty of Vietnamese was inherent. As Tuan Ngoc Nguyen points out:

The Vietnamese language was mainly used in writing of poems. Consequently, it was soft, subtle and musical, but had many defects. For example, it lacked abstract words, had few prefixes and suffixes in order to produce derivatives except for duplicative patterns. Moreover, it had no passive structure and only occasionally made use of noun and verb phrases because it contained very few classifiers, articles and prepositions; and as a result, its ability to expand sentences was limited. In Vietnamese traditional writings, sentences were often short. The relationship between the main and subordinate clauses were not clear, partly because there was no copulative and partly because writers were not used to using punctuation (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 38).

Both Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký and Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của ardently strove to promote the usage of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) not only among the common people but also mainly among the intelligentsia, whose initial perception of the script had been rather distrustful. The latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) had been perceived as a script of collaboration, while literary Chinese (*wenyan*) and the Vietnamese demotic script *chữ nôm* (demotic characters) as languages of resistance. However, with joint efforts Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký and Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của succeeded in developing the new script into, in Neil Jamieson's words, a "standardized and effective medium of communication" (Jamieson 1993: 70). Both of them were polyglots and beside Vietnamese, they excelled in literary Chinese and

French. As prolific translators, they translated many texts from literary Chinese and managed to transcribe many of the Vietnamese classics from the demotic script *chữ nôm* (demotic characters) into the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), and thus made them comprehensible to those, who had not mastered literary Chinese or *chữ nôm* (demotic characters). (Jamieson 1993: 70). They were also authors of the first valuable dictionaries, e.g. Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký is the author of a detailed *Pháp Việt tự điển* (Petit dictionnaire Français-Annamite, 1884) or *Việt Pháp tự điển* (Petit dictionnaire Annamite-F Français, 1887); Huỳnh Tịnh Của published a two-volume *Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị* (Dictionary of the Vietnamese national language, 1895-1896) providing a transcription of *chữ nôm* (demotic characters) into *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language).

Despite their efforts in the field of promoting *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language), compiling dictionaries, collecting and writing down stories, neither of them succeeded in stimulating a more plentiful production of literary works written in the new script.²⁴ It took over a decade for the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) to gain recognition due to the efforts of the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause).

In 1883 the French colonial administration also launched its printing activities in Hanoi. (Marr 1984: 45). Nine years later, one of the leading figures in this endeavor was a close friend of the French Governor-General

²⁴ We can identify several reasons that had led to this failure. As has been stated in the previous chapter, the insufficient dissemination of the latinized script was caused by the contradictory language policy of the colonial administration. Some of the French officials regarded the promotion of the new writing system with favor, while others were convinced that only French language should be taught in schools. The Vietnamese themselves were also divided in their opinions regarding the usage of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). Many had a rather negative viewpoint since they perceived it as a language of collaboration with the colonial regime (Jamieson 1993: 70). However, even the Vietnamese who were willingly cooperating with the French maintained a negative stand on the question of adopting the *quốc ngữ* and preferred to learn French instead.

of Indochina, the entrepreneur François Henri Schneider, who would soon build one of the largest printing and publishing enterprises in Indochina. (Marr 1984: 45). In the period of 1914 – 1918, François Henri Schneider, Governor-General Albert Sarraut (1912 – 1921) and the director of French secret police – the dreaded Sûreté – Louis Marty (fluent in Vietnamese and Chinese) put into effect “colonization by means of books” (Marr 1984: 45). This was partially a reaction to the French closure of the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) in 1907, the imprisonment of many important nationalists the following year and the overall stifling and oppressive colonial policy. Moreover, in November 1912 Vietnamese nationalists led by Phan Bội Châu (1867 – 1940) attempted to assassinate the Governor-General Albert Sarraut and other assaults against the French followed. In April 1913 there were several bomb attacks aimed at the French officials. The French retaliated with massive arrests of the local inhabitants, which resulted in an overall degradation of the relations between the two nations (Jamieson 1993: 73).

Thus, under these circumstances François Henri Schneider and his Vietnamese collaborateur and Francophile Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh rushed to Hanoi, where they started publishing the *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal) written in the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). Thus, one of the first most influential magazines emerged on the scene. The aim of the journal was primarily political, since it appeared immediately after a series of assassinations of French officials in Indochina. The main objective of the publication was to promote French culture, to enhance support of the colonial regime and to advance peaceful co-habitation of the two nations. In the editorial of the first issue, its founder Henri Schneider wrote that “...together we must use literature, knowledge, the benefits of civilization to silence the rebellious words. We ought to prevent the fire-crackers of the rebels from exploding, from exploding a sound against civilization”

(Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 71-72). However, its editor in chief Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882 – 1936) succeeded in transforming this magazine into a forum for the new emerging Vietnamese literature after he had started publishing the journal *Trung bắc tân văn* (Central and Northern News) in 1915, which focused more on political events.

Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, a prolific journalist and one of the most talented translators in Vietnamese literary history, was a perfect example of a Western-oriented intellectual, who ardently advocated modernization of Vietnamese society.²⁵ Nevertheless, due to his unconditional admiration of the French he had been despised by many intellectuals of the era. Even Nguyễn Tường Tam and his collaborators launched a series of attacks on him on the pages of their magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs) despite the fact that they shared zeal for the modernization of the Vietnamese society with him. However, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh had many admirers too and one cannot deny that he had substantially contributed to the development of journalism and literature in Vietnam.

Not much is known of his background, but he was probably born into a poor peasant family from the Hà Đông province in North Vietnam (Jamieson 1993: 65). He studied at the *Collège des Interprètes*, from which he graduated as one of the best at the age of fourteen. He then worked in the colonial administration and soon gained a reputation of being an efficient and loyal employee. In 1906 he, just like other leading journalists Phạm Quỳnh (1892 – 1945) and Phạm Duy Tồn (1881-1924), traveled to France as a member of a delegation sent to the Exhibition of Colonies in Marseille. This journey was to be a turning point in his life. For it was in France that he had become enamored with journalism and its

²⁵ For more detailed information about Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh see Jamieson 1993: 65-78 or Goscha 2004: 135 – 169.

potential to transform society. As Neil Jamieson put it, he had hoped to “lead his people in a cultural revolution turning them from what he perceived to be the “backwardness and “superstition” of their “ossified” Asian heritage” (Jamieson 1993: 66).

After his arrival back to Vietnam a year later, he gave up his job in the colonial administration and plunged into the world of journalism. Furthermore, he was convinced that through the dissemination of the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), which he intended to spread through journalism, he could propagate his own notion of socio-cultural revolution in Vietnam. He even stated that “the condition of our nation in the future, good or bad, depends on *chữ quốc ngữ*” (Jamieson 1993: 67).

However, his first endeavors in the field of journalism were in the beginning far from successful. In 1907 he joined the editorial office of a periodical called *Đăng Cổ Tùng Báo* (Old Lantern Miscellany), which appeared irregularly and was written in literary Chinese, *chữ nôm* (demotic script) and later also in *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language). Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was responsible for the section written in *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language). In the years to come, he collaborated with François Henri Schneider with whom he issued two French language papers *Notre journal* (1908-1909) and *Notre revue* (1910). As the dates indicate, their existence was rather ephemeral. However, in 1910 Vĩnh started working in a well-established periodical called *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* (News of the Six Provinces).

In 1911 both Schneider and Vĩnh moved back to the Tonkin, where they hoped to continue with publishing newspapers. In May 1913 they published the first issue of the 1913 *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal). The French authorities, which hoped to make use of it as their

tool of propaganda, supported it fully. However, Vĩnh aimed much higher. He intended to popularize the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*), to spread Western knowledge and thought and thus re-examine the values of the traditional society in Tonkin.

The thirty-two-page *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal) was published every Thursday and it contained many articles covering domestic and foreign news, public affairs, science, Western and Eastern philosophy, and translations of Western literature and poetry (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 72). Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was a prolific and phenomenal translator. He was also one of the first (after Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký), who had realized the potential of translations in their capacity of bridging the gap between the West and the East (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 72).

However, around the year 1917 the *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal) started to gradually lose its readership since by then it had turned into a literary magazine inefficient in promoting the French cause. Instead, a new magazine called *Nam Phong tạp chí* (Southern Wind Journal) took its place as the promoter of peaceful cooperation of the French and the Vietnamese. Therefore, the reasons behind the apparition of this magazine were also of political nature, since in 1917 the French in Indochina were forced to face an emerging more-organized opposition lead by Vietnamese scholars and intellectuals. In addition, the French also feared that the October Revolution in Russia would have a negative impact on domestic affairs in Indochina (Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 99- 125). Thus, the French hoped that via the new journal they could win over the Vietnamese intelligentsia.

The name of the magazine contained two connotations e.g. *Nam Phong* can be translated as “Southern Wind”. According to Huỳnh Sanh Thông, the

Confucian scholars perceived “southern wind” as a gentle breeze that was supposed to relieve one of bad mood, to cool down anger, and to induce a feeling of mental welfare and harmony (Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 99-125). In other words, the essential objective of the journal was to promote reconciliation between the French and the Vietnamese. However, *Nam Phong* can also be translated as “Southern Ethos”, referring to local Vietnamese culture and customs, as the Vietnamese always referred to their own country as Southern, in relation to China.

The founder of the magazine was Louis Marty, the director of French Sureté, who summoned a young, talented and trusted Francophile Vietnamese scholar and also a member of the editorial office of the *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina journal) Phạm Quỳnh (1892 – 1945)²⁶ to aid him in his endeavor of “colonization by books”. Thus, the twenty-five-year old Phạm Quỳnh became the editor-in-chief of the new journal, which was to influence the literary and intellectual milieu until 1934 when the “baton” was taken over by Nguyễn Tường Tam’s *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). The French, who were subsidizing the journal with 400 piastres every month, had hoped the magazine would continue to promote their interests, to propagate French culture and spread the idea of peaceful cooperation between the French and Vietnamese. According to Tuan Ngoc Nguyen the *Nam Phong tạp chí* (Southern Wind Journal) embodied the effort of reconciling the old with new, Eastern tradition with Western civilization.

Phạm Quỳnh and his colleagues did succeed in creating a bridge between the still prevailing Chinese culture among Vietnamese intellectuals and the Western one represented by the French. Moreover, they managed to lay the

²⁶ For more details on Phạm Quỳnh’s life and activities as editor of the *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) journal see Jamieson 1993: 82 – 89, or DeFrancis 1977: 187 – 192.

foundations of modern Vietnamese literature since just like its predecessor *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal) the magazine served as a forum for emerging Vietnamese authors. During its existence, the magazine changed its form three times. In the first five years (1917 – 1922) it was published in Chinese and in the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). Then for a year, the magazine was enriched by a section written in French, while the section in literary Chinese was substantially downgraded. Whereas, in the period of 1923-1934, the magazine's content was reduced to two parts again being edited in the latinized script and in French. Concerning the content of the journal, it could be divided into eight different columns: editorials and news; literary; philosophical and scientific studies; garden of letters; literary variations; commentaries; novels, short stories and tales (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 111).²⁷ As has been stated above, *Nam Phong tạp chí* (Southern Wind Journal) embodied the effort of reconciling the old with new, Eastern tradition with Western civilization. Since it was published in French, in Chinese and also in the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) it aimed to address not only the literati who continued to live in the countryside, read Chinese books and write in literary Chinese or demotic characters; but also the newly-emergent middle-class intellectuals who had pursued their education in the Franco-Vietnamese schools or in France, were fluent in French and preferred using the latinized script.

The development of press was also partially incited by a new trend in Vietnamese society and literature – i.e. the advent of writing as a profession – another inspiration taken from the West (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 43). Before the arrival of the Europeans, Vietnamese did enjoy composing and reading poetry, but in the pre-colonial period it was impossible to earn living by writing. As Tuan Ngoc Nguyen pointed out:

²⁷ For a complete list of articles published in *Nam Phong* see Phạm Thị Ngoan: 1978. *Index analytique du Nam phong*. (Thèse de 3e cycle, Paris 7).

“Literature was attached to education and regarded as a traditional route to bureaucracy. People attended school, practiced their literary skills in order to pass the civil service examinations, received their bachelor’s or doctor’s degrees, and then became imperial officials...” (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 46). Did the literati write literature in their free time, then only as a form of entertainment, a pass time (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 46).

However, with the arrival of press into Vietnam, the dissemination of the *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language) and with the emergence of the new Western-educated middle-class, the conditions for professionalism in literary activities were created. Step by step the numbers of journalists and professional writers (most of the writers worked as journalists at the same time) started to increase. Hand in hand with the emergence of writing as a profession a new factor in literary production came into play – the readers and their taste. Thus, apart from being forced to find their own voice, the writers were suddenly obliged also to take into consideration the topics, subjects and the style so as to appeal to the largest possible readership (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 43).

Just as in other countries of East and South-East Asia, this quest for the new style and voice was preceded by a large number of literary translations of Chinese and Western writings that were being published on the pages of the above-mentioned periodicals. The translations of Chinese novels enjoyed great popularity among the Vietnamese readership. However, at this point we can distinguish a slight difference in taste. Whilst, translations of sentimental novels (especially those of the Chinese author of *mandarin duck* and *butterfly* fiction Hsú Cheng-ya) were extremely popular in Tonkin, the readership in Cochinchina preferred knight-errant fiction. Furthermore, the readers also enjoyed reading translations of French literature.

On the pages of his magazines Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh published many of his translations of Western classics, such as Alexandre Dumas's "Les trois mousquetaires", Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables", LaFontaine's "Fables", Molière's "Le bourgeois gentilhomme" or the "Malade imaginaire", Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels", Abbe Prevost's "Manon Lescaut", Honore de Balzac's "La Peau de Chagrin", and Fenelon's "Les aventures de Télémaque".²⁸ At first sight, from the Western point of view, the choice of the translated works may seem rather quaint. However, according to Christopher Goscha, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh had a hidden agenda in his choice of writings to be translated. In Christopher Goscha's opinion, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh deliberately chose to translate such works that all were very critical of monarchy, as he could not aim his pen against the colonial regime (Goscha 2004: 14-15). It is undeniable that e.g. LaFontaine's "Fables", Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" or Fenelon's "Les aventures de Télémaque" all carry a strong anti-monarchical strain (Goscha 2004: 15).

On the other hand, Phạm Quỳnh, the editor-in chief of the *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) magazine followed a different purpose in his choice of Western authors that he wanted to introduce to the Vietnamese readership. On the pages of his magazine he published translations of works of French enlightenment writers, playwrights and philosophers from the 17th and 18th centuries, such as Pierre Corneille (1606 – 1684), Jean Racine (1639 – 1699), Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622 – 1673), Jean de La Fontaine (1621 – 1695), François Maire Arouet Voltaire (1694 – 1778), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778), Denis Diderot (1713 – 1784), Charles Louis Montesquieu (1689 – 1755). The variety of the above mentioned translated French philosopher indicates that Phạm Quỳnh aimed to introduce Vietnamese readership to a range of Western thought of Enlightenment, which he, as a renowned polemist also commented in great

²⁸ For more information about his translations see Goscha 2004: 135 – 169.

detail. However, in his translations Phạm Quỳnh also followed another agenda. As a conservative and a traditionalist he feared the effects of uncontrolled modernization (Westernization) of Indochina. As a defender of the continuing relevance of Confucianism, he turned to translating Western philosophers, in whose writings he sought to find arguments to justify his claims. In order to reinforce Confucian teachings, he translated e.g. the works of Charles Maurras, who had criticized the Enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes and Rousseau for having encouraged individualism that is a threat to authority (Marr 1984: 110). He also chose to translate e.g. the works of the French writer and salonnière Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles, known as Mme Marquise de Lambert (1647-1733), to reinforce Confucian teachings on friendship (Marr 1984: 110).²⁹ Later on, he was criticized for having chosen to translate such conservative authors.

2.6.2. New Fiction in the Vernacular and Subsequent Literary Debates

Gradually, under the influence of these translations Vietnamese writers began to create their own prose written in the latinized script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). On the pages of the leading periodicals first literary endeavors, especially short stories, of such authors like Nguyễn Bá Học (1857 – 1921) or Phạm Duy Tồn (1881 – 1924), began to appear.³⁰ Despite their uncontested talent, it was apparent that they closely copied the French models. Most of these stories dealt with topics related to the gradual

²⁹ For a more detailed analysis of Phạm Quỳnh's translations see Marr 1984: 110-114.

³⁰ For more detailed information of the authors and the content of their short stories see e.g. Hoàng Ngọc Thành: 1991. *Vietnam's Social and Political Development as Seen through the Modern Novel*. (New York: Peter Lang).

modernization of Vietnamese traditional society, the anomie that pervaded it and the clash of Eastern and Western values.

Speaking of prose, determining the exact date and place of naissance of the Vietnamese modern novel is debatable. Moreover, for a long time literary scholars, who had focused on this topic, had been convinced that the first modern novel appeared in the north, i.e. in Tonkin (Schafer - Thế Uyên 1993: 854). Nevertheless, after the 1986 *Đổi Mới* Reforms and Việt Nam's subsequent extrication from international isolation, one of the consequences of which, was a renewed interest in Vietnamese society and culture, this opinion began to change as more and more literary research was conducted and now the most widespread theory claims that the first Vietnamese modern novels developed in the south of Vietnam, i.e. in the colony of Cochinchina (Schafer - Thế Uyên 1993: 854).

In the north, i.e. in Tonkin, the year 1925 is considered as the turning point in the development of prose, when two extremely popular publications appeared on the scene. Those were the novels *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart) by Hoàng Ngọc Phách (1896 - 1973) and *Quả dưa đỏ* (Red Watermelon) by Nguyễn Trọng Thuật (1883 – 1940). Whilst the novel *Quả dưa đỏ* (Red Watermelon) received great acclaim and even a prize from the *Association pour la formation intellectuelle et morale* (Association for the intellectual and moral education), it was the novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart), which caused an uncontested upheaval among the readership.

This novel, which for the first time in Vietnamese literary history had a subhead psychological novel (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 42), is often considered to be a radical break up with the Vietnamese literary tradition. It is a story of a hopeless love affair between a girl *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart) and a young student of Pedagogical faculty in Hanoi *Đạm Thủy*. *Đạm Thủy* befriends a

small boy Tân, who had found his lost wallet, and becomes a frequent guest in Tân's house. There he meets Tân's elder sister, whom he starts calling Tố Tâm (Pure Heart). As time passes they fall in love with each other, a reality that can end only in tragedy, since Đạm Thủy is already engaged to another girl, whom his parents have chosen. Even though Đạm Thủy loves Tố Tâm (Pure Heart) deeply, he has no intention to break the engagement for he feels profound filial piety towards his parents. Tố Tâm (Pure Heart) accepts his decision. Yet she swears never to marry for she cannot love any other man. However, she is forced to break her oath after she decided to fulfill the last wish of her dying mother and marry the man her mother has chosen. Nevertheless, she does not allow her husband to consummate the marriage and shortly after she dies lovelorn. When Đạm Thủy hears the news, he also falls sick. In the end he overcomes his sorrow and decides to serve the society.³¹

Despite the fact that the aim of the author of this novel was rather to reinforce the traditional Confucian values, the extended family and the obligations of the individual towards it (mainly the concept of *hiếu* – filial piety and *nhĩa* – righteousness), the young readership comprehended his idea of love and individual in a totally different manner than he had intended. Instead of taking him for a “teacher of morality”, which he had hoped to be, the young public hailed him as the „teacher of love“ (Schafer - Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh 1988: 772). Beside stirring a wave of Werther-like suicides among young women in Hanoi, in the intellectual circles the novel aroused never-ending discussions on topics such as individualism, the relationship of the individual and the extended family, the issue of personal happiness, etc. Thereafter, Vietnamese literature became dominated by melancholic romanticism. According to Hoàng Ngọc Thành, this new

³¹ For more details about this novel see e.g.: Schafer, John - Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh 1988: 756 – 777 or Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 88-92.

literary trend was quietly encouraged by the French colonial administration, who aimed to distract the readership from thornier social and political problems (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 91).

On the other hand, the development of prose in the south (in the colony of Cochinchina) had a slightly different denouement than that in Tonkin. The first novels in the colony are said to have appeared as early as 1910 when two novels such as *Hoàng Tố Anh hàm oan* (Hoang To Anh Suffers Injustice) by Trần Chánh Chiêu (1897 – 1919) and *Phan Yên ngoại sử tiết phụ gian truân* (The Miserable Life of a Chaste Widow in Phan Yen) by Trương Duy Toàn (? - ?) were published. Probably the most popular writer of fiction in Cochinchina was Hồ Biểu Chánh (1884–1958),³² whose prose indicates that the process of development of prose in the south was not as radical as it was in the north. One could say that it was a continual process of building up on the so popular traditional errant-knight and „scholar-meets-beauty“ stories. Moreover, the influence of writing of contemporary French authors can also be discerned, mainly that of Hector Malot (1830 – 1907) and Victor Hugo (1802 – 1885).

Despite the fact that Hồ Biểu Chánh’s novels were more realistic and lively in style, they did not have such an impact on triggering discussions about the transformation of Vietnamese literature and society as the novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart) did. However, the issues concerning the role of the individual within the extended family and the society, its right for freedom and personal happiness were only hinted by Hoàng Ngọc Phách. It would be Nguyễn Tường Tam (Nhất Linh) and his *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), who would pick up the threads in 1932 and make

³² For more information on Hồ Biểu Chánh and his writings see e.g.: Schafer, John - Thé Uyên 1993: 852 – 884, or Schafer, John C - Cao Thi Nhu Quỳnh 1988: 100 – 112.

these issues the focal point of their novels with the aim of modernizing Vietnamese society.

Another stage of Vietnamese literature began in 1932 when Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (Self-Strength Literary Group) under the leadership of Nguyễn Tường Tam (Nhất Linh) published two novels of Khái Hưng: *Hồn Bướm mơ tiên* (Dream Love) and *Nửa chừng xuân* (In the Midst of Spring) (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 140). The novel *Hồn Bướm mơ tiên* (Dream Love) is a story of love unfulfilled. The main character, a young man named Ngọc, returns to a pagoda, which he left many years ago. There he falls in love with a young monk called Lan, whom he suspects to be a disguised girl. Soon, his suspicion proves to be correct. Lan cherishes the same feelings for Ngọc but she does not want to break her oath to Buddha. Thus, this novel is another story of a love forlorn, so popular with Vietnamese readership. The year of its apparition, i.e. 1932, is often considered as another turning point in Vietnamese literature, since it is believed that the Vietnamese novel finally found its own voice (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 63).

With the appearance of the Nguyễn Tường Tam (Nhất Linh) and his Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (Self-Strength Literary Group), two new Western factors appeared on the Vietnamese literary scene: individualism and rationalism. Since most of the members of the his Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (Self-Strength Literary Group) had been trained in French schools or even had direct contact with the French culture and literature, they were able to bring a new voice onto the Vietnamese literary scene. Unlike their predecessors e.g. Phạm Quỳnh they no longer strove for the reconciliation of the old with the new, the Eastern tradition with Western civilization. On the other hand, in its manifest the Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (Self-Strength Literary Group) clearly stated the aim to modernize Vietnamese literature together with the social reform, e.g. “to introduce Western scientific concepts into

Vietnamese literature”, and “to promote individual freedom”, etc (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 131; Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 241).

As a result of the diffusing the concept individualism, the Western educated Vietnamese intellectuals in Ngoc Tuan Nguyen’s words “became distinctive individuals both in their writings and in their lives. Dropping all reserve, they began to express deep-felt thoughts and emotions” (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 50). Hand in hand with this new trend Vietnamese writers wrote in order to address urgent intellectual and emotional problems that were preoccupying not only the Vietnamese intelligentsia but also most of the urban society that had come into contact with the Western culture and found themselves lost between the collision of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern.

In general, in between 1932 and 1936 most of authors were mostly men of middle to upper-middle class families, who had received higher education either in Indochina or in France, where they were schooled in Western science and arts (Nguyen Van Marshal 2004: 215). These men, imbued with the notions of individual freedom and the right for happiness produced a number of *romans-à-thèse*, in which they condemned certain aspects of the traditional society focusing especially on the position of women within the extended family. The protagonists of their novels came from the same social milieu as they did, i.e. from the middle class, petite bourgeoisie and also suffered under the weight of restrictions and expectations imposed on them by the Confucian extended family system.

Moreover, this period is marked by a substantial diversification of Vietnamese literature since many new genres from Western literature were introduced, i.e. literary critique, drama, investigative cover stories, essays etc. The Vietnamese readership could get acquainted with this new kind of

literature on the pages of magazines that the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) and other groups produced.³³

The year 1936 marked another turning point in Vietnamese literature. This transformation was induced by a change on the political scene in France as the Popular Front (1936 – 1939) came to power. This political change caused a relaxation of overall situation in Indochina. Censorship was abolished, political prisoners were released and the Vietnamese were permitted to establish political parties and associations. Hand in hand with this change, a new type of writer from a different kind of milieu established himself on the literary scene. Prior to 1936 middle-class writers, i.e. also those belonging to the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), who could pride themselves with University diplomas acquired in the West, had dominated it. After 1936 their place was taken by totally different authors: These men and women did not have such a formal education; they often did not even have a University degree and most of them came from poverty-stricken conditions, such as Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912 – 1939), Nguyễn Hồng (1918 – 1982), Nguyễn Lan Khai (1906), Nam Cao (1915 – 1951), Tô Hoài (1920) etc. Having grown up in such destitute conditions and being thoroughly acquainted with them, these writers brought up a shift in topics and the so-called “popular literature” (*bình dân*) appeared on the scene (Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 120).

Thus, the overall shift from romanticism to realism was more than apparent. The new conditions favored mainly the development of the novel, documentary and investigative writings. Therefore, it was the

³³ For a very profound analysis of Vietnamese society and literature of this era see Hoàng Ngọc Thành: 1991. *Vietnam's Social and Political Development as Seen through the Modern Novel*. (New York: Peter Lang); Bùi Xuân Bào: 1972. *Le roman vietnamien contemporain: tendances et évolution du roman vietnamien contemporain 1925-1945*. (Saigon: Tủ sách nhân văn xã hội).

reportage (*phóng sự*) that started dominating the pages of the magazines in Indochina. The naissance of this genre, entirely novel to Vietnamese literature, was closely linked to the social changes initiated by the arrival of the French. Despite the fact that most of the population lived in rural areas, many peasants were forced to leave their land and move to the city to earn their living (Lockhart 1996: 10). For example, the population of Hanoi increased from 75 000 in 1921 to 180 000 in 1937 (Lockhart 1996: 10). Most of the newcomers to the city ended up in the lower classes and usually worked as servants, drivers, rickshaw coolies, barbers etc. The displacement of individuals from their families, villages and communities, their coming to the city and their daily battles to earn their living soon became the most common topics of the new genre of reportage.

The newspapers started to publish regularly cover stories that focused on the life of different strata of society since journalists and writers started to draw the readers' attention to the social evils that pervaded the society. As a result, coverage on slums, rickshaw-pullers, prostitutes, the unemployed, rickshaw-pullers, miners, peasants, thieves, crooks, etc. became more and more common. In their writings the new authors described the wretched life in city slums, in the impoverished countryside or the harsh working and living conditions of rubber plantation workers and bourgeois snobbery.³⁴

Moreover, the time of the Popular Front (1936 – 1939) coincided with a polemic between proponents of art for art's sake and art for human's life sake, which broke out in 1935 and lasted till 1938, when it withered away.

³⁴ For more information on these novels see Bùi Xuân Bào: 1972. *Le roman vietnamien contemporain: tendances et évolution du roman vietnamien contemporain 1925-1945*. (Saigon: Tủ sách nhân văn xã hội), chapter 5; Durand, Maurice – Nguyen Tran Huan: 1985. *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature*. (New York: Columbia University Press), 224 – 25, or Hoàng Ngọc Thành: 1991. *Vietnam's Social and Political Development as Seen through the Modern Novel*. (New York: Peter Lang).

The polemic emerged when Thiều Sơn (1908 – 1978) published two articles *Hai cái quan niệm về văn học* (Two Views on Literature) and *Nghệ thuật với đời người* (Art and Life) in the magazine *Tiểu Thuyết Thứ Bảy* (Saturday Fiction) in February and March 1935 (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 61). In these two articles, he criticized the Confucian perception of literature as a means to “achieve educational, ethical and scientific goals” (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 61). On the contrary, literature in Thiều Sơn’s words should “set art or beauty as its main goal” (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 61). He is, thus, classified as the representative of the so-called “art for art’s sake” movement and was soon joined by a group of writers and intellectual such as Hoài Thanh (1909 - 1982), Lê Tràng Kiều (1912-1977), Lưu Trọng Lư (1912-1991) and Lan Khai (1906 – 1945).

Instantaneously, a group of objectors to this stance appeared on the scene claiming that literature must be socially responsible, i.e. must be politically active, and should depict life as it is. Thus the movement for “art for the sake of life” also established itself on the scene,³⁵ which was lead by Marxist critic Hải Triều (1908-1954), who was immediately sided by other leftist participants, e.g. Hải Thanh, Hồ Xanh, Hải Khách, Sơn Trà, Thạch Động and many others. These men, many of them members of the Communist Party of Indochina took advantage of the more relaxed atmosphere in Indochina not so much as to discuss literature but rather to promote their political ideas and party’s policies on the pages of the press, i.e. this discussion was viewed by them more as a political debate rather than an aesthetic and literary one.

³⁵ For a thorough analysis of the debate see Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 57-85.

The debate ended at the beginning of the World War II,³⁶ when the French tightened censorship again and many of the leftist artists, who had taken part in, were either arrested or had to disappear from the literary scene (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 80-81). The debate itself did not have a salient impact on changing the literary scene; nevertheless, according to Tuan Ngoc Nguyen it did have two notable outcomes. Before the debate was incited most of Vietnamese authors had tended to create spontaneously without much theoretical consideration (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 81). However, from 1938 many writers started to focus their attention on the theory of writing acquired through their study of French literature. The second impact of the debate was the introduction of the basic theoretical points of social realism and the writings of Russian writers, such as Leo Tolstoy (1828 – 1910) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821 – 1881), who were presented to the readership (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 81). Until then Vietnamese intellectuals and their readers had been acquainted only with Chinese, French and little English literature (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 81). From that moment on, the press and the many printing houses were fast to react and provided the enthusiastic readership with a number of translated works written by realistic authors such as: Honoré de Balzac (1799 – 1850), Gustav Flaubert (1821 – 1880), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Leo Tolstoy (1828 – 1910), Romain Rolland (1866 – 1944), André Gide (1869 – 1951), and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821 – 1881). Even though the debate did not initiate a substantial change on the literary scene, it did, however, encourage the shift from romanticism to realism. It is noteworthy to say that this shift was also apparent in Nguyễn Tường Tam's writings as shall be shown in the following chapters.

³⁶ According to Hue Tam Ho Tai, the debate lasted for about ten years till 1945. I incline to the opinion of Tuan Ngoc Nguyen (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 57).

3. Life of Nguyễn Tường Tam (Nhất Linh)

In reconstructing Nguyễn Tường Tam's life, I shall be working with two biographies written by Vietnamese authors: Lê Hữu Mục's *Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Nhất Linh (tức Luận đề về Nhất Linh)* (Life and Works of Nhất Linh, i.e. Thesis on Nhất Linh) (Huế: Nhận Thức, 1958), which as the date of publishing indicates was written during Tam's life and does not cover the later years of his existence. The other biography, which most of the Western literary critics and historians often quote, is *Chân Dung Nhất Linh* (Nhất Linh's Portrait) written by Nhật Thịnh. Its structure and depth is almost identical with the first mentioned monograph written by Lê Hữu Mục. It provides a comprehensive overview of Tam's life and professional activities till his suicide in 1963. Both the books seemed to be based on the memoirs of Tam's family members, friends, colleagues and contemporaries. Both are undoubtedly useful sources of information on Tam, but cannot be considered as "academic" publications in their own right.

In order to get more precise and thorough information in reconstructing Tam's life I have also consulted especially the memoirs of his family members, such as his sister's Nguyễn Thị Thế's memoirs, *Hồi Ký về gia đình Nguyễn Tường, Nhất Linh, Hoàng Đạo, Thạch Lam* (Reminiscences about the Nguyễn Tường Family: Nhất Linh, Hoàng Đạo, and Thạch Lam), (Saigon: NXB Sống, 1974); his younger brother's Nguyễn Tường Bách's account, *Việt Nam, một thế kỷ qua* (Vietnam, a Century That Passed), (1980, <http://vantuyen.net/index.php?view=story&subjectid=323>); the memoirs of Tam's son Nguyễn Tường Thiết, *Nhất Linh, cha tôi* (Nhất Linh, My Father), (Gardena, CA: Văn Mới, 2000). The recollections of Tam's nephews' Tường Hùng's "Người chú" (Uncle) and Thế Uyên, "Người Bác. (Nhất Linh trong dĩ vãng một người trẻ tuổi)" (Uncle, Nhất

Linh in the Past of One Youngster), both republished in Phan Cự Đệ's *Văn học lãng mạn Việt Nam (1930 – 1945)* (Vietnamese Romantic Literature, 1930-1945), (TP Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Giáo Dục, 1997) also proved to be quite an important source on Tam's private life, his family relationships and the standpoint of his family members on his political and literary activities.

Writings of his closest friends and colleagues were an invaluable source on Tam's literary and political career, such as his friend's and colleague's Tú Mỡ's, "*Trong bếp núc của Tự lực văn đoàn*" (In the Kitchen of the Self-Strength Literary Group), (*Tạp chí văn học*, no. 5/6 – 1988 and *Tạp chí văn học*, no. 1 – 1989); Hoàng Xuân Hãn's memoirs *Một vài kí vãng về hội nghị Đà Lạt* (Several Memories about the Đà Lạt Conference), (Hà Nội: NXB Giáo Dục, 1996), etc. I have also consulted the numerous memoirs of his friends and colleagues, which cover different areas of Tam's life.

Undoubtedly, working with these sources can be revealing concerning the large number of information that they provide, it is at the same time a rather precarious task, especially due to the bias, positive or negative, of the eyewitness. Moreover, the information often furnished by these texts proved to be at time inaccurate when dealing with certain historical events.

Being inspired by the approach of New Historicism, I shall also work with Nguyễn Tường Tam's writings as with specific visions of history. Therefore, in order to attain a more thorough understanding of the social and cultural context I shall quote Tam's literary work to illuminate and / or specify historical events that might have had a salient impact not only his writings, but also on his life's direction.

3.1. The Early Years of Nguyễn Tường Tam

Nguyễn Tường Tam was born in the hour of Dậu, July 25, 1906 in the district of Cẩm Giàng lying in the province Hải Dương. Tam later changed the date of his birth to February 1st, 1905 in order to reach the required age limit for school examinations (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 20; Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 6). His father Nguyễn Tường Nhu apparently worked only reluctantly as an interpreter and secretary in the French administration. He had a reputation of Confucian scholar renown for his literary talent, which Tam seemed to have inherited from him.

Nguyễn Tường Tam spent the earliest years of his childhood in the district of Cẩm Giàng in the Hải Dương province, which lay on the main road connecting Hà Nội with Hải Phòng, i.e. he spent his early days in close contact with peasants toiling on their fields in the middle of the Red River delta. His parents and siblings perceived him as a pensive child concerned with problems to which the other children of his age did not pay any heed (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). He would later depict his impressions from his youth in a collection of short stories called *Anh phải sống* (You Must Live) published in 1932-1933 (O'Harrow 1968: 208). His family was forced to move from place to place, thus he passed his schooldays at different schools under the guidance of many Confucian scholars who had left the colonial administration because of their hatred and unwillingness to yield to the new and alien regime of the French (O'Harrow 1968: 208). Among his teachers were, for example Bùi Đình Tá, who taught in the village of Thái Hà, or Bùi Trinh Nhất, who gave lessons in Hàng Bạc Street in Hanoi (O'Harrow 1968: 208; Nhật Thịnh 1986: 20). Nguyễn Tường Tam spent a few years in Hanoi attending Bùi Trinh Nhất's school, but then returned to Cẩm Giàng due to some family affair (Lê Hữu Mục

1958: 10). There he continued his schooling in a newly opened primary school.

Tam was known to be a good student. He impressed his new teacher Kiên with his talent for poetry and excelled mainly in composing poetry in T'ang style, in *lục bát* (six-eight legged verse) or *song thất lục bát* (two-seven, six-eight legged verse) (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 10). With the help of his talented father he managed to progress fast and thus succeeded in obtaining the *Bằng cao đẳng tiểu học* (Diplome d'Etudes Primaire) at the age of thirteen (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 10). However, Tam's schooling was abruptly ended after the unexpected death of his father in Sam Nua in Laos. Nguyễn Tường Nhu left behind his wife Le Thi Sâm³⁷ and seven children, six boys and one girl, some of whom would later on play a more or less salient part in the realm of Vietnamese literature.³⁸

The unexpected circumstances forced Tam to give up his studies and help out in the household, which was struck by poverty after the death of its provider. Tam was said to have been very disappointed by leaving school,

³⁷ Le was born in 1880 in the province of Hải Dương in Vietnam. She passed away August 5, 1962 in Saigon. For more information see the Nguyễn Tường family website: <http://www.nguyentuong.net/cirfset.html>

³⁸ The eldest son Nguyễn Tường Thụy (1903 – 1974) would hold the post of director of the post-office in Saigon. The second child Nguyễn Tường Cẩm (1904 – 1947) would later cooperate with Nguyễn Tường Tam and be the director of the journal *Ngày Nay* (This Day) from 1935. He was to die in a purge carried out by Việt Minh in 1947. Nguyễn Tường Long, later known as Tứ Ly or Hoàng Đạo, was born in 1907. He was active in journalism, being the main theoretician of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). Later on he launched himself into politics to become the Minister of Economy in the second Vietnamese government after the World War II. He deceased in Thạch Long (Guangzhou) in 1948 under vague circumstances. Nguyễn Thị Thế (1908 – 1997), the only daughter of the family, was to become the mother of writers Duy Lam (1935) and Thế Uyên (born 1935). Her memoirs *Hồi Ký về gia đình Nguyễn Tường, Nhất Linh, Hoàng Đạo, Thạch Lam* provide quite a lot of information on the life of the Nguyễn Tường family. Nguyễn Tường Lân (1909 – 1942) would later be known as the writer Thạch Lam and was considered as one of the most talented writers of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) despite his apparent laziness that Nguyễn Tường Tam would often reproach him. He died of tuberculosis in 1942. Nguyễn Tường Bách (1916), studied

but he had no choice since the years following the death of his father were very difficult for his family. His mother tried to earn a living by trading rice and at some point even engaged herself in the illicit trade with opium, which was a rather risky affair. Later on, after almost having been caught by the French, she gave up this way of earning bread and focused on trading rice again. Moreover, the fellow villagers were apparently hostile to the family and wished that ill luck to fall upon the Nguyễn Tường clan (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 23). According to Nhật Thịnh, the reason of their enviousness was that the Nguyễn Tường family was relatively better off and could provide education for their children (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 23).

After Tam had been out of school for two years, his family finally permitted him to apply to Collège du Protectorat (*Trường Thành chung Bảo hộ*), also known as the Chu Văn An School (*Trường Chu Văn An*) in the village of Bưởi on the bank of the Hồ Tây in Hanoi.³⁹ Among the Vietnamese the school was called the Grapefruit School (*Trường Bưởi*), since it was located in the area of Kê Bưởi. It was an institution that had been established by the French in 1908 with the primary objective to educate future Vietnamese staff for the French administration system of Tonkin. At that time it was one of the most famous and prestigious schools in Indochina and many outstanding personalities of Vietnamese political and intellectual life received their education at this school, i.e. politician Phạm Văn Đồng (1906 – 2000), professor of medicine Tôn Thất Tùng (1912-1982), historian and politician Nguyễn Khắc Viện (1913-1997) and many others.

At the age of fifteen, Tam had a serious appearance of a grown-up and made the impression of an indifferent, taciturn and conceited teenager (Lê

medicine, and in 1945 became the director of the revived journal *Ngày Nay* (This Day). He has written several memoirs, such as *Việt Nam, một thế kỷ qua*.

³⁹ For a photograph of the school see the Picture Supplement p. 312.

Hữu Mục 1958: 11). At the beginning, he even became the target of other students' mockery due to his rather quiet character and boorish looks (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 11). Moreover, he did not present himself as an outstanding student at the outset, even though he did enjoy most of the subjects taught at the school (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 11). Nevertheless, he soon received recognition for being intelligent and talented and received a scholarship, which enabled him to continue with his studies. He even ingratiated the fellow students thanks to his reputation of an excellent cartoonist and caricaturist and many of his fellow-students begged him for a portrait, while others feared that they and their families would become the target of his mockery (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 11).

At school he excelled mainly in literary studies and worked hard on improving his knowledge of French language. He was good in science too (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 9). He spent much of his free time reading the *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) magazine (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 9), which would later on become the object of his ridicule and critique for its intellectual snobbery and academic standpoint. During his studies at the school he developed an interest in poetry and read the epic poem *Kim Vân Kiều* of Nguyễn Du (1765 – 1820) and the T'ang style poetry written by Tản Đà's (1888 – 1939) (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 12). Paradoxically a few years later Tam and his *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-strength Literary Group) would launch an attack against the poetry of the latter criticizing it of being too traditional as shall be stated below. Tam even wrote many poems in T'ang style and in literary Chinese, which he then sent to Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882 – 1936), another of the future victims of Tam's mockery), who was working as an editor of the newspaper *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* (News of the Center and North) at that time. Vĩnh actually published some of Tam's poems. The first one ever to be published was a two-verse poem called *Vịnh Tây Hồ* (West Lake Cove) (Nguyễn Ngu Í 2000: 455). However,

according to Stephen O'Harrow it is dubious that these poems impressed anybody (O'Harrow 1968: 209).

While attending the second year of the Collège du Protectorat (*Trường Thành chung Bảo hộ*), Tam started to be afraid that he would not be able to catch up with his two older brothers who had pursued their studies at private schools (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 12). His two older brothers had been studying at private secondary schools for three years and had already obtained their Baccalaureate diplomas (*Bằng Thành Chung*, also known as Diplôme d'études primaires supérieures). It is noteworthy to state that obtaining this diploma meant a means of how to improve one's life and climb higher on the social ladder of Vietnamese society under the French colonial rule (Lan Pham 2000: 3). Therefore, he went to ask his mother for permission to transfer to some private institution so that he could pass the Baccalaureate examinations at the end of the year, for he felt that his studies were progressing too slowly (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 12). His mother opposed this idea due to the constant shortage of money the family had been suffering from since the death of her husband. Furthermore, she was said to have perceived Tam as rather dull and considered his interest in art and literature as a waste of time (O'Harrow 1968: 209).

In 1923, at the age of seventeen, Tam was even told to leave his studies by his mother. Nevertheless, he did not succumb to her demands. While most of his friends started their third year at the Collège du Protectorat (*Trường Thành chung Bảo hộ*), he decided to take the Baccalaureate diplomas (*Bằng Thành Chung*) at the end of the year, even though he was a year below the age limit for it (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 13). He passed the exam with a very high score and rushed home to tell his mother, who welcomed him with more rebukes, but she was forced to acknowledge that her child

was intelligent, yet a bit stubborn (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 14; Nhật Thịnh 1986: 27).

After having successfully completed his studies in 1923, Tam wanted to continue at the University of Indochina (*Cao Đẳng Đông Dương*). Since he had not reached the required age for entering the school yet - he was a year younger - he started working at the Financial Bureau (*Sở tài chính*) in Hanoi (Lê Hữu Mục, 1958: 14; O’Harrow, 1968: 210). There he met Hồ Trọng Hiếu (1900 – 1976), who would become his close friend and one of the most famous satirical Vietnamese poets of the 20th century known under his pen name Tú Mỡ. Hồ Trọng Hiếu became immediately fond of Tam, whom he described as lively, with bright eyes and kind spoken (Tú Mỡ 1988: 99).

Tam and Hiếu, who had found a liking to each other at once, spent long hours at the office by talking about literature and reading their own works. Apparently Tam was fascinated by the satirical poems of his friend and sent some of them to be published in the magazine *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) which enjoyed more popularity than magazine *Việt Nam Thanh Niên* (Vietnamese Youth), where Hồ Trọng Hiếu had published earlier (O’Harrow 1968: 210). Tam was fascinated by the thought of writing. Hiếu recalled that when he asked Tam why he had not applied to the University of Indochina yet, Tam replied that “he did not intend to become a chief clerk or a director...as anybody else and that his only wish was to write literature, publish newspapers, and earn his living by having an independent job” (Tú Mỡ 1988: 99). Moreover, according to Hồ Trọng Hiếu, Tam often talked about “writing to live, living to write” (Lockhart 1994: 79).

Thus in the following two years that Tam worked at the Financial Bureau, he devoted himself to writing and managed to publish a collection of short stories and his first novel *Nho Phong* (Confucian Manners, 1925) and a collection of short stories *Người Quay Tơ* (The Silk Spinner, 1926).⁴⁰ Nevertheless, his first literary endeavors did not stir any significant reaction from the public since its attention was focused elsewhere. The year of 1925 is considered a major turning point in Vietnamese literature due to the apparition of first Vietnamese modern novel *Tố Tâm* by Hoàng Ngọc Phách.

Nevertheless, the year 1925 was not only a turning point in Vietnamese literature, but also in Tam's life - in 1925 Tam made his first step into marital life. According to the memoirs of his younger sister Nguyễn Thị Thế, Tam left the choice of spouse on his mother, despite the fact that he had received Western education (Nguyễn Thị Thế 1974: 73). His mother and grandmother had chosen for him a girl from a family running a small shop selling areca nuts in the Cầu Gỗ Street, where Tam's family was living at that time. His fiancé was Phạm Thị Nguyên,⁴¹ whose family came from the village of Phượng Dực, Thường Tín, province of Hà Đông.

After the marriage, Phạm Thị Nguyên continued in earning the family's living by selling areca nuts in Hanoi. And it was partially thanks to her support that Tam could later go and pursue his studies in France and thus fulfill his long cherished dream. Phạm Thị Nguyên gave her husband seven children: five sons Nguyễn Tường Việt (born 19 September 1931), Nguyễn Tường Triều (born 15 November 1932), Nguyễn Tường Thạch (born 6

⁴⁰ For more detailed information see the following chapter.

⁴¹ Phạm Thị Nguyên was born 1907 in Hanoi and died 6 May 1981 in 3/4 Tan Dau, Orsay, France. She was buried in Cimetière Orsay, Division 13, 91400 Orsay, France. For more information see the Nguyễn Tường family website <<http://www.nguyentuong.net/cirfset.html>>

October 1935), Nguyễn Tường Thiết (born 23 October 1940) and three daughters Nguyễn Thị Kim Thu (born 17 August 1926 – 6 May 1976), Nguyễn Thị Kim Thanh (?-?), Nguyễn Thị Kim Thoa (born 5 March 1938).⁴² Despite the fact, that in his later writings Tam would denounce Vietnamese traditional customs (and thus also traditional marriage), his own marital life would remain surprisingly conservative and traditional.

According to Nguyễn Tường Thiết, their marriage was to be a harmonious one, even though they would spend most of it apart from each other (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). Phạm Thị Nguyên would often say that her husband was born in the year of the Horse and, thus, throughout his life he had the need to be on the go and often be away from his family (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). She also recalled that in the first days of their marriage, Nguyễn Tường Tam frankly let her know, that every person had his / her own obligations, his were to the society, and hers to their family (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). This statement reveals that despite his exposure to the West and its values Tam might have been more conservative than at first sight, since his dedication to serve the society first is a standpoint of a true Confucian gentleman (*junzi*).

Therefore, in the years to come, Tam would often leave his family in order to concentrate either on his literary or political activities. However, according to the memoirs of his son Nguyễn Tường Thiết after he had published a novel, he would always come back and ask her to leave her work and join him in a private villa at the Sầm Sơn beach. In those happy moments they spent together, he would teach her to smoke, drink alcohol, which is a rather peculiar manifestation of modernization, and Chinese tea (Võ Phiến 2004, Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).

⁴² For more information see the Nguyễn Tường family website
<<http://www.nguyentuong.net/cirfset.html>>

In November 1925 after having reached the age limit for attending university, Nguyễn Tường Tam left his bureaucratic job and started his studies at the University of Indochina (*Cao Đẳng Đông Dương*) at the faculty of medicine (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 10; Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 23). The choice of the faculty was not his own, because at that time the students could not determine the field of their study. It was the board of directors of the University, who decided the future specialization of every student. Thus, Tam had to contend with studying medicine.⁴³ According to Trương Bảo Sơn, Nguyễn Tường Tam had always feared that he would have to work in some bureaucratic post or as a doctor. Due to his artistic inclination he rather yearned for a freelance job and a life that would be only his own, without being tied down by anybody (Trương Bảo Sơn 1997: 337-338).

Given Tam's fright of being smothered, his studies in the field of medicine lasted only a few weeks and were finished shortly after the L'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de L'Indochine⁴⁴ (Fine Arts College of Indochina, Cao Đẳng Mỹ Thuật Hà Nội) had been opened in an abandoned railway workshop in Rue Reinach in Hanoi in 1925 (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 23). Tam was absolutely excited by this idea and under the astonished eyes of his family decided to leave studies of medicine and pursue his education at the newly opened school.

The headmaster of the Institute was Victor Tardieu (1870 – 1937), who had established the school in close cooperation with the painter Nguyễn Văn Thọ (1890 – 1973), more re-known under his art pseudonym Nam Sơn. Both of them shared an ardent passion for art and had a very close

⁴³ For a picture of the Faculty of Medicine see the Picture Supplement p. 312.

⁴⁴ For a picture of the Fine Arts College of Indochina see the Picture Supplement p. 313.

relationship to their students. Tardieu, who was convinced that “the Annamese had all the gifts to become true artists and that they had this right” (Quang Phòng 1998: 133), spent most of his time fighting against the French administration, which was determined to close the school down perceiving it as a waste of money. Tardieu stayed dedicated to his cause until his death of pneumonia in 1937. Later Tam would say that Tardieu’s interest in art and his teaching methods encouraged him to continue his studies and go to France (O’Harrow 1968: 210).

During his studies, Tam managed to progress in painting. In addition, everybody considered him to be very talented (O’Harrow 1968: 210; Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). However, there seemed to be something that prevented him from being happy. Moreover, one event at school forced him to reconsider his future career of a painter. Apart from the good teacher-student relationships that were cultivated at the school, the students were encouraged to appreciate the local culture (Huynh Boi Tranh 2005: 118). They were required to participate in painting *en plein air*, and they would often go into the countryside with their instructors to paint the rural landscape (Huynh Boi Tranh 2005: 118).⁴⁵ This experience must have left a profound impact on Tam. After having studied at the school for about a year, he too went with his teacher and fellow students to draw buffaloes in the countryside. On that occasion, he was confronted with the poverty and bleak living conditions of Vietnamese peasants and he suddenly apprehended his creative endeavors as futile. He decided to abandon his studies again.

The impact of the above-mentioned experience must have been quite powerful, since it later served as an inspiration for a story published in 1936 in the collection of short stories *Tối Tăm* (Shadows). Tam called the

⁴⁵ For an example of Tam’s paintings see the Picture Supplement pp. 313, 316, 319.

story *Hai vẻ đẹp* (Two Aspects of Beauty). The hero of this account is a young man, who after having studied law in France, returns home with the fervent intention to devote his life to painting. But after seeing the miserable life of the people of his native village, he realizes that “all his school fees and expenses over so many years had been extracted from the miserable peasants over there, or some other peasants in the locality where his father served as a mandarin. He saw the absurdity of looking for an elusive light playing over the roofs of their grass huts while never imagining the cold reality, the obscure lives that were led inside those hovels” (cited from Hue-Tam Ho Tai 1992: 252). Thereafter, the main character gives up his intention to paint and devotes himself to helping the villagers come to understand their rights and consequently improve their lives, just as Nguyễn Tường Tam was to do in the future.

Despite his step into marital life and studying at various schools, Tam was most preoccupied by writing prose. In the same year, in which Hoàng Ngọc Phách's *Tố Tâm* (1925, Pure Heart) appeared on the literary scene, Tam also issued his first novel known as *Nho Phong* (Confucian Manners), which he had started writing in 1924.⁴⁶ The 3 000 copies of the novel that Tam published on his own, were sold out shortly after its appearance, despite the poor quality of print and paper.

After having published the novel *Nho Phong*, Nguyễn Tường Tam immersed himself into writing again. A year later, he succeeded in publishing a collection of short stories *Người quay tơ* (The Silk Spinner). According to Nguyễn Thị Thê, Tam, who at that time had a fair collection of books in Literary Chinese, made up his mind to have his book printed on his own handmade rice paper. He then took his homemade rice paper to

⁴⁶ According to Phạm Thế Ngũ, the novel *Nho Phong* was published in 1926 (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 10).

the printing house, where they successfully printed the collection in *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language) on it (Nguyễn Thị Thế 1974: 69). He then proudly brought the book home for his whole family to see (Nguyễn Thị Thế 1974: 70).

3.2. Going to France

It was during his studies at the L'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de l'Indochine (Fine Arts College of Indochina) that Tam became interested in politics and applied for the membership in the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 29). He left Hanoi on March 24th, 1926 (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 29), and went south, for he had heard that the political atmosphere was relatively freer in Cochinchina. Indeed, in the period between 1920 and 1939 Saigon was the most politically open city in Indochina (McHale 2003: 24). Therefore, many intellectuals and journalists moved from Tonkin and Annam to the city, where many progressive newspapers and journals began to appear since the readership in the town was more boisterous than the one in the northern and the central part of the country (McHale 2003: 24).

In Saigon Tam met with Trần Huy Liệu⁴⁷ (1901 – 1969) and Vũ Đình Di (? - ?) and intended to start publishing newspapers with them. But this plan never materialized because the French crushed down upon the youth, who were participating at Phan Chu Trinh's funeral March 4th, 1926, with the aim to arrest members of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc*

⁴⁷ Trần Huy Liệu (1901 – 1969) was a Vietnamese writer, journalist and revolutionary. In 1924 he left Hanoi and moved to Cochinchina where he cooperated with newspapers such as *Nông công mìn đăm*, *Rạng đông* and worked as an editor of *Đông Pháp thời báo*. In 1927 he was arrested by the French for his revolutionary activities. That experience had not discouraged him from revolutionary activities and in the 1930s he joined the Indochina Communist Party.

Dân Đảng) (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 29). Nguyễn Tường Tam escaped arrest for he had not yet received the party-membership card (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 29; Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 29). Nevertheless, he was forced to flee to Cambodia in order to avoid further persecution from the police. There he made his living by drawing portraits of local mandarins and painting of scenes for a wandering theatre troupe.

In fact, quite little is known about Nguyễn Tường Tam's political activities at that time. It seems that even his own family had almost no idea of what he was actually doing in the south (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). However, according to his younger brother Nguyễn Tường Bách, he could not have joined the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), as many authors researching Tam's life have written, since the party had not even existed at that time (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). It was more probable, that Tam joined some secret organization such as *Hội Phục Việt* (Vietnam Restoration Association), later known as *Tân Việt Cách Mạng Đảng* (New Vietnam Revolutionary Party) or *Việt nam thanh niên cách mệnh đồng chí hội* (Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Students).⁴⁸

In this case Nguyễn Tường Bách is right, since the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) was not established until December 25th 1927. Nevertheless, the origins of the party can be traced to the establishment of the *Nam Đông Thư xã* (Southeast Asia Publishing House) by a teacher named Phạm Tuấn Tài (1902-1937) and his brother Phạm

⁴⁸ *Hội Phục Việt* (Vietnam Restoration Association), was established in 1925 and its origins can be traced back to the Vietnam Restoration League. In March 1926 the party changed its name to *Hùng Việt* (Vietnam Restoration League), and later on it became known as *Tân Việt Cách Mạng Đảng* (New Vietnam Revolutionary Party). In its program the party demanded independence that was to be attained through a peaceful revolution. Its principles were to be based on Communist theories and among others also called for military training for all its members. *Việt nam thanh niên cách mệnh đồng chí hội* (Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Students) was a student communist organization established by Nguyễn Ái Quốc (Hồ Chí Minh) in June 1925. For a very detailed analysis of all parties existing in Vietnam see Patti 1960: 498 – 538.

Tuấn Lâm in late 1925. Their main objective was to promote violent revolution as a means of regaining independence for Vietnam. Therefore, their publishing house printed books and leaflets about Sun Yat-sen⁴⁹ (1866 – 1925) and the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Moreover, the group of progressive intellectuals, which gathered around, opened a free school to teach the romanized Vietnamese script known as *chữ quốc ngữ* (script of the national language).⁵⁰ Their endeavors attracted many progressive students and teachers and it is possible that their activities also appealed to young Nguyễn Tường Tam.

Nevertheless, upon his return from Cambodia, Tam came up with new plans for the future. This time he pondered on pursuing his studies in France and discussed this option with his family. His mother's reaction was rather hesitant at the beginning, since studying abroad was a costly affair. What more, Tam was already a father of two children. However, Tam was well informed about the existence of the *Hội Du Học* (Overseas Study Association). The objective of this organization with its seat in Huế was to provide finances for the children of meritorious mandarins so that they could obtain their education abroad. The whole family was then preoccupied with completing dossiers and applications for Tam and also his younger brother Nguyễn Tường Lâm (Thạch Lam). However, only Tam succeeded in obtaining the scholarship. According to some it was also due to the help of Victor Tardieu, his former director at the *l'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de l'Indochine* (College of Fine Arts of Indochina). Tam's younger brother Lâm was turned down, the apparent reason being his low age (Nguyễn Thị Thế 1974: 88-89). He then pursued his studies at the

⁴⁹Sun Yat-sen (1866 – 1925) was a Chinese revolutionary and political leader. He is frequently referred to as the Father of the Nation for he played an instrumental role in overthrowing the Qing Dynasty in October 1911. Thereafter, he became the first provisional president of the newly founded Republic of China (ROC) in 1912. He is also the co-founder and the first leader of the Kuomintang (KMT).

⁵⁰ For more information on the party and its activities see Patti 1960: 498 – 538.

l'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de l'Indochine as his elder brother had done a few years before him. Nguyễn Tường Lân (Thạch Lam) would then also become of the first most renowned modern painters, alongside with other artists, such as Nguyễn Gia Trí (1908 – 1993), Tô Ngọc Vân (1906 – 1954) and Lê Phổ (1907-2001).

According to the writer Nguyễn Công Hoan (1903 – 1977), Tam apparently did not really know what he wanted to study in France. He was said to joke about studying naval or electric engineering (Lockhart 1994: 80). Those, who knew him, said that the primary aim of his journey to France was to study journalism and everything that was related to it. However, in his series of satiric articles under the heading “Going to France” (*Đi tây*) published in the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine from no. 151 (31. August 1935) to no.180 (27. March 1936) (Lockhart 1994: 94), and later compiled into one of the first satirical travelogues in Vietnamese literature Tam noted that his (or the main character Lãng Du's) primary aim was to study the art of photography. He humorously described the process of applying for the permission as follows:

Meanwhile, I had sent ten travel applications to the authorities, but I hadn't received a word in reply. I thought that was possibly because I had said in my applications that I wanted to go to France to study the miracles of French science, and to research astronomy, geography and philosophy. Perhaps they thought I was a boastful, mixed up sort of fellow. Then, one day, my girlfriend asked me to go and have a photograph taken for a souvenir, and I had an idea.

I filled in an application form and addressed it to the Province Chief rather than to the Résident Supérieur as before. I put on a set of Vietnamese clothes and a white hat, and carrying the application form, I went to the provincial administrative building. I entered obsequiously and said that I sought permission to go to France.

I attempted to speak rough pidgin French. The Province Chief looked at me as if he were thinking of a French saying: “My dear sir, you want to go to France but you speak French like a Spanish cow.”

I went on: “I would like to go to France to study photography.”

The Province Chief emitted one sound: “A!”

This meant he was probably thinking: “That sounds OK!”

He asked: “But why must you go all the way to France to study photography?”

I gave a risky reply: “Sir, because the majority of my customers are French,

I thought I should go to France to study and fully acquaint myself with the trade.”

This made no sense at all. But the Province Chief listened to what I said, and immediately signed the necessary papers for me to go... (Cited from Lockhart 1994: 96-97).

Tam traveled to France on the board of *Compiègne*. The month long voyage opened his eyes in many ways and Tam became sensitive to the ironies and paradoxes of colonialism. Through the words of the main character Lãng Du Tam expressed a certain feeling of ease that spread over him as he left Indochina behind his back:

With the ship soon to arrive at the first foreign port, I began to record some strange stories in my notebook. And one strange thing that no one else seemed to feel was that **I found it incredibly easy to breath**. I don't know whether this was because we were in the open sea, or whether it was because the air now breathed was different from that which I had breathed for so long (Quoted from Lockhart 1994: 99).

The remark “I found it incredibly easy to breath” doubtlessly indicates a sense of relief that one must have felt when departing from Indochina. At that time the French colony did actually resemble a “prison cell” for as one author summed it up: “Vietnamese who wished to leave the region in which they were domiciled had to obtain a passport, while an exit visa was required to go abroad. Mail was censored, police or customs officials without a warrant carried out domiciliary visits, and the Governor-General

was empowered to intern Vietnamese without trial and to sequester their property for a period of ten years. The allegation in clandestine Communist tracts that Indochina was a prison had some justification, and even moderate nationalists who were anxious to find pacific solution to these difficulties complained that Vietnamese were treated like aliens in their own country” (Lancaster 1961: 68).

Another remark of Tam depicting the attitude of the French towards Vietnamese is as follows:

The farther the ship sailed from Vietnam and the closer it got to France, my experience was that the more decent people on board were. In China Sea, they did not want to look in my direction. In the Gulf of Siam, they looked at me with disdain, as though I was a mosquito carrying malaria germs to Europe. When we entered the Indian Ocean, their eyes started to become infected with gentleness and compassion, and they began to realize that I was a human being with a few brains. Crossing the Mediterranean they suddenly regarded me as someone who was as civilized as them and began to have some respect for me. When I reached France itself, I had the impression that I could bully them. At that stage I was very happy. But I was still worried about the return trip (Quoted from Lockhart 1994: 102).

Tam spent three idyllic years in France (1927 to 1930), despite leading a hand-to-mouth life since the scholarship and the money that his wife used to send him were not enough to secure him a serene stay. According to the memoirs of his sister Nguyễn Thị Thê, the *Hội Du Học* (Overseas Study Association) provided only 80 000 *đồng* out of the estimated 106 000 *đồng* monthly minimum needed for sustaining the basic needs of a student in France (Nguyễn Thị Thê 1974: 89). The rest of the money had to be provided by the family.

According to Peter Zinoman, Tam started studying chemistry and physics in Montpellier (Zinoman 2005: 18). While Bùi Xuân Bào claims that Tam

studied at the Université de Paris (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 165).⁵¹ Surprisingly his school results were much better than he himself had expected and he graduated with a diploma *licence en sciences*. His close friend Tú Mỡ was rather surprised when Tam arrived home with a diploma of this kind and recalled that when he asked Tam why he had studied natural sciences, Tam replied: “I went to France mainly to learn how to produce newspapers, so that when I returned to Vietnam I could start publishing a new type of journal. And the *licence en sciences*? It is just a precaution. If I don’t succeed in journalism, I will be a professor” (Tú Mỡ 1988: 102).

The years spent in France were to become the most formative ones in Tam’s life. According to the writer Trương Bảo Sơn (1916), when Tam arrived to France, he started studying journalism, but then found out that there was nothing to learn and that things needed for it were to be found rather outside of school. Tam went out to meet journalists, to observe the organization of newspapers and their publishing. When he had money, he only spent it on books and journals, such as “Le Revue de Deux Mondes”⁵², La Nouvelle Revue Française⁵³, “Le Mercure de France”⁵⁴,

⁵¹ Phạm Thế Ngũ also states that Tam studied in Paris (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 10).

⁵² *Le Revue de Deux Mondes* was established in 1829 and was the first “modern” publication of the 19th century. In the first stage of its existence the magazine promoted literary and artistic creation and many foremost writers and politicians of the period published their writings on its pages, such as Abd el-Kader (1808-1883), Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Claude Bernard (1813-1878), Henri Stendhal (1783-1842), Paul Bourget (1852-1935), François René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), Maxime du Camp (1822-1894), Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870), Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855), François Guizot (1787-1874), Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), Henrich Heine (1797-1856), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), Ernest Lavisse (1842-1922), George Sand (1804-1876), and many others. At the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the magazine concentrated on issues such as social harmony, socialism, anticlericalism, concern of the growing communist movement, etc. Until the Second World War the magazine enjoyed wide readership, was held in high esteem on the international scene and was read by top political, economic and social representatives.

⁵³ *La Nouvelle Revue Française* was a literary magazine founded by André Gide (1869-1951) and like-minded figures, such as Jacques Copeau (1879-1949) and Jean

“Les Cahiers du Sud”⁵⁵, “La vie intellectuelle” “La Revue de Paris”, “Etudes”, and “Le Rire”⁵⁶ (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 32-33), which inspired him to publish a similar kind of newspapers upon his return to Vietnam.

It is indubitable that reading the above mentioned magazines must have been extremely inspiring for Tam, probably unleashing his desire to

Schlumberger (1877-1968), in 1909. The main target of the magazine was to promote aesthetic issues and at the same time avoid any affiliation to any political party and moral or intellectual school. Between the interwar period (1919 – 1940) it became one of the leading French literary journals publishing writings of many significant authors of the era, such as Paul Bourget (1852-1935), Anatole France (1844-1924), André Malraux (1901-1976) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980).

⁵⁴ *Le Mercure de France* was a French gazette and a literary magazine that appeared as early as 1672, when it was conceived more as a “tabloid” bringing information about life at the court, the intellectual and artistic debates, news on marriages and similar gossip, theater, art, fashion reviews, etc. At the end of the 19th century, the magazine was brought back to life by Alfred Vallete (1858-1935), who was closely linked to a group of Symbolist writers. Over the next decade the magazine won over a large readership and achieved much success by publishing works of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), José-Maria de Heredia (1842-1905), and the first writings of André Gide (1869-1951), Paul Claudel (1868-1955), Colette (1873-1954), Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) and many others.

⁵⁵ *Les Cahiers du Sud*, originally called *Fortunio*, had been first published by Marcel Pagnol (1895-1974) in 1914 to become of the leading French literary magazines, on the pages of which many French contemporary writers published their works. Among its contributors one could find such personages as Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), Albert Béguin (1901-1957), Joë Bousquet (1897-1950), Louis Braquier, Roger Caillois (1913-1978), René Crevel (1900-1935), René Daumal (1908-1944), Robert Desnos (1900-1945), Paul Éluard (1895-1952), Benjamin Fondane (1898-1944), Pierre Jean Jouve (1887-1976), Michel Leiris (1901-1990), André Masson (1896-1987), Henri Michaux (1899-1984), Gérald Neveu (1921-1960), Benjamin Péret (1899-1959), Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960), Alexandre Tournsky (1917-1970), and many others. After Jean Ballard had taken up the post of director in 1925, he had turned the magazine into one of the most important poetry revues in France.

⁵⁶ *Le Rire*, or “Laughter,” was a thriving humor magazine first published in October 1894 by Felix Juven. In the following decades it would become one of the most successful satirical journals in France filled with excellent drawings by prominent artists, illustrators, caricaturists, poster art designers, among which one could find, e.g. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), René Georges Hermann-Paul (1864-1940), Juan Gris (1887-1927), Lucien Metivet (1863-1930), Georges Meunier (1869-1942), Jean-Louis Forain (1852-1931), Adolphe Willette (1857-1926), Joaquín Xaudaró (1872-1933), Leonetto Cappiello (1875-1942), Albert Guillaume (1873-1942), Jules Grandjouan (1875-1968) and Jules-Alexandre Grun (1868-1934). The pages of the journal were scattered with humorous drawings capturing and commenting on the current political events, but also everyday scenes from Parisian music halls, cabarets and cafes.

publish a similar kind of newspapers upon his return to Indochina. On the pages of these journals, Tam was not only captivated by the political satirical caricatures, but also by Western literature. He was said to have read such authors like the French novelist and translator Marcel Proust (1871 – 1922); the French novelist, dramatist, essayist and historian Romain Rolland (1866 – 1944), whose concept of people’s theatre⁵⁷ must have appealed to Tam; French poet, essayist and philosopher Paul Valéry (1871-1945); English novelist, playwright and short story writer Somerset Maugham (1874 – 1965), and Irish novelist and poet James Joyce (1882 – 1941) (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 32-33). It was also in France, that Tam read André Gide (1869 – 1951) for the first time and was enchanted by his style. Gide’s influence can later be noticed especially in Tam’s novel *Nắng Thu* (Autumn Sun, 1934), which was no doubt inspired by *La Symphonie pastorale*. In the following years, the writings of André Gide would have a salient impact on not only on Tam’s writing, but also on the production of other Vietnamese writers who became obsessed by Gide’s concept of free act (*acte gratuite*) and questions such as search for personal happiness and the liberation from the burden of upbringing (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 52).

The influence of Tam’s sojourn in France on his later life and literary activity is supposed to have three aspects. In France Tam had many opportunities to read Western literature and to discuss its style with his fellow students. In addition, he experienced the free political atmosphere of the French society in the 1920s and could, therefore, find support for his political ideas from other students coming from colonized countries.

⁵⁷ In 1902 Romain Rolland published an essay called *The People's Theatre* (*Le Théâtre du peuple*, 1902), in which he claimed that the only necessary condition for the emergence of a new theatre was to open the stage and auditorium to the masses, and that the theatre should treat the topics of the people and their actions. I am convinced that Rolland’s ideas must have appealed to Tam, as he advocated that literature too should be “bình dân”, i.e. popular.

Lastly, he had the space to think about his native country, to see it as a whole and to set his own goals in life (O'Harrow 1968: 214).

His sojourn in France was abruptly terminated by his deportation after the Sûreté saw him lending money to an acquaintance of his, whom he did not know to be a radical (Hue-Tam Ho Tai 1992: 169). This event itself was also rather ironic, since during his stay in France, Tam determinedly avoided politics. However, it was not possible to keep away from it totally since many of the Vietnamese students in France were in some way politically active. Thus, Tam was one of the many Vietnamese students, who were transported back to Indochina, after student strikes in front of the Lycée Palace had taken place, in which Vietnamese students had expressed their disapproval of the French suppression of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) in Indochina.

Tam ironically described his deportation in his travelogue "Going to France" (*Đi tây*) subsequently:

(...) I told Thái: "Let's go to sleep. The postman will wake us up at 9 tomorrow morning. If he doesn't and we sleep in till 11, we'll have no hope." As expected, someone knocked on the door at 9 and woke us up.

Thái was excited: "Please, let me sign."

I rubbed my eyes and asked myself: "But why are there two postmen?"

As they came into focus, it turned out that they were two gendarmes. I said to Thái: "The gentlemen have brought your letter. Important, isn't it?"

The two gendarmes did not pay any attention to my joke. They gave us a paper to look at and said: "In accordance with an order of the Interior Minister, you are to be deported from France; please pack your bags and come with us to the station."

Thái said: "This is pretty funny isn't it?"

I answered: "Quite exciting."

We knew that it was no use explaining to these gendarmes, because they were only following orders. As we packed our clothes in our suitcases, we made some jokes to keep our spirits.

I laughed: “At least they’ll feed us at the police station.”

“That’s for sure.”

“So what are we waiting for?”

Suddenly, Thái had a brilliant idea: “Let’s take advantage of the situation to get a free trip home.”

I replied: “But once I go back, I won’t be able to come here again. How am I going to study photography?”

“But they’ve made a mistake about us, so why won’t we be able to come back later?”

When we reached the police station we were given the role of two dangerous rebels. Aside from us, there were about ten others who had been arrested. They said we were members of a group from X province who had come to Paris to cause trouble.

The Police officer said: “Mr Trạch has been in contact with you, you agreed in the Luxembourg Gardens to eat in a Chinese restaurant, and when Mr Trạch left you, you did not forget to lend him some money. Isn’t that so? What do you have to say for yourselves?”

I intended to reply: “It’s because we lent him the money that we are hungry.”

However, Thái answered calmly before I could speak: “There’s no need for you to ask complicated questions. You already know the answer, so there is no point in waisting time.”

I noticed that Thái had an unusually firm expression on his face, even though he was starving. Later, I realized that it was better to be determined, because explanations were no use whatsoever.

The next morning we reached Marseilles, and when our ship passed Con Son Prison Island off the coast of Cochinchina, we prayed that it would stay a long way from it (Quoted from Lockhart 1994: 133 – 134).

3.3. Nguyễn Tường Tam Returns to Vietnam

In 1930 Tam returned to Vietnam on board of the *Compiègne* and he was full of enthusiasm. All his family came to greet him in Hải Phòng, where the ship had landed (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 34). On his way home to the Hải Dương province, he listened intently to the members of his family, who were updating him on the overall political, social and cultural situation in

Indochina (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 34). He was most interested in the living conditions of Vietnamese youth and was deeply disappointed by the fact that young people were supposed to lead rather debauched and idealless lives (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 34).

Despite his Franco-Vietnamese education that many of his generation had received, Tam was very much unlike the mass of other Western-educated Vietnamese, whom Barthouet described as follows: “I have a real contempt for those so called emancipated people who represent nothing more than a caricature of themselves in their attitude as much as in their clothes or in the tangible or intangible states of their soul. They do not embody in any way or to any degree the normal and harmonious blending of an extreme oriental essence with a coat of culture of the West...Hybrid products, rotten fruits, no particle of the Vietnamese soul could be found in them” (Barthouet 1933: 259, cited from Trương Bửu Lâm, 2000: 68). Unlike them, Nguyễn Tường Tam remained loyal to his roots and hoped to serve his people under the colonial rule.

After having spent some time with his family in Hải Dương, Tam decided to move to Hanoi. Despite his good education, which would have enabled him to get a secure and well-paid job in the colonial administration, he turned away from that option. Instead, Tam intended to set up a newspaper, which would be different from at that time quite popular, but according to Tam snobbish *Nam Phong tạp chí* (Southern Wind magazine) and from *Phụ nữ tân văn* (Women’s News), which Tam considered being too mediocre in quality (O’Harrow 1968: 215; Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 35). In this sense, Tam would succeed, since both his journals *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and later *Ngày Nay* (This Day) were to become one of the most popular magazines of the decade.

Tam was convinced that journalism in Vietnam was rather boring and that there was no journal focusing on satire (Tú Mỡ 1988: 102). Therefore, he wanted to start publishing a weekly called *Tiếng Cười* (Laughter), which he intended to model after the magazines *Le Rire* and *Le Canard Enchaîné*, widely read and appreciated among the readership in France. For that reason, in the anticipated weekly *Tiếng Cười* (Laughter) Tam meant to provide young and unknown authors with the opportunity to publish their jokes, humorous or romantic stories, satirical poems or comics. He hoped this journal would receive an enthusiastic reception by the public and be perceived as a revolution in the newspapers written in the roman script (*chữ quốc ngữ*) (Tú Mỡ 1988: 102). He also wished that this initiative would result in a new literary movement emphasizing “individual freedom” in Vietnam. With this aim in mind Tam applied for the permission from the colonial authorities. He managed to convince his friend Hồ Trọng Hiếu, still working at the Financial Bureau, and his two brothers Nguyễn Tường Lân and Nguyễn Tường Long to participate in the project. He rented a small house in the Thái Hà village on the outskirts of Hanoi, where he worked on articles for the future journal. Hiếu recalled that all of them used to meet together every Saturday evening to prepare their columns and they would spend the whole Sunday writing, drawing caricatures and playing football, when tired (Tú Mỡ 1988: 103-104).

Since the acquisition of the permission to publish the journal seemed far off, Tam took up a teaching job in order to obtain at least some capital. However, the colonial administration finally did issue the permission for publishing the *Tiếng Cười* (Laughter) journal. Nevertheless, it never appeared because Nguyễn Tường Tam and his colleagues did not manage to materialize it before the permission from the government expired, since there was not much time left between Tam’s acquisition of the permission and its expiry date (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 35, Nhật Linh 2004). Therefore, in

Nguyễn Tường Tam's words, "*Tiếng Cười* (Laughter) became *Tiếng Khóc* (Weeping)" (Nhất Linh 2004). Despite the fact that Nguyễn Tường Tam's first steps into the world of journalism had not been successful, he did not let himself be discouraged. Instead, he turned his attention to publishing another kind of literary journal.

As Tam was still lacking the needed capital for launching his project, he was forced to take up a job at the private Thăng Long School in the Rue Bourret (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 36). Phạm Hữu Ninh, secretary of finance, who hoped to enlarge the insufficient number of public schools, founded it in 1919. During its apogee, it was one of the best-equipped training institutions in Hanoi with its own laboratories for physics, chemistry, natural sciences and even a library for its students (Boudarel - Nguyễn Văn Ký – Duiker 2002: 55). In the period of 1928 – 1935, which also coincided with Tam's activity in the school (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 397 – 400),⁵⁸ there was a substantial increase in registration, from 29 to more than 1000 students (Boudarel - Nguyễn Văn Ký – Duiker 2002: 56). This school was to become one of the most progressive institutions, which formed one whole generation of politically active intellectuals that would later play a salient role in Vietnamese history.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ According to Nguyễn Vỹ the school director Nguyễn Văn Tông sold the school to Nguyễn Tường Tam in 1930. The school was then renamed to "École Thăng Long" and it was found on the corner of the streets Hàng Cót (rue de TAKOU) and Cửa Bắc (Bd Carnot). After some time Nguyễn Tường Tam was said to have sold the school to another group of professors while keeping a certain share there. The school changed its name again. This time to Lycéum Thăng Long and its location was moved to one of the streets adjacent to Hàng Da. The new board was made up of the new director Hoàng Minh Giám, Nguyễn Tường Tam, Tôn Thất Bình (the editor-in-chief of the newspaper La Patrie Annamite and also the son-in-law of Phạm Quỳnh).

⁵⁹ The personalities that were linked to the school comprised: Hoàng Minh Giám (1904 – 1995), became one of the most influential leaders in the Việt Minh in 1945 and also future minister of foreign affairs, brought in Đặng Thai Mai (1902 – 1984), an influential Marxist critics, and Võ Nguyễn Giáp (1911), the future victor of Điện Biên Phủ, who taught history there, etc. Moreover, among other personalities linked to the school were Bùi Kỳ (1888 – 1960), famous scholar and mandarin, Phan Anh (1912 – 1990), a famous lawyer

The well-paid job of a science teacher enabled Tam to take advantage of his free time, in which he dedicated himself to creative writing. After school Tam would grab his bicycle and pedal to the library or to the bookstores in the Hàng Bông and Hàng Điều streets in search of newspapers and newly issued books (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 39). At that time the number of books in the bookstores was still limited. One could find the notoriously known first modern novels *Quả Dưa Đỏ* (Red Watermelon) by Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, Hoàng Ngọc Phách's *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart) and issues of magazines such as *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind), *Khai Hoá* (Enlightenment) and *Văn Học Tạp Chí* (Literary Magazine) (Lê Hữu Mục, 1958: 39). Beside teaching and reading Tam was known to go around and talk about his intention of publishing newspapers to whomever he met (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 39).

One of the „victims“ of his talking was Trần Khánh Giur (1896-1947), who started teaching at the Thăng Long School in 1931. Tam had informed Giur about his intention of publishing a magazine called *Tiếng Cười* (Laughter) and asked him to take part in this endeavor. Trần Khánh Giur, later known under his pen name Khái Hưng, agreed and thus one of the most important literary friendships in modern Vietnam came to life since both of them soon became the leading figures of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self Strength Literary Group) that Tam would later establish.

However, the lack of capital was a persistent problem. Nevertheless, Tam was provided with an exceptional opportunity. At that time Phạm Hữu Ninh, the director of the Thăng Long School, and Nguyễn Xuân Mai were publishing a magazine called *Phong Hoá* (Customs). According to Lê Hữu Mục, by producing this journal Phạm Hữu Ninh intended to divert the

and future minister, Phạm Huy Thông (1916 – 1988), poet and scholar, Trần Văn Tuyên (1913-1976), South Vietnam's leading opposition politician, etc.

attention of Vietnamese youth from the lugubriously romantic prose and poetry that flooded the market such as: the already mentioned novel *Tố Tâm* by Hoàng Ngọc Phách, romantic poems by poetess Trương Phổ (1896 – 1973), poet Đông Hồ (1906-1969) or the translations of Chinese mandarin-duck-and butterfly fiction (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 40), as he was convinced that romantic prose has negative impact on the youth's mental well-being causing nothing more than depression.

In its first two months of existence the journal had been expanding successfully thanks to its innovative approach. In the beginning the readers could find on its pages something new in comparison with the contents of the other magazines of the time. However, after the eleventh issue *Ninh* started to get the impression that the overall quality of articles was going down and became worried that *Phong Hoá* (Customs) would degenerate into a magazine similar to the *Phụ nữ tân văn* (Women's News). This was due to the simple fact that the magazine staff did not cooperate with good writers and journalists and also lacked skillful cartoonists (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 41). According to Phạm Thế Ngũ, the loss of innovativeness and in its consequences also of the readership was caused by the official line of the magazine that advocated to “find in the two cultures [Vietnamese and French] all that is beautiful and compile it into a new [Vietnamese] culture” (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 12). Therefore, the overall tone of the journal became rather conciliatory and uninteresting. It seemed that the journal's days were being drawn to a close. However, *Ninh* was determined not to let this happen, thus he publicly declared his desire to pass over the magazine to a group of young writers who would run its different sections (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 34).

Nguyễn Tường Tam grasped this opportunity that he had been waiting for for so long, since taking over somebody else's magazine lifted the burden

of finding enough financial means for his own endeavors from his shoulders. He rushed to discuss the matter with Ninh and demanded to be the editor-in-chief (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 41). Ninh, who was reluctant at first, conceded and gave Tam a free hand in the affair. Tam hurried to the Financial Bureau to tell the good news to his friend Hồ Trọng Hiếu. Then he dashed to send a telegram to his younger brother Nguyễn Tường Long pleading him to return to Hanoi immediately for there was work waiting for them (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 41).

Moreover, Tam left his well-paid job of a teacher for a career of a journalist – his salary being ten times lower than that of a teacher’s (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 34, Trương Bảo Sơn 1997: 339) - and started the preparations for another issue of the magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs). He was soon to reap the fruits of his efforts, since he and his colleagues managed to increase the circulation of an almost moribund magazine from three thousand to ten thousand copies (Hue-Tam Ho Tai 1992: 250). According to some estimates, the readership of the journal reached the number of ten thousand by July 1933 (Boudarel - Nguyễn Văn Ký – Duiker 1995: 34, Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 107). It is noteworthy to say that at the time most of the *chữ quốc ngữ* (national script) periodicals had a circulation of about 2 000 – 3 000 copies, whilst journals in French rarely surpassed the number of 1 500 copies (Marr 2010: 261). Thus, Tam would dedicate the following six years of his life to publishing the magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day) and writing works of fiction that would send ripples through Vietnamese society.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ For the analysis of Tam’s journalistic activities and his writings see the following chapters.

3.4. The Ray of Light Association

The establishment of Popular Front (1936 – 1939) in Indochina allowed the Vietnamese to participate to a limited extent in legal political activities. Thus, many political, social and cultural movements saw the light of day. Nguyễn Tường Tam and his colleagues from the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) did not lag behind and in 1937 brought their ideas of social reform from paper into reality since “words are not as effective as action.”

On August 16th, 1937, Nguyễn Tường Tam founded *Hội Ánh Sáng* (The Ray of Light Association) under the patronage of Résident Superier (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 263). The founding session of the association took place at the Hanoi Opera (*Nhà hát lớn*) in Hanoi. On that occasion Nguyễn Tường Tam, who was to become the president of the society, delivered a speech on “The Significance of The Ray of Light Association for the Society” (*Ý Nghĩa Về Xã Hội Của Hội Ánh Sáng*) (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 113). Several days before the first meeting took place, Nguyễn Tường Tam had taken first steps to promote the movement and to attract the contributions of the public by advertising the association in major streets of Hanoi:

“Dear friends,
You must have seen
The miserable, dismal, unlivable conditions
In the dark and wet houses all over the country
Every day you must have been moved
Because you saw illnesses that killed so many lives
You must have yearned for the strength
To destroy all the troubles causing the huddled life
In houses resembling mouse holes,
To create new, bright and happy conditions
Instead of the dark, miserable life of the poor people
You must have dreamt of an association

That would take care of peoples' lives
That would lessen the suffering of the people
That would change the society in front of our eyes.
My friends,
Join the The Ray of Light Association
I introduce the The Ray of Light Association with other well-known people
I invite all of you to join in.
When you join, it means
That you will participate in social work,
That will contribute to the progress of Annamese society
In form and also in spirit
The more people join the association,
The more rays of light will illuminate dark places,
Bringing a little happiness into the miserable lives of the poor people.”
(Ngày Nay, no 72, 15.8.1937, quoted from Nhật Thịnh 1986: 114).

The advertisement must have appealed to a large number of public because more than 2 000 people participated at the first session; while another 2 000 had to be turned down for the lack of places (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 263). Despite the initial enthusiasm, there were some who were rather skeptical about the whole venture. Nguyễn Tường Bách, Tam's younger brother, described the founding session and his impressions as follows:

I and some friends of mine came to participate at the founding session at the Big Theater. But when we witnessed how the Résident Superier pompously arrived at his seat and everybody solemnly stood up to hear the French national anthem – La Marseillaise – we all felt deceived and pushed our way out. (...) At that moment, well-dressed schoolgirls took their flower baskets and started selling flowers to all French and Vietnamese guests, so that they could lessen their belongings in order to contribute to the poor... I felt it was not the right way to take (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980).

Not only from his fiction, but also from the above quoted speech, it is apparent that Nguyễn Tường Tam considered it a moral duty of the educated to enlighten the poor and make them conscious of their

oppression. However, by emphasizing the elite's duty to aid the poor he reinstated the Confucian social responsibility, which was ironically in contrast with the efforts of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) that strove to disseminate the idea that Confucianism was outdated. His interest in the lot of the poor is yet another proof that he was in many ways a true Confucian gentleman (*junzi*), since one of the main features of a *junzi* was to have profound inner sympathy towards other human beings and be considerate of others.

The *Hội Ánh Sáng* (Ray of Light Association) appealed to public and it attracted many intellectuals, officials and artists into its ranks mainly in the cities of Hải Phòng, Hải Dương, Sơn Tây and Nam Định, e.g. the future general and victor at the famous battle of Điện Biên Phủ Võ Nguyên Giáp (1911) and the future prime-minister Trần Trọng Kim (1883 – 1953) joined in to open a program aimed at increasing literacy among the lower classes (Jamieson, 1993: 158). Furthermore, other important personalities of nationalist orientation like Nguyễn Cao Luyện (1907 – 1987) or Nguyễn Xuân Đào participated in these endeavors (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 263).

The *Hội Ánh Sáng* (Ray of Light Association) aimed to reform the life of the common people and its first focus was on the housing issue. The movement went on to build a village Ánh Sáng on the banks of the river Phúc Xá five kilometers up the Red River from Hanoi; then another village in Voi Phục (1939), now a part of Hanoi; and two model housing estates in the area of Kiến An, now a district of Hải Phòng City (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 263). It also planned to build a model village in the district of Bất Bạt, in Sơn Tây Province (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 263).

In order to promote the association and to raise funds, the society organized a lot of fairs, boxing matches, evening parties, theatre

performances and so on. At the same time Nguyễn Tường Tam, who had immersed himself into work for the association, returned to his teaching post at the Thăng Long School. The association participated in all kinds of activities aimed at helping the needy, i.e. in October 1937 it organized material aid for the victims of floods in Lang Tài (Bắc Ninh) (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 263). Having realized the miserable conditions of the poor, the group of intellectuals assembled around Nguyễn Tường Tam became more and more overt in their critique of the cruel policy of the corrupted French colonial administration, which mercilessly exploited the Vietnamese peasants. In 1938 Hoàng Đạo published another pamphlet called *Bùn Lầy Nước Động* (Slums and Huts), in which he proposed possible reforms of the colonial administration (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 120). However, the colonial administration was fast to react and the booklet was not only confiscated, but also banned the very day it was made public. The association soon ran out of breath and its leaders soon returned to their pens. However, the establishment of this organization was the very first step that Tam made into the world of politics.

3.5. Nguyễn Tường Tam in the World of Politics

The *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) dominated the literary scene for almost six years from 1932 to 1938. As the Second World War started looming over Europe and Asia, the lives of the members of the group took on different courses, and many of them willingly or reluctantly took part in political events that were to change their lives dramatically.

In 1938 Nguyễn Tường Tam made his first steps into the political arena by establishing a party called *Hưng Việt* (Rising Vietnam) (Phạm Thế Ngũ

2000: 16). However, he had to wait until the outburst of the World War II, when his political activities became more focused. Nguyễn Tường Bách recalled that one day at the end of 1939 his brother Tam told him of his desire to establish a political party that would strive for freedom and independence of the nation (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). Furthermore, it would overthrow French colonialism and Vietnamese monarchy (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). Tú Mỡ also recalled a conversation that he had with Tam on a similar topic: “One day when I met Tam, he told me: “The time has come for us to be politically active in order to wrest away the current administration. The government of Trần Trọng Kim will come to nothing. The Japanese will not absorb our country, because the Americans will not let them take possession of the gateway to East Asia. We must enter a revolutionary organization in order to stand up and seize power when the time comes. At present some of us from the group have entered the secret Việt Cách party (also known as the Vietnam Revolutionary Comrades Association) and you should too...” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 553 -554). Tú Mỡ turned the offer down, since he did not want to take part in politics. However, he was to become a revolutionary poet as the years passed. On that occasion Tú Mỡ also asked Tam why he had not entered the Việt Minh. Tam gave him the following answer: “Việt Minh is Communist. They advocate seizing the power with rifles, which is going to cause a deadly and destructive war. Further to this, the Americans will be anti-communist. America is rich and strong. Joining a pro-American party will be useful; we will fight by politics not by spilling blood, to say the least we will still achieve autonomy. The Americans do not need to usurp our country as the Europeans did. We will follow the Americans, we will let them do business with us, to bring money of the developed technology, they will profit and so shall we” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 554). These words reproduced by Tú Mỡ are interesting, since the dominant and often repeated opinion is that Nguyễn Tường Tam was pro-Japanese oriented.

For that reason he had not been able to appear credible enough in the eyes of the Americans when the World War II in Indochina came to a close.

The Japanese invasion of Indochina in 1940 hastened the decision of Nguyễn Tường Tam to give up his career of a writer and journalist and hurl himself into politics. He handed over the manuscript of the novel *Bướm Trắng* (White Butterfly) to his brother Thạch Lam to print. His other brother, Hoàng Đạo, was given the text of the novel *Con đường sáng* (The Road of Light), of which Tam had written only 30 pages, to finish (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 135). This step is not very surprising because it was Hoàng Đạo, who had always been the main theoretician of the literary group, thus who else but him could be more acquainted with the message that Tam wanted to pass over. Moreover, even in his future political career Tam relied on the opinions of Hoàng Đạo, who was his closest political advisor.

Allegedly, Tam turned to the Japanese with pleas for help in the struggle against the French. Moreover, he founded another political party known as the Great Viet Nam Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính* – shortly known as *Đại Việt*). It was a pro-Japanese fraction that separated itself from the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) in 1940 (Patti, 1960: 504). These were to be the last days of the unity of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). Nguyễn Tường Tam, Hoàng Đạo, Khái Hưng and Nguyễn Gia Trí were working frantically on building a political base of their *Đại Việt* party in Vietnam. Nguyễn Tường Bách, the youngest of the Nguyễn Tường family, was responsible for recruiting potential members among the university students in Hanoi. However, other members of the group, such as Tú Mỡ, Thế Lữ and Thạch Lam did not want to participate in these political activities (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). According to Trương Bửu Lâm, it is difficult to assess the *Đại Việt* party since it operated more as a secret society or a fraternity rather than a

political party (Trương Bửu Lâm, 1973: 254). Furthermore, this name encompassed many diverse factions following slightly different goals.⁶¹ Despite the initial fervor, the party managed to attract members only from the ranks of intellectuals, civil servants, teachers and city-dwellers, i.e. the elites (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). On the contrary, it failed to appeal to the masses (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). According to Nguyễn Tường Bách, this was caused mainly by the lack of experience in revolutionary activities, lack of information about the political situation abroad and insufficient training of the party-members (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). Furthermore, the party did not seem to have a concrete program besides striving for independence of Vietnam. Moreover, most of its political activities were reduced to political maneuvering of its members in their quest of higher positions in the current power structure (Trương Bửu Lâm 1973: 254).

In 1940 Khái Hưng and Hoàng Đạo traveled to China for the Greater Vietnamese Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*). But lacking political experience and organizational skills they had found themselves facing a tough and well-organized apparatus of Vietnamese Communists (Jamieson 1993: 178). Having attained only minor gains against their better-organized competitors, they returned to Indochina. Shortly upon their return, the French reacting swiftly to the turbulent situation imprisoned most of the leaders of Greater Vietnamese Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*), including Khái Hưng, who was detained in Vụ Bản (Hoà Bình) and Hoàng Đạo, who spent the following two years in prison in Sơn La.

⁶¹ 1] Greater Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng*) created by Trương Tử Anh in 1936; 2] Greater Vietnamese National-Socialist Party (*Đại Việt Quốc Xã*) established in 1936; 3] Greater Vietnamese Humanist Party (*Đại Việt Duy Dân*) constituted in 1937 by a young, outstanding intellectual Lý Đông A; 4] and lastly Nguyễn Tường Tam's Greater Vietnamese Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*). (Li - Cribb 2003: 223).

Meanwhile, Tam's brothers Thạch Lam and Nguyễn Tường Bách continued to publish the magazine *Ngày Nay* (This Day), which was eventually closed down at the end of 1941. In this time, Tam kept a low profile and refrained from any political statements. In order to dispel the French *Sûreté*, he joined an orchestra of professor Lê Ngọc Huỳnh, and musicians Thẩm Oánh and Vũ Khánh and made a living playing his clarinet (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 137).⁶² It must be stated that the following steps of Nguyễn Tường Tam seem to be shrouded in mystery, since different sources tend to give considerably divergent versions of his actions.

According to Nhật Thịnh, after the Japanese had attacked the Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 Tam ceased his musical activities and fled to China (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 137). However, on the word of other sources, Tam left Indochina a year earlier, i.e. in December 1940, and escaped to Canton with the help of Trần Hy Thánh⁶³, the Japanese sponsored pretender to the Vietnamese throne and adopted son of prince Cường Để (My Van Tra 2005: 154).⁶⁴ On the other hand, Vũ Hồng Khanh⁶⁵ (1898 – 1993) claims

⁶² For a picture of Tam playing his clarinet see the Picture Supplement, p. 314.

⁶³ Trần Hy Thánh (also know as Trần Phúc An) was born in the province of Vĩnh Long province in South Vietnam. He then moved to Japan as one of the many students who had joined the *Đông Du* movement in 1906. There he joined the Japanese army and soon attained the rank of General. He returned to Vietnam at the outbreak of war in 1940 as a Japanese soldier and a leader of the VNPQĐMH (Việt Nam Phục Quốc Đồng Minh Hội). He was responsible for rallying people to the revolutionary movement.

⁶⁴ Prince Cường Để (1882-1951) was a Vietnamese revolutionary who, along with Phan Bội Châu (1867 – 1940) tried unsuccessfully to liberate Vietnam from French colonial rule. He was a relative of the last Vietnamese dynasty Nguyễn and issued directly from the line of first born descendants of the first emperor of this dynasty, Gia Long (1762 – 1820). In order to gain support for his revolutionary activities he sought assistance of the wealthy Vietnamese patriots mainly in Cochinchina. He participated in the 1905 *Đông Du* (Journey to the East) movement, which aimed to send Vietnamese students to study in Japan. In close cooperation with Phan Bội Châu he became the nominal leader of the 1904 *Reformation Society* (Duy Tân Hội) and the 1911 *Vietnam Restoration Organisation* (Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội). During the World War II he was one of the proponents of the Japanese occupation of Vietnam hoping that the Japanese would help Vietnamese people to overthrow the yokes of French colonialism.

that it was the Japanese Navy, which sent Tam to Canton for military training (Lansdale et al. 1968: 16). Trần Hy Thánh was only supposed to accompany him on the trip. Moreover, Vũ Hồng Khanh stated that Tam allegedly assassinated Trần Hy Thánh⁶⁶ and then took flight to Liu-chow in the province of Kwang-si (Lansdale et al. 1968: 16).

On the contrary, Tam's younger brother Nguyễn Tường Bách maintains that in 1942 Tam travelled to the Chinese province of Kwangchou, where he witnessed the atrocities the Japanese army had committed on the populace (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). Disillusioned, he concluded that the Japanese were not sincere in their efforts of helping other Asian countries to attain independence but they rather pursued their own objectives. Therefore, he decided to flee to Liu-chow in the province of Kwang-si, where most of the Vietnamese political parties were concentrated (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980).

Conversely, Van Dao Hoang claims that Nguyễn Tường Tam escaped to China at the end of 1942 under his new name Nguyễn Tường Dũng (Van Dao Hoang, 2008: 200), which according to Nguyễn Tường Bách, Tam adopted from one of his main characters in the novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Breaking the Ties) and *Đôi Bạn* (Two Friends) (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). The local Chinese authorities suspected him to be a Japanese spy who was sent to sabotage the activities of the Việt Nam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*) and promptly arrested him and detained him in a stone cave in Liu-chow (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 200; Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 302).

⁶⁵ Vũ Hồng Khanh was one of the leaders of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*).

⁶⁶ According to Van Dao Hoang, Trần Hy Thánh was killed on the order of Nguyễn Tường Tam. It is unclear, whether Tam committed the murder himself (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 198).

It is worth mentioning that Nguyễn Tường Tam and his brothers were not the only revolutionaries who escaped to China in order to avoid French and Japanese persecution. Throughout the year 1942 Vietnamese revolutionary, nationalist and communist elements were gathering in the southern provinces of China, especially in Liu-chow in the province of Kwang-si.⁶⁷ Pursuing their own interests, the Chinese authorities made a decision to consolidate these Vietnamese revolutionary and national elements in the southern provinces. Throughout the summer and early autumn of 1942 many discussions among all the Vietnamese revolutionary parties were in progress under the auspicious eye of General Zhang Fagui, the commander of the Fourth War Area.⁶⁸ The result of these negotiations was the establishment of a new organization called the Việt Nam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*) on October 10th, 1942.⁶⁹

Most of the important posts in the newly created organization ended up in the hands of the members of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), while Việt Minh and the Communists were expelled on purpose (Patti 1960: 506). Other parties that were perceived to be too closely linked to the Japanese were also viewed with suspicion and denied more important posts in the structure. The program of the Việt Nam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*) was modeled in accordance with the Kuomintang agenda and also encompassed

⁶⁷ For a picture of Tam in Shanghai with other Vietnamese in exile see the Picture Supplement, p. 314.

⁶⁸ General Zhang Fagui received orders from the generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to assemble the Vietnamese revolutionary parties in exile in China and to encourage them to form a unique organization. According to the generalissimo it would be much easier for the Chinese government to finance and to support a single united organization rather than a number of separate parties. Moreover, this united front of Vietnamese revolutionaries could assist the Japanese government in their struggle for national security during the Japanese invasion.

⁶⁹ Nguyễn Hải Thần was appointed head of the seven-member committee, which comprised of Trương Bộ Công, Nguyễn Hải Thần, Vũ Hồng Khanh, Nghiêm Kế Tổ, Trần Báo, Nông Kính Du and Trương Trung Phụng (Chen 1969: 62).

Sun Yat-sen's (1866 – 1925) Three Principles of People, i.e. nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood. The League strove to gain independence from the French and Japanese rule and envisaged co-operation between Vietnam and China in the future. With a large subsidy of 100 000 Chinese dollars per month the League was to engage in three major fields of activity: the conscription of new members, publication of journals and pamphlets and establishing offices in other Chinese towns and provinces (Chen 1969: 63).

However, after a year of feverish activity, the results of the Vietnam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*) were negligible. The leadership was weak and corrupt. Its president Nguyễn Hải Thần even embezzled some of the funds and fled from Liu-chow defying all the efforts of the six other executive members to bring him to reason (Chen 1969: 63). Moreover, the organization itself suffered greatly from factionalism. As General Zhang Fagui stated "Factions against factions, criticisms against criticism; some of them enjoyed merely empty talks without any action; and a few of them did not even possess any quality as a revolutionist" (Quoted from Chen 1969: 63). In addition, the league had a strong opponent in the Indochinese Communist Party.

In the meantime, Vũ Hồng Khanh and Nghiêm Kế Tổ, who had obtained permission from the General Zhang Fagui, visited Tam, who had been in prison for a few months, where he had been detained on the basis of the suspicion of him being a pro-Japanese spy (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 202). At the same time they also found out that another revolutionary, Hồ Chí Minh (1890 – 1969), had also been confined in the same place (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 202). After their visit to jail, both men encouraged the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*) to appeal to General Zhang Fagui for the realese of

Nguyễn Tường Tam and Hồ Chí Minh (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 202). They, just like General Zhang Fagui, were unaware that Hồ Chí Minh was in fact a Communist. In the end General Zhang Fagui conceded and both the men were released. According to Chen K.C, it happened in the fall of 1943 (Chen 1969: 63). Their first steps at liberty lead to the Việt Nam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*) headquarters, where they received the ranking of “Central Committee’s alternative members” (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 202).

Since the results of the League were far from promising General Zhang Fagui was ordered to instigate a further reorganization of the League. Therefore, another conference was to be held in Liu-chow in October 1943. The Indochinese Communist Party was denied participation, but Việt Minh was invited to take part at the congress, which in its consequences allowed the Communist elements to penetrate the organization. Yet again, much bickering and squabbling marked the talks. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) managed to maintain its leading role in the union. However, the different factions continued in petty struggles and also in developing contacts with different civilian and military organizations in Chinese, Japanese French, British and American missions in China and in Vietnam (Jamieson 1993: 180).

At that time Nguyễn Tường Tam’s Greater Vietnamese Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*) was operating in a loose coalition of nationalist oriented parties that were referred to as the *Đại Việts* (Greater Vietnam parties) (Jamieson 1993: 180). Tam’s close collaborators Hoàng Đạo and Khải Hưng were allegedly leading discussions with the Japanese Kampetai concerning their possible participation in the new government that the Kampetai was hoping to establish in Indochina (Jamieson 1993: 181). At the same time Nguyễn Tường Tam was active in trying to win the Chinese

and the Allies over for his cause (Jamieson 1993: 181). Consequently, due to playing on all sides Tam and his party lost a lot of credibility (Jamieson 1993: 181). Thereafter, they found themselves in isolation, since the Chinese and the Americans perceived them as pro-Japanese. Furthermore, all three of them were also known for their extreme anti-colonialism and anti-communism. Thus, there was no room left for their political maneuvers and Tam found himself isolated. This was also due to the fact that they had only a small number of middle-class followers in Hanoi; lacked the support of an effective mass organization beneath and had no powerful sponsors that would back up their cause (Jamieson 1993: 181).

Since the Viet Nam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*) showed to be very ineffective General Zhang Fagui convoked another reunification conference called “Congress of Overseas revolutionary Groups of the *Đồng Minh Hội*” in Liuchow, which took place on March 25th to 28th, 1944. There, the representatives of the Overseas Revolutionary Groups negotiated a new organization of the League.⁷⁰ The conference was marked by ceaseless and tenacious disputes between the Nationalist and Communist delegates. Despite the fact that Hồ Chí Minh and Phạm Văn Đồng were two of the three Communist representatives present at the conference, the result was a shift in power enabling the Communists to play a more important role than they had expected (Jamieson 1993: 181). On the contrary, Nguyễn Tường Tam ended up being disappointed for he was one of the four out of the fifteen representatives who failed to obtain any official post in the new organizational structure (Jamieson 1993: 181).

⁷⁰ The representatives taking part were Trương Bội Công, Nguyễn Hải Thần, Vũ Hồng Khanh, Nghiêm Kế Tổ, Trương Trung Phụng, Trần Bảo, Nông Kính Du, Bò Xuân Luật, Trần Đình Xuyên, Lê Tùng Sơn, Nguyễn Tường Tam, Nguyễn Thanh Đông, Hồ Đức Thành, Hồ Chí Minh and Phạm Văn Đồng.

It is undeniable that Nguyễn Tường Tam was the sole responsible for his failure. Despite the fact that he had been an influential and admired personality in the literary field, as a politician he was inflexible, too direct and incapable of any political maneuvering (Jamieson 1993: 181). However, for Tam all was not lost in the political sphere yet. On this occasion Tam befriended Nguyễn Hải Thần, a representative of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), who was also disillusioned with the outcome of the election. One of the effects of their close friendship would be the election of Nguyễn Tường Tam into the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Hồ Chí Minh government, of which Nguyễn Hải Thần was Vice-President in 1946 (Chen 1969: 69).

One of the decisions approved at the congress was the need to return to Vietnam and start operations leading to gaining independence. Hồ Chí Minh, who was appointed as the responsible of this plan, moved to the province of Cao Bằng, where he started to work on building a base there (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). Meanwhile, Nguyễn Tường Tam had left Liu-chow and moved to Kunming, where he started to cooperate closely with Vũ Hồng Khanh and the Overseas Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980).

While Hồ Chí Minh moved back to Vietnam to lay foundations for his ascension to power, Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) and Greater Vietnamese Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*) concluded on the necessity to create a united front and initiated a new round of negotiations, which lasted throughout much of the winter of 1944 and resulted in their unification. Negotiations between both the parties lasted throughout much of the winter of 1944.

The preparations of all the parties concerned were even more accelerated by the Japanese coup in Indochina on March 9th, 1945. As the war was coming to a close, the Japanese started to fear that the French colonial regime would turn against them as the Vichy regime had ceased to exist. On March 9th, 1945, the Japanese demanded that the French turn over the colony to them and disarm the troops. The French, who resisted, were imprisoned or killed. The Japanese then proceeded to disband the colonial administration and urged the kings of Annam and Tonkin, Cambodia and Laos to proclaim independence. The Vietnamese emperor Bảo Đại obeyed and on March 11th, he proclaimed independence. The following day he appointed the renowned scholar Trần Trọng Kim (1883- 1953) as Prime Minister. Moreover, the name of the country was changed to the Empire of Vietnam (*Đế quốc Việt Nam*, or *Việt Nam Đế quốc*). This Japanese puppet state was to be short-lived. It fell on August 23rd, 1945 as the world war two was coming to an end in Asia.

In the meantime Nguyễn Tường Tam immediately wrote a letter to his compatriots in Hanoi to begin preparations for publishing of the weekly *Ngày nay kỷ nguyên mới* (This Day of the New Era). It came to light again on May 5th, 1945, and sided with the Japanese appointed government of Prime Minister Trần Trọng Kim (1883- 1953) (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 245). The editorial office was at 80 Quan Thánh Street in Hanoi. This time the magazine was published by Hoàng Đạo and Khải Hưng. Nguyễn Tường Bách, Nguyễn Gia Trí, Nguyễn Xuân Miến also joined them in this endeavor. However, the new magazine had no resemblance with the journal, which had been published in the 1930s. It had about twenty pages and there was no literature of note, little objective news and no humor. It was intended to serve as a political organ of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) aiming to attack fiercely the actions of the French and the Việt Minh. On the cover of the first issue one could

come across slogans such as “the French colonialism has collapsed, *Ngày Nay* (This Day) has been revived... *Ngày Nay* (This Day) has adopted another course of action, to seize the opportunity...but to stay loyal to its former philosophy” (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 1994: 154 – 155).

After the Việt Minh had come to power on August 25th, 1945, the editorial office of the magazine was closed down and members of the editors’ office were dispersed as a result of Việt Minh’s efforts to suppress any kind of opposition to its cause. Meanwhile in Kunming, Nguyễn Tường Tam was actively pursuing his goal of an independent and non-communist Vietnam. However, he failed to be heard out by the Americans who had been operating in South China. They had no understanding for him due to his previous pro-Japanese stance. Moreover, as an ardent nationalist he was known to work against both the French and the Việt Minh. Moreover, the Americans were cooperating with Hồ Chí Minh and Việt Minh, who had been helping them collect intelligence on the Japanese and save pilots shot-down above Indochina. Moreover, the Americans were also co-acting with the French. Thus, Tam was watched with suspicion and was considered to be more of a problem rather than a potential partner in dialogue (Jamieson 1993: 192). Once again Tam found himself isolated.

Therefore, he strove to contact Jean Sainteny (1907 – 1978), who had been appointed the commanding major of a French military delegation in China. At that time Sainteny was interested in finding out the opinions of Vietnamese revolutionary intellectuals concerning the situation in Indochina. Both men met at night on August 4th, 1945 at a small discreet restaurant. As Sainteny later recalled in his memoirs *Histoire d’une paix manqué* a man, sitting alone at a table, was waiting for him and it was “a perfect type of a Vietnamese intellectual, who had something manly and direct, which is very rare in this Vietnamese class” (Sainteny 1967: 64). On

the other hand, Tam was also pleased to have had the opportunity to meet a highly placed French official, who seemed to be so unbiased and understanding to the anticipations of Vietnamese nationalists. When the meeting came to a close Tam asked Sainteny whether he could deliver a letter to his brother Hoàng Đạo if he managed to get to Hanoi after the war (Jamieson 1993: 192). Sainteny was willing to do so and three days later, Tam handed over a note, in which he beseeched his brother to cooperate with Sainteny (Jamieson 1993: 192).

Sainteny's plane landed at the airport in Gia Lam on August 22nd, three days after Việt Minh had seized power in Hanoi. On August 28th, the Chinese army led by the general Lu Han (1895 – 1974) crossed the borders of northern Vietnam.⁷¹ The 150 000 – 200 000 Chinese soldiers were followed by the remnants of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) and the Vietnamese Revolutionary League (*Đông Minh Hội*), who hoped the Chinese would help them attain the key positions in the future leadership of the country. Võ Nguyên Giáp received instructions from Hồ Chí Minh to contact Nguyễn Tường Tam and invite him to Hanoi for discussions. Giáp not knowing where to find him asked Major Archimedes Patti to get the message across (Jamieson 1993: 195).

Meanwhile, Nguyễn Tường Tam had left China and set off to Vietnam on his own. Upon his arrival he hurled himself into politics again. Trying to gain support for his opposition to Việt Minh, he started publishing a rival newspaper *Việt Nam*, in which he launched a harsh critique of Việt Minh and called for an establishment of a coalition government.

⁷¹ In accordance with the conclusions that were reached at the Postdam Conference of July 1945, the Chinese were to disarm the Japanese north of the 16th parallel in Indochina, while the British were to oversee the Japanese south of the 17th parallel.

However, he as well as the separate squabbling nationalist factions missed out their chances when on September 2nd, 1945, Hồ Chí Minh declared the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) at the Hanoi square of Ba Đình. Hồ Chí Minh was appointed the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his closest Communist comrades were designated to other leading posts of the country. This was partially also a consequence of Hồ Chí Minh influence in the Vietnam Revolutionary League (*Việt Nam Cách Mạng Đồng Minh Hội*). The leaders of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), the Trotskyists and other leaders of the nationalist parties, as well as Nguyễn Tường Tam had been totally left out from this redistribution of power.

The main issue that Hồ Chí Minh's government had to solve was the consequence of the Postdam Conference of July 1945. It had been decided there that the Japanese army located in North Vietnam was to be disarmed by the Chinese, while the Japanese in the South Vietnam were to be unarmed by the British. Unfortunately, General Douglas D. Gracey, head of the British troops that had arrived in Saigon September 12th, 1945, was not so keen on fulfilling his mission. He had already come to the conclusion that "the question of the government of Indochina is exclusively.... Civil and military control of Indochina by the French is only a question of weeks" (Jamieson 1993: 198). It did not take long for disorder to break out in the streets of Saigon.

Given the circumstances, Hồ Chí Minh became much aware that the situation in the country did not facilitate his dream of a unified Vietnam. Therefore, he decided to approach the problem with two precautions. In order to coax the Chinese, he dissolved the Indochinese Communist Party in November 1945. The party, however, was not abolished it only went underground. The second precaution was the offer made to the

representatives of the opposing nationalist parties, especially the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) and the Vietnamese Revolutionary League (*Đông Minh Hội*) to join his government. The negotiations among all three sides lasted for about a month from mid-November to mid-December and were characterized by an overall discontent of all the participants. Moreover, in December Hồ Chí Minh took his political opponents by surprise on December 3, 1945, by announcing his intention to organize parliamentary elections. At that moment Hồ Chí Minh found himself yet again under pressure from the Chinese, who sided with the opposing nationalist parties. The reason for the Chinese intervention was the fact that nationalist parties were not in a position to compete successfully with Hồ Chí Minh. Nguyễn Tường Tam criticized Hồ Chí Minh for his “deceit” and branded the elections as a cunning Communist trick (Jamieson 1993: 199). Moreover, the leadership of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) issued an order to all the provincial units to boycott the elections. However, after a series of negotiations that followed Hồ Chí Minh promised that he would leave 70 out of 380 seats to his opponents from other nationalist parties, i.e. fifty to the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) and twenty to the Vietnamese Revolutionary League (*Đông Minh Hội*).

The nationalists felt that they had been pushed to the sidelines. In order to ameliorate their position on the political scene they founded the *Quốc Dân Đảng Central Committee*, which formally started its operation December 12th, 1945 (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 271). The committee consisted of two bodies: the Secret Highest Headquarters (*Bộ Chỉ Huy Bí Mật Tối Cao*) and the Public President Committee (*Chủ Tịch Đoàn Công Khai*) (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 271). The secret body comprised of Nguyễn Tử Anh, Nguyễn Tiến Hỷ, Vũ Hồng Khanh, Nghiêm Kế Tổ and Nguyễn Tường Tam, while the Public President Committee was made up of Nguyễn Tử Anh, who

held the post of the president; Vũ Hồng Khanh who served as the Secretary Chief and three committee members: Xuân Tùng, Nguyễn Tường Long and Phạm Khải Hoàn (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 271). However, their activities were predestined to failure since the *Quốc Dân Đảng Central Committee* had no means to efficiently contest the Việt Minh. It was short of economic and military resources not to mention the lack of public support (Van Dao Hoang 2008: 276).

The elections took place January 6th, 1946 and resulted in an overwhelming victory of the Việt Minh. Despite the overwhelming success, Hồ Chí Minh, when establishing his government, found himself again under the pressure of the Chinese generals, who tried to interfere in the constitution of the cabinet. Hồ Chí Minh managed to solve the rather tense situation by nominating four representatives of the Việt Minh, four representatives of the anti-Việt Minh nationalist parties, and four independent representatives, who were in fact secret members of the Việt Minh into his government. Thus, Nguyễn Tường Tam, as the representative of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), was appointed to the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Hồ Chí Minh's first provisional government. He would later confess to his son that the time when he had held this post had been one of the worst in his entire life (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). At the same time, Nguyễn Tường Tam acted as the General Secretary of the Nationalist Party (*Quốc Dân Đảng*), which comprised Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), Great Vietnam Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng*) and Great Vietnam Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*) (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 303).

Hồ Chí Minh was cautious in his negotiations with all sides, for he was much aware of the French effort to get hold of Indochina again. He was also well informed of the continuous negotiations between the French and

the Chinese. The discussions were concluded February 28th, 1946 by a treaty signed in Chungking, in which France receded from its territory and concession in China in exchange for the right of replacing the Chinese army in to Tonkin in March 1946.

Therefore, Hồ Chí Minh was leading secret talks with Jean Sainteny about the future of Indochina. The negotiations led to an agreement that caused turmoil not only in the ranks of Việt Minh, but also the opposing parties. On March 6th 1946 Hồ Chí Minh and Jean Sainteny signed an agreement, within which France recognized Vietnam as an “independent” state within the French Union. This meant that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was entitled to make decisions about the internal affairs of the country. However, the issues of foreign relations, defense, and commerce were to stay in the hands of the French. Moreover, the French also promised to organize a referendum in Cochinchina, within which the population was to decide whether Cochinchina would be annexed to the DRV. Nonetheless, no concrete date of elections was determined. France also agreed to withdraw its troops from Vietnam within five years from signing the treaty. In exchange to these concessions made by the French, Hồ Chí Minh had to agree with the placement of 15 000 French troops and 10 000 Vietnamese troops under French command in Hanoi, Hải Phòng and other cities in North Vietnam as a replacement of the Chinese troops, which were to leave the country by October 1946. Both sides also agreed to send a Việt Minh delegation to Paris, where further negotiations of Vietnam's independence were to take place. Hồ Chí Minh was not very happy with the result for he had hoped for more. Moreover, he was widely criticized from all sides, even from his own ranks.

Nguyễn Tường Tam, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had also been expected to lead the negotiations with the French concerning the status and

the future of Vietnam in the French Union. However, he was too uncompromising in his attitude toward the continuous presence of the French in Indochina. This adamant stance of his foreshadowed the future disaccord between him and the Việt Minh, which had a more tolerant and accommodating attitude toward the French at least in the first phase of the negotiations. Due to his uncompromising attitude, Nguyễn Tường Tam was often perceived as a bad diplomat and politician. I on the other hand dare to claim that this at first sight adamant attitude was not a sign of inflexible negotiating skills, but rather of another feature of a true Confucian gentleman (*junzi*). A true *junzi*, which I believe Tam was, is to display a strong sense of honor, strive for political success and in all his undertakings display potency, audacity and persistence despite the possible negative outcomes. I believe that Tam was not stiff or rigid. He only acted in accordance with what he believed to be honorable.

When Nguyễn Tường Tam had found out about the secret negotiations between Hồ Chí Minh and Jean Sainteny, he was furious and decided to resign from his post. Day before the agreement was signed; Tam sent a letter to the president Hồ Chí Minh:

Hanoi, March 5th, 1946

Respectfully addressed to: the President

United Government of Resistance

Dear Sir,

I find myself incapable and helpless to be in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Therefore, I would like to resign from the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs counting from today.

I do not want my resignation to influence our common work. Thus, I ask the President to take the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs upon himself or nominate some other neutral person.

Concerning my resignation, it is a personal decision that is in no way related to the unification of the opposing parties.

I wish the President and the Cabinet success in leading the country to ultimate independence.

Nguyễn Tường Tam⁷²

After having expedited the letter, Tam left for the area of Vĩnh Yên (Trương Bảo Sơn 1997: 341). He remained there for five days in order to express his disagreement with Hồ Chí Minh's politics of compromise. Nevertheless, Hồ Chí Minh ignored his outraged reaction and thus Tam decided to return to his post on March 12th (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 144) On that occasion, in compliance with his deep-rooted negative stance towards the French and colonialism, he appealed to the Chinese and the Americans for help. He stated that: "China and America are responsible for defending the peace in the East. Vietnam wants to be in direct contact with the United States just as the king Tự Đức was with Lincoln in the past. While waiting for the French and the Vietnamese to establish stable peace, America must help Vietnam in every aspect just like China" (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 144-145).

A day later, March 13th, Nguyễn Tường Tam discussed with Hồ Chí Minh the possibility of sending a delegation to China to Chungking in order to strengthen the mutual relations with General Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang (Devillers 1952: 233). The main objective was to explain to Kuomintang the Vietnamese stance and to reinforce the Sino-Vietnamese relations (Devillers 1952: 233). The delegation was to be led by the former emperor Bảo Đại and was to comprise of representatives of all the parties. After much persuasion Bảo Đại finally agreed and set out to China on March 18th (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 144 – 146; Devillers, P., 1952: 233).

⁷² Retrieved from the website:
<http://www.dactrung.net/baiviet/noidung.aspx?BaiID=6TjE3Y1b5J%2bWE03rjV03SQ%3d%3d>

However, according to Devillers, Hồ Chí Minh sent out another secret delegation consisting of Việt Minh members to Yunnan, where they were to contact the Communist authorities (Devillers 1952: 233).

Meanwhile, Tam was assigned to lead the delegation to Đà Lạt, where further negotiations with the French were to take place from April 17th, 1946.⁷³ The discussions lasted for three weeks and bore no significant results. There were too many differences between the French and Vietnamese notions of a “free state” that it was almost impossible to reach even a basis for discussions. Moreover, the conviction that the conflict could be solved only with force began to ferment among all the participants. Tam showing himself as a very bad diplomat was sullen and stiff during most of the talks (Jamieson 1993: 202). It also seemed that he was getting a bit tired of politics altogether. Hoàng Xuân Hãn, who visited him one day, when Tam was lying sick in his room, recalled him saying that, “You do the politics. I will return to culture” (Võ Phiến 2004). The negotiations ended in a fiasco. Nguyễn Tường Tam summed up the achievement of the discussions as “a general agreement on the fact that the Conference had failed to reach agreement on any item on the agenda” (Jamieson 1993: 202). He was said to have left the talks furious, while Võ Nguyên Giáp in tears (Jamieson 1993: 202).

When Nguyễn Tường Tam had been asked to lead the conference in Fontainebleau, he excused himself on the pretext of health problems. He

⁷³ The Vietnamese delegation comprised of twelve representatives and twelve advisors. Nguyễn Tường Tam, as the head of the delegation, was accompanied by his deputy Võ Nguyên Giáp (1911). The group of representatives comprised: Trịnh Văn Bính, Cù Huy Cận, Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Vũ Văn Hiến, Vũ Hồng Khanh, Trần Đăng Khoa, Dương Bạch Mai, Nguyễn Văn Luyện, Phạm Ngọc Thạch, Bùi Công Trùng and Nguyễn Mạnh Tường. The group of advisors comprised: Tạ Quang Bửu, Kha Vạng Cân, Kiều Công Cung, Đinh Văn Hớn, Phạm Khắc Hòe, Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Hồ Đắc Liên, Phan Văn Phát, Nguyễn Văn Tình, Nguyễn Duy Thanh, Nguyễn Tường Thụy and Hồ Hữu Tường.

did not want to participate in further negotiations for he was convinced of their failure (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 147). Moreover, he was certain that his presence at the talks was being used to harm the reputation of the noncommunist Nationalists (Jamieson 1993: 202). Therefore, Phạm Văn Đồng, who left for France together with Hồ Chí Minh, replaced him. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Tường Tam stayed in Hanoi and launched a campaign against the government. In the newspaper *Việt Nam* he published a series of articles, in which he accused Hồ Chí Minh of being a reactionary, who pushed the nation into the hands of the enemy (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149). The situation became more and more tense and a series of clashes between the Việt Minh and the armed forces of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) broke out.

Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) hoped to overthrow the Hồ Chí Minh government and they intended to make Nguyễn Tường Tam president of the country (Nhật Thịnh, 1986: 149). Võ Nguyên Giáp was fast to react. While Hồ Chí Minh was in France, Giáp, with the quiet consent of the French Colonel Jean Crépin (1908 – 1996), started to systematically crush down all political opponents of Việt Minh (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149). Skirmishes broke out in the Northern provinces Vĩnh Yên, Việt Trì, Phú Thọ, Tuyên Quang, Hà Giang, Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Lào Kay, which were under the control of Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) and the Vietnamese Revolutionary League (*Đồng Minh Hội*) (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149). Furthermore, during the three days of July 11th, 12th, 13th Việt Minh arrested more than 120 representatives of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) in Hanoi (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149). The mouthpiece of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), Nguyễn Tường Tam's newspaper *Việt Nam* was searched and closed down (Nhật Thịnh

1986: 149). It reappeared again after six days having a new editorial team affiliated to the Việt Minh (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149).

In order to avoid arrest, Nguyễn Tường Tam and his colleague Vũ Hồng Khanh fled to China in May (Van Dao Hoang, 2008: 306). There, Tam immersed himself into political activities and strove to organize an anti-French and anti-Communist coalition as an opposition to the Hồ Chí Minh government (Jamieson 1993: 202).

After his flight to China, Việt Minh criticized Nguyễn Tường Tam on all levels. According to the writer Hiếu Chân, in 1947 Vietnamese Communists issued an order to all existing and affiliated cultural and literary groups to organize debates and write literary critiques denigrating Nguyễn Tường Tam and the work of the *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 151).

In those assessments Nguyễn Tường Tam was often portrayed as a prototype of a spineless reactionary coming from a bourgeois milieu, whose social reforms proved to be only temporary (Hiếu Chân 1970). From that moment into the early 1990's, there was a mass production of literary critiques of Tam's writing denigrating one novel or the other. For instance, Dũng, the hero of the novel *Đôi Bạn* (Two Friends) was often criticized by the Communist writers for his apparent inclination to the Vietnamese Nationalist Party, which was always in a determined opposition to the Communists (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 130). The well-known scholar and leftist literary critic Đặng Thái Mai even called Dũng a kind of Don Quixote roaming the countryside without any clear plan in mind (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 130). Another of Nguyễn Tường Tam's novels *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties), so famous at the time of its appearance on the literary scene in 1935, also became a target of numerous

critiques. It was fashionable to compare Tam's novel with Nguyễn Công Hoan's *Cô giáo Minh* (Schoolteacher Minh, 1936). Whilst the novel of the latter had not been so successful with the readership, now Hoan was presented as an advocate of social responsibility, while Tam was depicted as a promoter of egoistic individualism (Jamieson 1993: 149 – 153). It is also noteworthy to say that after the division of Vietnam following the Geneva conference in 1954 none of his works were re-published in north Vietnam since his “romantic individualism” was incompatible with the new trend of socialist realism, which was promoted by the Party.

On a political level, Nguyễn Tường Tam was proclaimed to be the enemy of the proletarian revolution (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 151). Thus, his name was to be smeared by all means. There was a mass production of songs and ditties in which the treason of Nguyễn Tường Tam was denounced (Jamieson 1993: 211). His nephew Thế Uyên even recalled going to see a comedy play called “*Nguyễn Tường Tam ăn cắp hai triệu*” (Nguyễn Tường Tam steals two million) (Thế Uyên 1997: 313), for after his flight to China, Tam had been accused of defrauding some state money (Celerin 1950: 120, Van Dao Hoang 2008: 300).

As one high ranking Communist official admitted to the writer Hiếu Chân the main reason of the denigrating campaign against Nguyễn Tường Tam was the fact that Tam was in Nanking at that time trying to establish a United National Front of Vietnam (*Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Thống Nhất Việt Nam*), which could theoretically turn into a strong rival for the Communists (Hiếu Chân 1970).

A month later, i.e. in March, Nguyễn Hải Thần and Nguyễn Tường Tam flew from Canton to Hong Kong (Chen 1969: 181, Jamieson 1993: 210). There between March 15th and 22nd 1947 they led negotiations with Bảo

Đại and the representatives of the South Vietnam National Movement (*Quốc gia Nam Bộ*) (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149, Chen 1969: 181).⁷⁴ On this occasion Nguyễn Hải Thần also announced the foundation of the United National Front having two branches, one in Saigon, and the second one in Hanoi (Chen 1969: 181). At the same time, Nguyễn Tường Tam decided to organize a conference in Nanking, where further political steps were to be discussed (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149).

Upon his return to Mainland China Tam announced the formation of the United National Front of Vietnam (*Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Thống Nhất Việt Nam*) (Jamieson 1993: 210). It was conceived as an anti-French and anti-Communist organization, the aim of which was to create a new government with the emperor Bảo Đại at its head as a counterpart to Hồ Chí Minh's government. In the beginning the core of this front was formed by members of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), Revolutionary League (*Đồng Minh Hội*) and the Great Vietnam Democratic Party (*Đại Việt Dân Chính*). Later on many other groups opposing the politics of Việt Minh affiliated with the front, such as members of the Cao Đại, Hòa Hảo sects, Buddhist, Catholic groups and even conservatives such as Trần Trọng Kim (Jamieson 1993: 210).

In the beginning the United National Front of Vietnam (*Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Thống Nhất Việt Nam*) made great progress and quickly won the support of the population, especially in the Republic of Cochinchina. In August demonstrations in favor of the emperor Bảo Đại broke out even in Hanoi (Jamieson 1993: 211). The popularity of Nguyễn Tường Tam soared again. However, to Tam's dismay the movement was slowly taken

⁷⁴ For a picture of all participants of the Hong Kong negotiations see the Picture Supplement, p. 315.

over by more moderate elements and as a consequence Tam's influence began to wither.

The first phase of the “Bảo Đại solution movement” reached its peak on September 9th, 1947. Twenty-four representatives of the United National Front of Vietnam (*Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Thống Nhất Việt Nam*) met with Bảo Đại in Hong Kong (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149; Chapuis 2000: 153). The leaders Nguyễn Hải Thần, Nguyễn Tường Tam and Nguyễn Tường Long (Hoàng Đạo) declared their intention of placing their trust into the hands of the former emperor, whom they expected to take steps to save the country (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 149).⁷⁵

On September 11th, 1947 the Front published the following statement signed by 21 participants: “The Communist Việt Minh is opposed to unity and independence of our nation; its anti-democratic and anti-unification actions have split the nation and destroyed much of our economic and manpower resources. The Việt Minh places its ideology above national interests...The people of the whole nation have expressed their faith in the abdicated emperor Bảo Đại...We, therefore, unanimously requested Bảo Đại to assume the responsibility for negotiations with France for Vietnam's peace and independence” (*Ta kung pao*, September 14, 1947, cited from Chen 1969: 183). Bảo Đại “accepted the request of the conferees” in a formal statement on September 18th, 1947 (*Ta kung pao*, September 19, 1947, cited from Chen 1969: 183).

⁷⁵ It was also agreed upon the following statements: 1) All the sides would mutually consult each other when important decisions were to be made; 2) The Front would continue to demand autonomy for Vietnam, an independent army and control of finances; 3) Only in the questions of foreign affairs the Vietnamese politics would be in accordance with the French (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004).

3. 6. Nguyễn Tường Tam Disillusioned

However, the mutual agreements were to turn sour, since Bảo Đại was not able to fulfill the expectations of the United National Front of Vietnam (*Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Thống Nhất Việt Nam*). In addition, he became suspicious of Nguyễn Hải Thần's affiliation to the Chinese and Nguyễn Tường Tam's former involvement in the Hồ Chí Minh coalition government in 1946 (Chen 1969: 184). Furthermore, the leaders of the Front themselves became disillusioned by Bảo Đại's inclination to play both sides, i.e. the Việt Minh and the French. Thus, on October 29, 1947, Nguyễn Tường Tam retreated from the pro-Bảo Đại movement and left the political arena (Chen 1969: 184). This was also due to the fact that his influence and that of his closest associates had withered since Bảo Đại started to have very moderate standpoints (Jamieson 1993: 211). However, Tam still continued writing political articles against the French and American presence in Vietnam. His colleagues soon followed his example, retreated from the movement, and in 1950 the Front was dissolved.

After the conference, Nguyễn Tường Tam moved to Hong Kong, where he joined Trương Bảo Sơn and his colleague from the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) Nguyễn Gia Trí, who had installed there in September 1947. They lived in a small plank hut without electricity and running water halfway on a mountain overlooking the Happy Valley racecourse (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). Nguyễn Tường Tam moved into a small, low cave in the mountain located just behind the hut. He tidied the five-meter-square space and placed in a small bed and a low chair. From three stones he made a fireplace, on which he would cook meals for his friends. Trương Bảo Sơn recalled that Tam excelled in making the Châteaubriand steak and bouillabaisse soup (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). He would also sit at the entrance of the cave and play the clarinet with Đỗ

Đình Đạo, a former commander-in-chief of the war zone III of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*) and also a former clarinetist, who had played in orchestras performing in dancing halls in Hanoi (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004).

There he lived only on money sent to him by his family and wrote occasional short stories “only to help kill time” (Jamieson, Neil, 1993: 239). It was there, where he started writing a book called *Bèo dạt* (Drifting Duckweed), the name of which was later changed to *Xóm cầu mới* (1949-1957, Village “New Bridge”). Nevertheless, he still continued to encourage young talented writers, e.g. he supported Nguyễn Thị Vinh⁷⁶ (1924) to write the novel *Thương Yêu* (To Love) and Linh Bảo (1926) to compose *Gió Bắc* (Northern Wind) (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). At this point it is worth mentioning that the effort to help and support younger people is yet again another feature of a true Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) as a *junzi* should always be altruistic and considerate of others.

At that time, he also started having problems with his nerves and was inclined to have depressions. According to Vũ Bằng, Tam began to suffer from neurasthenia (Vũ Bằng 1970). This state was even worsened after several tragic incidents affected the Nguyễn Tường family. Tam received the news that Nguyễn Tường Long (Hoàng Đạo), his younger brother and at the same his most efficient confidant not only in literature but also in politics, had committed suicide by jumping off a train in Thạch Long on July 22, 1948. According to his relatives the reason of this act was his heart disease (Thế Uyên 1997: 314). Thế Uyên, the nephew of Hoàng Đạo and Nguyễn Tường Tam, recalled his mother hoped that Tam would forget the world of politics after this incident (Thế Uyên 1997: 314).

⁷⁶ For a picture of Tam, Nguyễn Thị Vinh, and Trương Bảo Sơn in Hong Kong see the Picture Supplement, p. 315.

According to Trương Bảo Sơn, Tam was also struck by the news that his youngest brother Nguyễn Tường Bách had come to tell him all the way from Canton. Nguyễn Tường Bách wanted to leave the Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of People and preferred to return to Canton and work as a doctor in a hospital under the regime of the Chinese Communists (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). The loss of his two brothers threw Tam into depressions and he would pass many of his days and nights closed in his room, drinking cheap alcohol and smoking second-rate cigarettes (Jamieson 1993: 219, Nhật Thịnh 1986: 37-38). The only time he seemed to be doing better was when his wife came to Hong Kong to visit him. She took great pain to divert him from the misery by constantly reminding him of the times when he had worked as a journalist and had written books. Only in those moments he would look happy and his eyes would lose their usual gloomy expression (Nguyễn Thị Vinh 2002).

In February 1951 he returned to Hanoi because of his poor health and homesickness (Boudarel - Nguyen Van Ky 2002: 105; Võ Phiến 2004).⁷⁷ According to the memoirs of Nguyễn Tường Thiết, Nguyễn Tường Tam's son, Tam installed himself at his family's house in 15 Hàng Bè Street, where his wife had opened a famous shop with dried areca nuts (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). He stayed with his wife and children for some time and then moved away to the house of his older brother Nguyễn Tường Thụy at the 2 Lý Thường Kiệt Street, a quiet area in Hanoi. There he stayed passing his time by writing and painting. Additionally, he publicly announced that he would have nothing to do with politics and rejected the offer made to him by the resurging *Đại Việt* (Great Việt) party.

⁷⁷ For a picture of Tam, his wife and two children in Hanoi in 1951 see the Picture Supplement, p. 316.

Instead, he recommenced his literary activities by cooperating with the publishing house *Phượng Giang*, the former *Đời Nay*. The name *Phượng Giang* was made up of the two names of Vũ Phượng and Cẩm Giàng, the birthplaces of Nguyễn Tường Tam and his wife (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). There, Tam republished his books and those of his friends and colleagues from the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). However, his main objective was to find new literary talents and publish books having literary value. Nevertheless, according to his friend writer Nguyễn Vỹ (1912 – 1971), the main objective behind this endeavour was rather economic (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 430). Tam was also heard to have disassociated himself from most of his literary production except the novel *Bướm Trắng* (White Butterfly), which he seemed to appreciate the most (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 430). Furthermore, he also started writing an autobiography hoping to justify his political activities.

In April 1951 Tam moved to Saigon with the family of his brother Nguyễn Tường Thụy, who had been assigned the position of the director of the post office in Saigon. Tam took with him his daughter and the youngest son Nguyễn Tường Thiết leaving his wife with the rest of the family to join him later. He moved in with his elder brother's family to a flat assigned to the employees of the post-office in the 12P Hồng Thập Tự Street. During this time Nguyễn Tường Tam continued working in the *Phượng Giang* publishing house and searched for young talented writers. However, despite all his activities, he had still found no peace and was haunted by depressions. His son Nguyễn Tường Thiết recalled: “Nhật Linh often wrote till late at night. But when I woke up in the middle of the night, through the slit of the door I could often see that the light in my father's room was still on. His sobbing, at the beginning quite small and later getting louder, could not be held back. We, the children, would look at each other helplessly (...). After this, I knew that he had secretly cried for many nights on

different occasions. Nobody really knew why he cried, not even our mother. But this revelation marked my childhood with a strong impression that my father was a lonely and miserable man” (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).

His son was not the only one to have noticed Tam’s wretched state. Most of his friends would later recall that Tam lacked much of his enthusiasm and optimism of the inter-war period (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 430). He continued to smoke excessively, drink a lot of alcohol and the constant shaking of his hands gave away his nervous diseases even though he tried to conceal it by telling people he had liver problems (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 430).

In summer 1954 Tam went for the second and also the last time to France for medical treatment. It was also an opportunity to visit his eldest son, who had been studying in France since 1949. During Tam’s sojourn in Europe, his wife moved with the rest of the children to Saigon, where she bought an apartment in the area of market An Đông. The family soon realized that the noisy market area would not do Tam any good.

Therefore, in 1955, because of his poor health, Tam moved to Đà Lạt with the intention to stay there for some time. He took his youngest son Thiết with him in order to avoid loneliness. Both of them installed themselves at a rented apartment in a block of flats Poincard & Veyert, 12 Yersin Street. According to Tam’s son, the fresh air and poetic atmosphere of Đà Lạt, very much like that of the French countryside, contributed to the fast recovery of his father’s ailing health (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).

It was in Đà Lạt that Tam found a new passion - a passion for orchids. His son recalled that every day he would go out in search of them. Sometimes

his friends from Saigon would join him and thus Tam would take a loaf of bread, a few bottles of beer and his clarinet and take his friends into the forests surrounding the city (Jamieson 1993: 239).

Sometimes he would go to the forest to look for strangely shaped tree roots, which he then carved into the form of flowerpots for orchids that soon covered all the walls of his apartment. His delight in these flowers soon inspired many others in Đà Lạt to spend their time searching for them in the forests surrounding the city in the years of 1956-1957 (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). Moreover, he would often go to the library to do research. He would order books on orchids from France and then spend his time analyzing, comparing the species with the ones in Vietnam. The main objective of this endeavor, which more and more people found eccentric, was to write a book on collecting orchids.⁷⁸

However, the apartment where Tam was living soon became too small to accommodate the constantly growing number of flowers, so Tam was forced to find new lodging for himself and his son. They moved to a house in 19 Đặng Thái Thân Street, which Tam's orchid loving friend Lê Đình Giỏi rented him (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).⁷⁹ Tam then changed this villa into a small farm, with orchids growing everywhere (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006). Moreover, Tam started to invite his friends to come over and visit him. Thus, many important personages from the literary and political field were to be seen strolling with Tam in the Đà Lạt forests, such as writer Đỗ Tôn (1920 - ?), poet Tô Kiều Ngân (1926), politician and future Prime Minister Phan Huy Quát (1911 – 1979), general and future head of the Republic of Vietnam Dương Văn Minh (1916 – 2001), and many others (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).

⁷⁸ For an example of Tam's pictures of orchids see the Picture Supplement, p. 319.

⁷⁹ For a picture of the house in Đà Lạt see the Picture Supplement, p. 320.

Around the year 1955 Tam also purchased a piece of land in the village of Phin Nôm located about 26 km from Đà Lạt. There, next to the Đa Me stream he built with his own hands a log cabin, inspired by the type of housing that his Ray of Light Association had constructed for the poor (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). He moved out there without his family, who would visit him usually for the weekend.⁸⁰ There he spent much of his time lying in a hammock reading or playing the clarinet.⁸¹ Accordingly, he was fond of detective stories from the United States and Europe; the number of read books reached about five hundred (Jamieson 1993: 239). He also continued to raise and search for new kinds of orchids. It was at this place that his passion for writing resurged and he would spend hours drafting new stories (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).

However, in 1958 during one stormy night Tam's unfinished log cabin got severely damaged and tumbled down. Tam was very disappointed. Nevertheless, at this moment he decided to say farewell to his serene life in Đà Lạt and return back to the hustle and bustle of Saigon leaving behind probably one of the happiest moments of his life (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).

3.7. Nguyễn Tường Tam Returns to Literature

Upon his arrival to Saigon Tam settled in a house in Nguyễn Bình Khiêm Street (Tuông Hùng 1997: 376). In the beginning he avoided the world of politics, and rather immersed himself into publishing instead. This was due to his conviction that culture could transform society in a more profound way than politics, the effects of which he perceived as rather temporary. Culture, however, and its successes lasted forever (Tuông Hùng 1997:

⁸⁰ For a picture of Tam and his wife in Đà Lạt see the Picture Supplement, p. 318.

⁸¹ For a picture of Tam playing his clarinet in Đà Lạt see the Picture Supplement, p. 318.

376). This opinion was also reflected in the slogan of the new magazine *Ngày Nay* (This Day), later known as *Văn Hoá Ngày Nay* (Contemporary Culture): “Literature surpasses space and time (*Văn chương vượt không gian và thời gian*)” (Võ Phiến 1988: 186).

Nguyễn Tường Tam started publishing the *Văn Hoá Ngày Nay* (Contemporary Culture) journal with the intention to help and support young writers. It was, in compliance with his conviction, a literary and scrupulously non-political publication. In the editorial of the first issue published June 17th, 1958, Nguyễn Tường Tam remarked that: “During the ten years, which have passed by, Vietnamese contemporary literature found itself at a standstill because it had not found the direction to follow. We fear to ask ourselves why so many people have such a discouraged attitude towards literature. The reason is probably that contemporary literature is unable to move the reader, because it does not speak about the soul of man” (Võ Phiến 1988: 186). Furthermore, Nguyễn Tường Tam attacked the literary style of many authors labeling it as “eccentric” and criticizing them for their emphasis on strange form in their endeavor to give a “profound and subtle” impression (Võ Phiến 1988: 186).

Thus, striving to enliven the South Vietnam literary scene Nguyễn Tường Tam buried himself in work again and dedicated most of his time to editing the magazine, on the pages of which he republished and reviewed some of his earlier works or works of the *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-strength literary group). It must be said that his writings and the works of other writers of the group were very much popular in the South and had a much larger audience that of young contemporary authors. At the editorial office of the journal he managed to gather many talented authors such as: Nguyễn Thị Vinh (1924), Trương Bảo Sơn (1916 – 2010), Linh Bảo (1926) and many other young talented writers, i.e. Nhật Tiến (1936), Duy Lam (1933), etc.

Even in his free time he would devote himself to journalism and literature and would often stop by the editorial office of the *Phổ Thông* (Universal) magazine in the Phạm Ngũ Lão Street to chat about literature and life (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 409).

According to his nephew Thế Uyên, Nguyễn Tường Tam worked on his journal in a small room at the back of his elder brother's house, where he carried out all the tasks connected to publishing the magazine from drawing the cover, writing treatises on literature, answering letters of the readers to proof-reading (Thế Uyên 1997: 324). The magazine attracted the attention of public and to the great surprise of Tam and his family the first issues were sold out immediately. However, after the eighth issue of the magazine had been published, Tam unexpectedly and to the astonishment of his relatives announced that he did not want to continue in this endeavor anymore (Thế Uyên 1997: 324). His closest relations intervened and Tam agreed that his nephews Tường Hùng and Duy Lam would continue publishing the journal.

However, after the two following issues Tam decided to close the journal definitely (Thế Uyên 1997: 324). According to Trương Bảo Sơn⁸², there had existed other reasons that led to the closure of the magazine. Firstly, the Diệm administration did not give the permission for the magazine to be issued as a periodical, but as a separate publication. Since it could not have been published periodically the Ministry of Information deliberately took a long time to censure the articles, mainly those of Tam and Trương Bảo Sơn, thus, delaying them for print (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). The second reason of the disappearance of the magazine was the system of distribution of journals and books. The Diệm administration established the so-called *Nhà Phát Hành Thống Nhất* (United Distribution Company), where all the

⁸² For a picture of Tam and Trương Bảo Sơn in Saigon see the Picture Supplement, p. 322.

editorial offices and publishing houses were obliged to send the material for distribution. As the members of the editorial office of the *Văn Hoá Ngày Nay* (Contemporary Culture) noticed after the initial unexpected success the magazine gradually became unmarketable. As they were soon to find out, the *Nhà Phát Hành Thống Nhất* (United Distribution Company) intentionally withheld the magazine in the warehouses and did not distribute it sufficiently to the bookstores that had ordered it (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). Therefore, the editorial office decided to close the magazine down. The last issue of the magazine was published in July 1959 (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 302).

The young group of writers, who had been cooperating with Nguyễn Tường Tam, were reluctant to sit on their hands and give up.⁸³ Trương Bảo Sơn applied for a government permission to publish a magazine *Tân Phong* (New Wind), which he eventually received. Nguyễn Tường Tam then sporadically published his short stories in this periodical, before it suffered the same fate as the *Văn Hoá Ngày Nay* (Contemporary Culture) journal.

The writing of prose in the latter phase of Nguyễn Tường Tam's life became rather sporadic. During the years 1952 – 1960 Nguyễn Tường Tam worked on a more theoretical work treating the question of reading and writing novels, which he called simply *Viết và đọc tiểu thuyết* (Writing and reading novels), in which he focused on the pitfalls of writing long works of fiction. In its preface he wrote that, “After almost forty years of writing novels and through many errors and much groping I feel the responsibility to help partially the efforts of many young people who want to advance on the literary road” (Nhất Linh, 1972).

⁸³ For a picture of Tam at a cultural meeting with young writers see the Picture Supplement, p. 321.

In addition, he often spoke of writing long romans-fleuves, but as Nguyễn Vỹ recalled, these plans were never to be materialized (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 406). It is true that at that time Tam concentrated himself more on his editorial activities in the *Văn Hoá Ngày Nay* (Contemporary Culture), spending most of his time answering letters to the editor and writing poetry. However, he finally managed to publish a novel he had been working on for so long - *Bèo dạt* (Drifting Duckweed), the name of which was later changed to *Xóm Cầu Mới* (1949-1957, Village “New Bridge”).

The former name of the book *Bèo dạt* was based on a verse “*Bèo giạt về đâu hàng nối hàng*” (Where are chains after chains of duckweed drifting to) written by a poet and a former member of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) and later a renown communist poet – Huy Cận (Nguyễn Thị Vinh 2002). According to the publishing house Phương Giang: Tam rewrote the novel five times altogether: he had started to write the story for the first time it was in Hanoi in 1940; the second version was written in 1943 in Kwangchou (China); he returned to the manuscript for the third time in 1949 in Hong Kong (China); then after having returned to Hanoi in 1951; the last time he rewrote the story was when he intended to publish it in the *Văn Hoá Ngày Nay* (Contemporary Culture) journal in 1958 (Nguyễn Thị Vinh 2002). The fact that Tam re-wrote the story five times indicates how demanding he was. However, at this stage his perfectionism rather inhibited him from bringing his writings to conclusion.

The manuscript, even though incomplete, consists of twenty chapters or, to be more precise, twenty stories loosely linked together around the village *Cầu Mới* (New Bridge) and its inhabitants. According to Tam’s meticulous notes, seventeen days after the ill-fated coup of November 11 on South Vietnamese President Diệm he had started writing another piece of work -

the trilogy *Giòng sông Thanh Thủy* (Along the Thanh Thủy river) in November 28, 1960 and finished it two months later, on January 28, 1961. It comprised of the following novels: *Ba người bộ hành* (A Walk for Three), *Chi bộ hai người* (A Cell for Two), and *Vọng quốc* (The Lost Country) (Võ Phiến 2004).

The novel is a mixture of a love story and a political novel, in which Tam utilized and built on his experiences of his political life and revolutionary activities in China in the years 1941 – 1945. The two heroes, Ngọc, a member of the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (just like Tam used to be) and Thanh, a member of the Communist Việt Minh. Both of them get caught up in the political machinery, which puts their love at test, as both the organizations give them the task to kill each other. Their love, which is much stronger than party affiliations, is doomed to an end as both of them are caught up in a political machine, which destroys everything that gets in its way.⁸⁴

Tam seemed to have been satisfied with the trilogy and hoped it would be translated into English and French. He even tried to find the best translations of the trilogy's title: *Thanh Thủy hà* (in Chinese), *La rivière Claire* (in French) and *Limpid water river, Clear water river or Clear river* (in English) (Võ Phiến 2004). Despite the fact that Tam seemed to have been content, his nephew Thê Uyên recalled that they had been disappointed when reading the books. His nephew Duy Lam even came to the conclusion that Tam would not be able to write anymore since his past had left a too profound impact on his soul (Thê Uyên 1997: 326).

⁸⁴ For more details on the novel and a more thorough analysis see Boudarel, Georges - Nguyễn Văn Ký – Duiker, Claire: 2002. *Hanoi: City of the Rising Dragon*. (Maryland: Rowman&Littlefield Publisher).

After Tam had finished working the trilogy, he turned attention to his unfinished translation of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*. He translated it from the original with the help of the French translation *Les Hauts de Hurle-Vent* by Frédéric Delebecque (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2008). Meticulous as he always was, he tried to find the most suitable translation of the title. At the beginning he had chosen the heading *Mỏm Gió Hú*, which he then changed to *Đỉnh Gió Hú*, after he had decided to publish a part of it on the pages of the *Tân Phong* (New Direction) magazine in 1960 (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2008). From Tam's notes in the manuscript (he always noted down the time and dates of his work or details concerning his surroundings or his mood), we can tell that he worked on the translation of the novel during these intervals: 19. 12. 1952 - 21. 8. 1953 and 27. 6.1960 – 18.1.1962 (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2008). However, Tam did not manage to finish the translation before his tragic death on July 7th, 1963. It was Bảo Sơn, who would later terminate the manuscript, which was then published by the publishing house Phương Giang in 1974. (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2008).

Despite the fact that Tam had tried to produce writings of literary value, he never managed to reach the quality that had characterized his novels and stories of the 1930s. He remained to be one of the most popular and renowned writers in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, he was respected mainly for his literary production created within the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (The Self-Strength Literary Group) and for his tireless support of young promising South Vietnamese writers rather than for his new pieces of writings.

3.8. Nguyễn Tường Tam Returns to Politics

Despite the fact that Tam had given up his activities in the literary sphere, he did not return to Đà Lạt and continued living in Saigon. According to his nephew, writer Thế Uyên (1935), after Tam had ceased his career in journalism and literature, his health began to deteriorate as he started suffering from frequent gastric problems and nervous breakdowns (Thế Uyên 1997: 327). To the distress of his family, he also more and more often suffered from fits of insanity. In those cases, he would then stand in front of his house in the Lý Thái Tổ Street and take out documents from his wallet and with confused mumbling, “Take it. Please take it all.” give them to the passers-by (Thế Uyên 1997: 327). Tam's behavior seemed incomprehensible and some of his closest relatives even started to be convinced that he was actually feigning it in order to divert attention of the Diệm administration (Thế Uyên 1997: 327).

Even though he had many times proclaimed that he would not take part in politics, the circumstances forced him to hurl himself into political life again. He was known to be active in the Vietnam PEN Club (*Trung tâm Văn Bút Quốc tế tại Việt Nam*), which had been established in 1958 (Hiếu Chân 1970: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=13353&rb=08>). He held the post of the president for about two years in 1961 – 1962 (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 302). According to Trương Bảo Sơn, Tam also helped to reform the languishing key cell of *Chấn Hưng Quốc Dân Đảng* (Chấn Hưng National Party) in Saigon by dividing the significant duties among the younger members (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). He was also said to have contacts and meet with many intellectuals, politicians and leaders of political and religious parties opposing the regime of the president Ngô Đình Diệm (1901 – 1963), such as such as politicians Phan Khắc Sửu (1905 – 1970) and Trần Văn Hương (1902 – 1982), doctors Phan Huy

Quát (1911 – 1979), Nguyễn Xuân Chử and Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm, Catholic priest Hoàng Quỳnh, and many others (Trương Bảo Sơn 2004). Moreover, all kinds of other individuals of a rather “doubtful” reputation were told to have visited his house. (Jamieson 1993: 240).

Tam, thus, became one of the many displeased intellectuals in Saigon, whose favorite meeting place was in the bar of the Caravelle Hotel, the most luxurious hotel in Saigon (Jamieson, Neil, 1993: 240). Later on this group of eighteen dissatisfied men would be called as “the Caravellists”. Most of them had held high positions in the government: eleven of them had been cabinet members; four held other high government positions and the rest were the representatives of different religious groups (<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent11.htm>).

These men would often meet and discuss about the state of the country and necessary reforms that would lead to greater democracy. According to Trương Bảo Sơn, Nguyễn Tường Tam suggested new ways of resolving the political situation by drafting a program containing many points, of which the most important were to change the constitution and political system and to enforce democratic liberties and social justice (Trương Bảo Sơn 1997: 344). Concerning the constitution, he wanted it to be modeled after the constitution of France. Ngô Đình Diệm would continue to hold the post of the President, but would hand over the administrative authority to a national coalition government with a Prime Minister. According to Tam the government should also be made of representatives of different parties having revolutionary achievements, i.e. two religious sects Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo (Trương Bảo Sơn 1997: 344).

In April 1960 the Caravellists drafted a letter in which they stated the challenges the country was facing, the instigators of obstacles and solutions

to the pressing problems. The Manifesto firmly spoke to the president Diệm: “You should, Mr. President liberalize the regime, promote democracy, guarantee minimum civil rights, recognize the opposition so as to permit the citizens to express themselves without fear, thus removing grievances and resentments... When this occurs, the people of South Vietnam, in comparing their condition with that of the North, will appreciate the value of true liberty and of authentic democracy. It is only at that time that the people will make all the necessary efforts and sacrifices to defend that liberty and that democracy” (Diem – Chanoff 1999: 94). The letter was sent to president Diệm confidentially in the hope of stirring a dialogue. Since there came no response from the presidential palace, the group made the appeal public on April 26th, 1960 (Moyar 2006: 105). It aroused immediate reaction from the populace. President Diệm was fast to react and a wave of arrests followed. Most of the signers were round up and thrown into jail (Diem - Chanoff 1999: 94). Diệm becoming more and more paranoid continued to crush systematically any kind of opposition. Thus, by the autumn of 1960, the intellectual elite was muzzled and politically impotent; labour unions were helpless and opposition in the form of organized parties ceased to exist (<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent11.htm>). Surprisingly, Tam did not become a victim of the persecutions; nevertheless, from that moment on, the administration watched him even more than before.

The deteriorating situation in Saigon and Diệm’s intransigence led to another *coup d’etat* led by two displeased colonels of the South Vietnam Army on November 11th, 1960. The General Nguyễn Chánh Thi (1923 – 2007) and lieutenant colonel Vương Văn Đông succeeded in gaining control of Saigon for several days, which encouraged some of the Caravellists to step forward with a declaration of their support. According to some, Tam established *Mặt Trận Quốc Dân Đoàn Kết* (United National

Front), which aimed to support *coup d'état* of the above-mentioned colonels (Võ Phiến 2001). On the leaflet of the front, three names were stated: Phan Khắc Sửu, Nguyễn Xuân Chử, and Nguyễn Tường Tam (Võ Phiến 2001).

However, Tam soon found out that his political actions had no effect since the secret service of president Diệm's brother Ngô Đình Nhu (1910 – 1963) worked effectively on crushing all attempts of opposition. Nevertheless, according to his nephew Thế Uyên he had cherished the hope that he could succeed Diệm as the President of the Republic of Vietnam (Phan Cự Đệ 1997: 302). His family would often speculate about this (Thế Uyên 1997: 327).

However, this attempt to overthrow Diệm had been condemned to failure from the very beginning, since the insurgents had not succeeded in occupying the strategic positions in the city and were soon driven out by troops loyal to the President. The leading figure of the uprising colonel Nguyễn Chánh Thi fled to take refuge in the Tháp pagoda, while other thirty-three politicians, who had been linked to the uprising, were arrested, condemned and sent to the infamous prison on the Côn Đảo Island (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 189).

After the unsuccessful *coup d'état*, Nguyễn Tường Tam's name appeared on the list of many who were to be summoned to the court in order to be tried for their opposition to the regime (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 189). According to Nhật Thịnh, Tam fled and found refuge at the Chinese Ambassador (at the Embassy of China) in Saigon (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 189). Shortly thereafter, a Belgian Catholic priest Raymond de Jaegher,⁸⁵ the director of

⁸⁵ Raymond de Jaegher and Nguyễn Tường Tam had met in China, where Raymond de Jaegher had been living for more than thirty years. When the Communists came to power in 1949 and the general Chiang Kai Shek was forced to flee to Taiwan. He was then sent

the “Free Pacific Association” (*Tự Do Thái Bình Dương*) stood up for him and with his help Tam could report safely to the responsible authorities (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 189). In the report written down by the lawyer Dương Kiền, Nguyễn Tường Tam disassociated himself from the events that took place on November 11th, 1960 (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 189 - 191). Moreover, Tam argued that he was at home during the *coup d’état* and had not participated in any opposing party and had not been active in any attempt to subvert the government (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 189).⁸⁶

Based on the record of Nguyễn Tường Tam’s interrogation, it is evident that Tam distanced himself from all political activity, i.e. from the Caravellist group and the *Mặt Trận Quốc Dân Đoàn Kết* (United National Front), which he was said to have founded. Finally, since, there was no satisfactory evidence of his participation in the plot, Tam escaped the lot of his friends and colleagues and was only kept under house arrest for some time. After that Tam profited from his freedom but was called to the police station for interrogation from time to time.

Nothing happened for two years after the subversion but then Diệm’s government probably in order to discourage other potential plots decided to trial the alleged schemers. Nineteen military personnel and 34 civilians including Tam, who was pointed out to be the “architect” of the plot, were accused of taking part in the coup attempt (Dommen 2001: 522). It was his son Thiết, who received the court summons on Saturday July 5th, 1963, and handed it over to his father:

to Vietnam by Cardinal Spellman of New York to work as an advisor and close confidant of President Diệm. Having had a first hand experience of Chinese Communists, he established the “Free Pacific Association”, the aim of which was the opposition to Communism. After the assassination of President Diem in 1963 he was deported from Vietnam for unknown reasons. He then moved back to Taiwan.

⁸⁶ For detailed copies of the records see Nhật Thịnh 1986: 189 – 194.

(...) he (Nguyễn Tường Tam) was lying on a white mattress, his arms beneath his head facing the ceiling. His eyes were brown. His look was distant and melancholic as if all life he has been looking for something, yet has never reached the summit of his hopes. I came up to him and handed him a letter that I had just received. In the corner it had two words “very pressing” in red. The letter ordered my father to present himself at the police station in Nguyen Trai Street no. 635 at six in the evening the next day 6-7-1963 for “reasons he will learn later.” My father suddenly sat up, leaned on one hand, and turned his eyes to look at the clock. The sound of the military police car exploded under the house and gradually grew weaker and then it was lost. My father stood up, opened the window and looked down onto the street (Nguyễn Tường Thiét 2006).

The following day he was informed that on Monday, July 8th, he would be tried for complicity at the failed coup of November 1960 (Jamieson 1993: 241). He was to have rejected the accusations calmly and with a smile (Jamieson 1993: 241). Yet he must have been very much aware that all his life, his work, his political activities and aspirations would be tried (Jamieson 1993: 241). At that point he must have known that his dignity, strong sense of self-esteem and individual freedom – the features of a Confucian *junzi* – would not allow him to undergo such a humiliating and what more a biased process.

The following day, on Sunday, July 7th, Nguyễn Tường Tam woke up early as usual. His son recalled that he had opened the drawer and taken out several books and manuscripts that he wrapped into a newspaper and left somewhere (Nguyễn Tường Thiét 2006). According to a letter written by Nguyễn Thị Vinh from June 2nd, 2001, the first thing he did was to take the rough draft of his novel to the publishing house *Trường Sơn* headed by a friend of his, who was to oversee the publishing of the writing (Võ Phiến 2001). Nguyễn Tường Tam came back home at around ten o’clock, where he found his son Thiét listening to the radio. As noted by Thiét, Nguyễn Tường Tam seemed worried, constantly fidgeting, a cigarette shaking in

his hands. He managed to relax around 11 o'clock and seemed to have made up his mind about something. Thiét described to following events subsequently:

My father looked at the window and answered: "I am not worried about the result tomorrow because when you loose your freedom it doesn't matter if you are at home or in prison. (...) At noon, all the members of the family were at home, my mother came up from the ground floor, my elder brother Trieu had just come back from Bien Hoa, and we had a very cheerful lunch together. After lunch, I went to take a nap. My father, unlike usual, did not go to rest. While I was dozing, I thought I heard my father and my brother Trieu talking in French. At three I woke up, and still heard the two talking. My mother had already gone down. I was a little surprised to find the two drinking whiskey, which my father had stopped drinking years ago. But I was happy as my father looked cheerful. He was whole-heartedly asking about my studies and schooling. On that occasion I asked him what he thought about some strange people who had invited me to join some youth organization plotting against the government? He seemed to be interested in that matter, and advised me to be careful because after the failed coup of November 11, 1960, many organizations appeared in order to set a trap on the opponents of the regime. During our conversation, he was calm, cheerful and explained his absolutely different attitude in the past few days. That made me very happy, as it seemed that the matter of my father going to court tomorrow is not making him worried anymore. After drinking a small glass of alcohol, my father asked us to buy some stronger liquor. We thought that maybe alcohol made him forget all his problems. Therefore, we happily decided to go, and we promised our father to be back in 15 minutes. When I was just about to run down the stairs, my father called me back. I heard him call my name in a moved voice, but at that moment I did not pay any attention to it. He looked into my eyes for a long time, then hesitatingly raised his arm in front of himself as if he wanted to say something and then decided not to. He just asked: "You are going just for 15 minutes, then?" When I think about it again, I can still remember his look at that moment. As if the light in his eyes was sending me a message that he could not express with words. I took Trieu to Dong Khanh Street. It was about four in the afternoon. The weather was gloomy, as if it was going to rain. We went

through several shops to choose the kind of alcohol my father liked. At the end we selected a bottle of Johnie Walker, and as we walked out, it started raining heavily. We hid under a porch roof of a restaurant Arc-en-Ciel. The evening sky darkened. Pedestrians ran on both sides of the street to hide away from the rain. My brother Trieu looked worried and nervous. I noticed that he was standing uneasily on one spot. A taxi was driving fast; shining golden raindrops were knitting in front of the two streaks of headlights. I was surprised to see my brother run out quickly to call that taxi, even though the rain was falling heavily. He just managed to tell me one sentence: “You stay here, I am going in advance.” (Nguyễn Tường Thiết 2006).

When Thiết arrived back home, Nguyễn Tường Tam had already been dying (Nhật Thịnh, 1986: 194). Having fallen into a coma, he was immediately rushed to hospital, where he arrived exactly at 5:10 in the morning (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 211).

Despite the efforts of doctors, Nguyễn Tường Tam deceased the following morning. Diem’s government was anxious to avoid further criticism from the United States due to the unstable situation in the country. Moreover, the government did not want to be held responsible for Tam’s death. Therefore, it ordered the press in Saigon to inform the public that Tam had died of natural causes. However, Tam had written a testament before his death, which his children then handed over to Western journalists working at the United Press International (UPI) office in Saigon. Moreover, they also had his last words photocopied and distributed them to their father’s friends and the press, such as Newsweek and Time magazines. Thus, within 48 hours all Saigon found out about Nguyễn Tường Tam’s suicide and read his testament (Jamieson 1993: 242).⁸⁷

⁸⁷ For the scanned copy of the testament see the Picture Supplement, p. 323.

The original text in Vietnamese is as follows: “Đời tôi để lịch sử xử, tôi không chịu để ai xử cả. Sự bắt bớ và xử tội tất cả các phần tử đối lập quốc gia là một tội nặng, sẽ làm cho nước mất về tay cộng sản. Tôi chống đối sự đó và tự hủy mình, cũng như Hòa thượng Thích Quảng Đức tự thiêu, để cảnh cáo những người chà đạp mọi thứ tự do” (Cited from Trương Bảo Sơn 1997: 345). The message said: “Let history be my judge, I refuse to accept any other judgment. The arrest and detention of nationalist opposition members is a serious crime, and it will cause the country to be lost in the hands of Communists. I oppose these acts and kill myself, just like the monk Thích Quảng Đức burned himself to death as a warning to those who trample on freedom of every kind.”

3.9. Nguyễn Tường Tam’s Funeral

The government was not keen to make things easy for Nguyễn Tường Tam’s family, who had to face problems with organizing his funeral.⁸⁸ Tam’s relatives applied for permission to carry out the memorial service on Sunday, however this request was turned down immediately, since the authorities were scared of too many people attending the funeral (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 209, Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm 1966). Therefore, the family had to find another date for the ceremony. The authorities also rejected the option of Saturday evening, proposing only two possible dates – either Saturday morning or Monday morning (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 209-210, Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm 1966). The family opted for Saturday morning, July 14th, 1963.⁸⁹

The government, which did not want to be held responsible for Tam’s death, decided to intervene in the matter again by offering to take part in

⁸⁸ For pictures from the funeral see the Picture Supplement, pp. 323-326.

organizing a state funeral for the writer. President's brother Ngô Đình Nhu, who was at the same time commander of the secret police, sent lawyer Dương Văn Hiếu to meet Thanh Lãng (1924 – 1978), the chairman of Vietnam PEN Club, in order to discuss the possibility of organizing a state funeral. The government wanted Vietnam PEN Club (*Trung tâm Văn Bút Quốc tế tại Việt Nam*) to undertake the organization of a pompous memorial service for which the government would provide financial resources, transportation and even supervision of the police force (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 210). The sole condition was that Vietnam PEN Club (*Trung tâm Văn Bút Quốc tế tại Việt Nam*) would not only organize the funeral but also oversee that everybody, who was invited, would show up at the ceremony (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 210). Despite the fact that Thanh Lãng appreciated the possibility of organizing a state funeral, he was hesitant to make the decision preferring to convene a session of the Vietnam PEN Club (*Trung tâm Văn Bút Quốc tế tại Việt Nam*) executive committee, where Ngô Đình Nhu's offer was to be discussed (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 210).

The only reason why the Diệm family wanted to participate at the organization of the funeral was the sole fact that it wanted to cover up all expressions of discontent or opposition to its government, which has become more and more visible. It must be said that the credibility of Diệm and his regime had received a severe blow after the Buddhist protests and the self-immolation of the Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức (1897 – 1963) on a lively Saigon crossroad in June 1963. This act, which was followed by public immolations of other monks, and subsequent cynical remarks of Madame Nhu (1924), the self-designated First Lady of South Vietnam, horrified the public opinion abroad and the regime was losing fast the indispensable support of their American ally.

⁸⁹ According to Nguyễn Tường Tâm the funeral took place on July 13th 1963 (Nguyễn Tường Tâm 2008).

The discussion of the PEN Club (*Trung tâm Văn Bút Quốc tế tại Việt Nam*) committee was heated and after two hours of arguments the board came to a conclusion that it would participate at Nguyễn Tường Tam's funeral (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 210). However, it would neither organize nor invite anybody officially, therefore, Mr. Nhu's offer was turned down.

Being rejected by the Vietnam PEN Club, the authorities harassed Nguyễn Tường Tam's family insisting on an immediate funeral (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 211). The family played for time arguing that the eldest son had not had enough time to come back from France to take part in the rites. In order to threaten the family the secret police surveyed the house to such an extent, that according to Nhật Thịnh, it was difficult to distinguish who came to express their condolences and who was from the secret police (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 211). The authorities first refused the request of the family to carry out the funeral ceremony at the Xá Lợi pagoda, since Buddhist devotees were known as ardent opponents of the Diệm regime (Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm 1966).

While the funeral preparations were under way, crowds of people were coming to the Grall hospital, where the body of Nguyễn Tường Tam was resting before being buried, despite the fact that the secret police was monitoring all people who had the courage to come and express their condolences.

On Saturday morning, students carried out Nguyễn Tường Tam's coffin to the funeral car. The procession then set out and went peacefully through Mạc Đĩnh Chi, Phan Đình Phùng, Bà Huyện Thanh Quan Streets arriving at the Xá Lợi pagoda around 10:45 a.m (Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm 1966). When the procession had left the Grall hospital, the crowd following the coffin was scarce due to the obstruction of the secret agents and police, who were swarming the road from the Grall hospital barring all the roads disabling

access to those wanting to participate (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 215). However, gradually more and more people showed up and finally thousands of them were present at Nguyễn Tường Tam's funeral, despite the fact that their involvement meant certain jeopardy for them since secret police was everywhere. The crowd that participated comprised mainly middle-class intelligentsia, youth and students. Surprisingly, more women than men showed up at the funeral because they were not in such a danger of being arrested by the secret police which was surveying the procession minutely (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 211).

Moreover, many foreign journalists and photographers were covering the event. Those, however, mixed with the crowd at the Xá Lợi pagoda. There, more than 200 Buddhist nuns recited Buddhist requiem for Tam. However, the coffin was allowed to rest in the pagoda only for less than fifteen minutes unlike the previous arrangement (Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm 1966). Mrs. Tam, desperate, commented on the whole affair that Nguyễn Tường Tam had been miserable for "in life he had nowhere to go, after death he has no place to be buried."

After the ceremony the funeral procession returned to the Phan Thanh Giản Street, then turned right to the Hai Bà Trưng Avenue, which led to the Gò Vấp cemetery (Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm 1966). As the procession was drawing near to the burial site, the number of people in it and the police squad around grew more and more numerous (Nguyễn Hữu Phiếm 1966). The members of the Vietnam PEN Club (*Trung tâm Văn Bút Quốc tế tại Việt Nam*) were also present at the funeral, despite being warned that it would be much safer to stay at home (Jamieson 1993: 243). After Nhật Tiến, one of the most talented writers of the South Vietnam literary scene, had delivered his funeral oration, it was the chairman of the Vietnam PEN

Club, Thanh Lãng, who stepped forward to deliver his speech of farewell to his colleague:

Nhất Linh, I have come here as the president of the Vietnam PEN Club. Standing next to me are the vice-president, general secretary, secretary and many literary friends of the association that you established, presided, and of which you have been an advisor. We have come here on behalf of all literary friends from all over the country and all member countries of the world in order to bid you farewell. Handfuls of soil that all your friends and I are heaping onto you is not to bury you. If literature could be perceived as an existence, then you from this moment, the moment that you are lying here, are stepping into the real life of literature. Therefore, the handfuls of earth, that we are throwing onto you in this painful moment, is not earth, but rose petals, that we are heaping on you, wrapping your body in, so that they accompany you into the glory of history. I remember the year 1932, when Phạm Quỳnh left the *Nam Phong* magazine causing the people to mourn and think that Vietnamese literature was going to grow weak. However, the opposite happened for you started publishing the *Phong Hoá* journal and later the *Ngày nay*. You and your friends brought to life a new literary generation of which you were the leader, the president of the literary republic from 1932 to 1945. You brought for young men and women a completely new orientation of thought, feelings and a new literary style. Nhất Linh, in this moment while tears are overflowing our faces, in this moment while sobs are bursting in our thoughts, in this moment while our shaking hands heap on you handful of earth, that I call rose petals, then this is the very moment in which you will step into splendid history. We have come here to bow in front of your throne that history has prepared for you. I and everyone from the Vietnam PEN Club have brought you here to place you upon that throne (Thanh Lãng 2000: 461-463).

After having finished his speech, Thanh Lãng cast soil on Nguyễn Tường Tam's coffin. At that moment Nguyễn Tường Tam's wife fainted and the crowd burst into tears (Thanh Lãng 2000: 461-463).

3.10. Nguyễn Tường Tam – a True Junzi

Thus, Nguyễn Tường Tam was buried as one of the most prominent figures of the Vietnamese cultural scene. In the past until now he has been praised as one of the most radical proponents of modernization of Vietnamese society, culture and last but not least of literature. He was often called as the representative of radical individualism in literature, the heroes of which smashed convention and struggled against the oppressive extended family system - a legacy of traditional society imbued with Confucian values that Nguyễn Tường Tam had opposed with such fervor. Nevertheless, on the basis of his biographical data we can reveal the paradox of Nguyễn Tường Tam denouncing Confucianism, yet him unwittingly being the perfect Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) whose actions in every inch were permeated with Confucian values, such as humanity (*ren*), righteousness (*yí*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*) and bravery (*yong*).

Before I present my arguments in greater detail, I would like to briefly characterize the main features of an ideal Confucian gentleman (*junzi*), who should display the following virtues:

- 1) A *junzi* should have profound inner sympathy towards other human beings. A *junzi* should be considerate of others;
- 2) A *junzi* should display a strong sense of honor and should strive for political success in all his actions;
- 3) A *junzi* should be fearless and in all his undertakings display potency, audacity, persistence, strength of purpose, will power and perseverance;
- 4) A *junzi* should manifest a strong moral mission in pursuing the Way despite the possible destructive outcomes;
- 5) A *junzi* should be altruistic;
- 6) A *junzi* should display a sense of self-discipline;

- 7) A *junzi* should manifest a sense of self-esteem;
- 8) A *junzi* should strive for individual freedom and self-development. In doing so one should attain the liberty of mind;
- 9) A *junzi* should acquire a sense of dignity and virtues. He should be honest with others. (Guo 2002: 55)

It is undeniable that at first sight Nguyễn Tường Tam does seem as a radical proponent of modernization, i.e. Westernization, and an ardent denouncer of Vietnamese tradition. Yet, at the same time his efforts to modernize Vietnamese society and literature were essentially rooted in tradition.

Firstly, a Confucian gentleman should have profound inner sympathy towards other human beings. A *junzi* should be considerate of others. Looking after other people (*min*) is the most salient mission of a Confucian gentleman. In this case Nguyễn Tường Tam does fulfil this criteria. Throughout his life he displayed profound sympathy towards others, be it his family, colleagues or ordinary people. As has already been mentioned above, he was more than ready to help his nephews Duy Lam and Thế Uyên and other young promising writers such as Nguyễn Thị Vinh, Linh Bảo and Hoài Chân in developing their literary talents. His establishment of the Ray of Light Association (Hội Ánh Sáng), the aim of which was to build better housing estates for the needy and bring cultural and social enlightenment, was yet another manifestation of his sympathy and consideration for others. Not to mention his immersion into the world of politics after the outburst of World War II. This argument can also very easily be founded on Nguyễn Tường Tam's very own words that he told his wife in the first days of their marriage, i.e. that every person had his / her own obligations, his were to the society, and hers to their family. Moreover, the theme of obligation towards others, especially the needy

ones would become one of the topics of Tam's literary endeavors. The feature of an enlightened intellectual whose aim is to work for the good of others would also become a recurrent topic of Tam's stories focused on the peasant question.

Secondly, a *junzi* should display a strong sense of honor and should strive for political success. This feature of a *junzi* personality can also be found throughout Tam's life. As it is apparent Tam had become interested in politics in his twenties, when he left his family and moved south to Cochinchina, where he strove to start publishing a newspaper. He made his first shy steps into the world of politics by taking part in student demonstrations on the occasion of Phan Chu Trinh's funeral in 1926. He escaped arrest only due to the fact that he had not received any party membership card yet. It is known of him that during his stay in France in 1927 – 1930 he avoided the world of politics - only to return to it in about ten years time. In the first half of the 1930s due to French repressions in Indochina, it was difficult to engage in politics. However, the very moment the overall political situation eased in Indochina when the Popular Front had come to power in France, Tam as well as many others immediately immersed himself into the political world. In 1939 he had established his own political party, then merged with the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*). Throughout the World War II he was active in political squabbles of Vietnamese parties exiled in Kunming. In 1945 he would return to Vietnam to become the Prime Minister of Hồ Chí Minh's provisional government. Even though Tam would eventually become tired of politics, it was difficult for him to stay away from it – as the purpose of mission was probably much stronger than he himself had expected.

Tam had tried to retire from the world of politics twice. First, after his return from Hong Kong in 1951 and then in 1955 when he had moved to

Đà Lạt. I am convinced that even this withdrawal from politics was yet another of his political statements. To a certain extent, Tam's behavior resembled the hostile withdrawal from their posts and silence that the Vietnamese Confucian literati displayed when the French had colonized Indochina. Just like them Tam retreated not only from the political life of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North as well as from the political scene in the South, i.e. Republic of Vietnam. Tam retreated to Đà Lạt, where he devoted most of his time to collecting, studying and drawing orchids – launching a complete orchid craze among the inhabitants of the city. The question that comes to one's mind is whether Tam's obsession with orchids was just another of his pass-times or whether it was a hidden political statement.

In the Chinese culture shared by traditional Vietnamese literature, orchid carries an important symbolical meaning, i.e. the flower is perceived as the symbol of a “lofty spirit of upright literati often alienated from the court” (Zhou 2003: 135). Chinese minister and poet identified with this fragile flower was Qu Yuan (340 – 278 BC). In his well known poem “Encountering Sorrow”, which is considered as a depiction of his own lot, i.e. a loyal minister who became alienated from his master, he “twines autumn orchids to make a garland” as a symbol of personality, marginality and dissident sentiments (Zhou 2003: 135). As Maggie Bickford points out the association of an orchid “with neglected and rejected virtue was underscored by the wild flower's natural situation: growing hidden in the shade, orchids also stood for the superior scholars in seclusion” (Bickford 1996: 802-807). Thus, orchids have become symbols of superior, high-principled men.

In addition, we can also find many similarities between the life of the poet Qu Yuan and Nguyễn Tường Tam. Firstly, both of them were men of

virtue and great learning. Secondly, both of them had been politically active as ministers. Qu Yuan served as a high minister at the court of the king Huai (d. 296 BC). On the other hand, Tam served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Hồ Chí Minh's provisional government. In the beginning, both of them enjoyed the trust of their masters. Thirdly, Qu Yuan and Tam both fell out of favour due to slander, accusations and political intrigues. Fourthly, both of them were forced to leave the political arena and live in exile. Fifthly, both of them would eventually commit suicide. Qu Yuan had chosen drowning himself in the Miluo River, while Tam would use the mixture of alcohol and veronal to commit suicide.

Tam had first received the traditional Confucian education as his father, a Confucian mandarin, led him when Tam was making his very first steps into the world of education. Via this educational beginning Tam acquired a profound relationship to Chinese culture, which might have had a more salient impact on him that is apparent at first sight. Tam's obsession with orchids was not a mere pastime, it was yet another oblique political statement. It may seem paradoxical, that Tam as an ardent anti-Confucian had associated himself with the Confucian symbol of an orchid. The only conclusion that we can make is that he had been imbued with Confucian values more than he himself might have realized.

As has been mentioned above, a *junzi* should also be fearless and in all his undertakings display potency, audacity, persistence, strength of purpose, will power and perseverance. During his literary and political power Tam had always been courageous, determined and persevering. In the literary and journalistic sphere, he had fulfilled all his dreams of publishing a satirical magazine – a rather arduous task due to French censorship. In my opinion, he had also revealed a strong sense of determination, perseverance and courage in all his political activities. Many authors consider his

political career as more or less disastrous due to his obstinacy, inflexibility and lack of negotiating skills. On the other hand, if we change the perspective a little, this rigidity might not have been an expression of his incapacity in politics but rather a manifestation of his strength of purpose and conviction. Through out his life Tam had fought for what he believed in not making any compromises. He was determined and persevering in fighting for what he believed was true. Thus, even in political intrigues he stayed loyal to his own convictions.

This leads us to another feature of a *junzi*. A true Confucian gentleman should manifest a strong moral mission in pursuing the Way despite the possible destructive outcomes since in Confucianism the pursuit of moral obligation is the ultimate goal of one's life. From the above mentioned lines, it is apparent that Tam had always pursued his personal moral mission regardless of the possible negative consequences. He had always fought for his truth, for his vision of social justice regardless the fact that he had been persecuted by the French, imprisoned by the armies of Kuomintang in China, had seen his friends and colleagues killed, and had been slandered by the Communists as well as the Diêm regime. Therefore, even at this point we can conclude that Tam was a *junzi* – always loyal to and unwavering in pursuing the Way.

To a certain extent even his suicide was yet another negative consequence of his pursuit of his moral mission and social justice. Tam's message said: "Let history be my judge, I refuse to accept any other judgment. The arrest and detention of nationalist opposition elements is a serious crime, and it will cause the country to be lost in the hands of Communists. I oppose these acts and sentence myself to death... as a warning to those who would trample upon freedom of every kind." In this regard even in his suicide Tam remained a *junzi* as he acted in line with Mencius' concept of life and

dutifulness. Mencius had said that “Life is what I want, dutifulness is also what I want. If I cannot have both, I would rather take dutifulness than life” (Guo 2002: 55). Tam too remained dutiful till the very last day of his life.

As a true *junzi* Tam was also known for his altruism and modesty. He had lived a simple and modest life, striving to achieve his dreams willing to sacrifice much of comfort. Moreover, a *junzi* should display a sense of self-discipline. According to the memoirs of his friends, Tam was extremely disciplined in his everyday life – especially in his work. He was known to have been very hard working and had utterly devoted himself to publishing his magazines, which he did in a very organized manner. As a true *junzi* he strove for individual freedom and self-development. He was known to have been very demanding and would spend hours writing and re-writing his work aiming for perfection – unfortunately often to such an extent that writing became almost impossible for him to finish his writings in the latter years of his life.

As shall be shown in the following chapters devoted to Tam’s literary activities – this contradiction of Tam being a proponent of modernization and Westernization, yet remaining a Confucian *junzi* reappears in most of his writings. His Heroines are the embodiments of Confucian virtues, his Heroes are intellectuals (often with Western education) who display deep sympathy for the needy and whose mission is to work for the benefit of the less fortunate ones. Thus, Tam’s writings also reveal the contradiction that at first sight Tam promoted “radical individualism” and a break from the tradition, on the other hand his heroines and heroes remained very traditional in their behavior and did not find the courage to smash the oppressive yokes of convention. Thus, their liberation was the outcome of external forces that they did not control rather than the result of their “free act” through which they would willfully smash traditional customs. Thus,

as will be shown below, paradoxically, in many of his writings Tam actually reinstated Confucian values, which he seemed to denounce so ardently.

4. Nguyễn Tường Tam in Journalism

The ten years (1930 – 1940) of Tam's life were probably the most successful and the most productive in his existence; they encompassed his active career of a journalist and writer and were marked by his foundation of the leading literary group of the 1930s called *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). This group aimed not only to incite social reforms but also to create literature that would be Vietnamese in contents and form.

4.1. Naissance of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine

After having gained editorial control of the waning *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine in 1932, Nguyễn Tường Tam and his associates strove to reorganize it from content to form. Despite being convinced that they could succeed, Tam was, nevertheless, haunted by doubts. His younger brother Nguyễn Tường Bách recalled that Tam was worried that the magazine would be unmarketable (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). Therefore, the young journalists launched an advertising campaign in order to attract the attention of the reading public. Nguyễn Tường Tam humorously described their promotional activities subsequently:

“...we decided to launch a large and unprecedented advertising campaign, which meant that we went to buy some *Đáp Cầu* paper of purple and white color, then we carefully closed the door of the editorial office, took out scissors and cut the white paper into a shape of a white moon that we then glued onto the purple paper, which was supposed to represent the sky. We smacked our tongues in admiration and praised our abilities. We wrote a few very modest and courteous sentences on the advertisement: “A rarity that has never been seen in journalism: 7 cents.” Then, because we wanted everybody to pay attention to our moon, we cut out an arrowhead, which we glued on in such a way that it was piercing the moon, as if we wanted to say to all the passers-by: “Look!” A few days later,

after we had glued several tens of those advertisements on the walls in the city, nobody could see anything, because they were dirty and unsightly. (...) Now and then, the “moon”, which was not glued properly, fell off, and only the purple sky and a few words “A rarity: 7 cents” were visible. At that moment, the pedestrians started looking at the sign with interest, but they did not understand what kind of an advertisement was it to be so extravagant, to advertise something and not tell what rarity it concerned, just stating the price of seven cents. Some people guessed that this seven-cent rarity was a new kind of sauce that was tastier than soya-oil or maggi.” (Nhật Linh 2004).

In addition to the above-mentioned and rather unsuccessful promotion efforts, Tam launched a campaign on the pages of the existing *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine. On September 9th, 1932, issue of the journal one could read the following publicity (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980):

A big change for the better of the *Phong Hoá* magazine

A rarity in the newspaper sphere

An innovation

Issued on September 22, 1932

A new issue of *Phong Hoá* will be published.

It will discuss humorously all pressing social, political and economical problems.

It will clearly cover the status quo in the country

It will have fifteen cartoons and a lot of humorous stories.

It will be useful.

It will be active.

It will be funny....

All who need to read newspapers! Who like to read newspapers!

Must read *Phong Hoá*!

Moreover, walking through the streets of Hanoi one could see posters advertising the magazine at almost every intersection (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 44). On the placard there was a red phoenix and under it the subsequent text:

“The weekly is going to be issued on Friday. It will include columns on politics, society, trade, literature and women prepared by really talented writers. The first issue will be published September 22nd, 1932 and will contain articles: *Mấy lời phi lộ* (Several words of introduction) by Nhất Linh, *Từ nhỏ đến lớn* (From small to big) by Tú Ly (i.e. Nguyễn Tường Long), column *Hạt đậu dọn* (Sieved beans) on page 13, *Bông lúa vàng* (Golden Rice), a story by Khải Hưng, treatise on traditional poetry...and satirical poetry of Tú Mỡ, short literary works of Thạch Lam, and other very interesting, extremely funny writings of authors having good reputation in the community of writers and journalists!” (Cited from Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 44)

The advertisement did indeed cause a sensation amongst the readership for no one had previously heard of the “reputable” writers such as Nhất Linh, Khải Hưng, Tú Mỡ, Thạch Lam, and Tú Ly before (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 44-45). Thus, the first issue under the direction of Tam was published on September 22, 1932 (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 44), and as the advertisement had pointed out it was markedly different from the previous newspaper. The cover was changed and *Phong Hoá* (Customs) became the first literary and satirical magazine in Vietnam. On the front page one could read slogans, such as “being satirical in order to change the backward customs of the country” or “the objective of the newspaper is...to do away with the bad customs and practices, only to accept the good ones in order to advance the progress of the country...” (Dutton 2007: 86). In accord with these statements, cartoons and caricatures were often printed on the front page of the magazine. This practice indubitably also contributed to increasing the sales of the journal (Dutton 2007: 86).

Nguyễn Tường Tam and his group not only wanted to reform society but also launched a campaign encouraging merriment and pleasure in life: “Vietnamese society is now in the stage of transition...the journal *Phong Hoá* (Customs) is published in order to bring at least a little cheeriness to this society...” (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 1994:154, Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 398). They

were not the only ones to have done so. Due to the fact that French had been harsh in suppressing any political activities that endangered their colonial regime, a gloomy atmosphere of depression and bitterness in the Vietnamese society was prevailing. In order to disperse the melancholy, they encouraged the publishing of all kinds of humoristic trends. Therefore, the first five years of the 1930s were witness to many humoristic trends in Vietnamese newspapers. Newspapers were literally scattered with humorous cartoons, caricatures, jokes, etc., which the readers were also encouraged to contribute, and the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) was not in variance with this trend. For example in November 1932, the editorial board of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine launched a “Joking Competition”, the aim of which was to encourage readers to participate and submit their jokes in order to enhance the overall atmosphere of cheerfulness in the society:

Man in a barber’s chair: Don’t tell me more stories about murders and people hanging themselves; it makes my hair stand on end.

Barber: That’s why I’m telling you.

An American millionaire is trolling past a shop with his private secretary, when he notices a beautiful sales-girl in the shop and immediately goes into it.

Millionaire: Can I buy a kiss?

Sales-girl (startled, but still smiling and composed): Yes Sir, it’ll cost 1,000 francs.

Millionaire: OK, here’s the money. Now let me have the goods.

Sales-girl (turning to an ugly old woman with a pock-marked face): OK, give him the goods.

Millionaire (calmly turning to his secretary): Come here and collect the goods.

First thief: You’ve just stolen a very nice hat.

Second thief: No, I bought it for two piastres.

First thief: Where did you get the two piastres?

Second thief: I stole them. (*Phong Hoá*, 18. Nov. 1932, p.12; 25 Nov. 1932, p. 6; 21 July 1933, p. 18; Quoted from Lockhart 1994: 89).

In the first issues Tam utilized all the articles and drawings that he had intended to publish in the never materialized *Tiếng Cười* (Laughter) magazine that he had wanted to conceive after the famous French magazine *Le Rire*. Thanks to Tam's ideas and innovations, the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) was transformed into one of the most famous weeklies in Vietnam. Its success was also due to the fact that the magazine responded well to the expectations not only of the intellectual circles, but also to the needs of the common people. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan described the reasons behind the excited reaction of the public subsequently: "One was conscious of being on the eve of a literary revolution directed by a group of young writers who were aware of their power and also of the support of a public tired of novels and the soporific journals of the old school" (Durand – Nguyen Tran Huan 1969: 206-207).

Tam's younger brother Nguyễn Tường Bách recalled that when reading the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine one could see that the editorial team had a clearly stated line and vowed to: 1) enthusiastically pursue a new way and find new ideals; 2) never give way to prejudices; 3) never be enslaved and never yield to any authority; 4) be sincere in essence; 5) use satire as a method of expression (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980, Tú Mỡ 1988: 105).

Nguyễn Tường Tam, already known among his friends and colleagues for his perfectionism, immersed himself into work again. Trương Bảo Sơn recalled that when publishing the magazines *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day) Nguyễn Tường Tam "would sleep only four or five hours a day, and except three meals lasting only ten minutes, he would carry out all the work connected to the newspaper: he wrote articles, drew the covers, illustrated the poems, wrote articles about newspapers, prepared the articles for print; at the same time he received guests, went to meet with writers, poets, all colleagues and guests" (Trương Bảo Sơn 1997: 346). In

addition, Nguyễn Tường Tam had the gift of involving those around him and soon everybody was working ceaselessly on the articles for the magazine. His close friend, the satirical poet Tú Mỡ recalled that “everybody was working day and night, mainly at night, consuming lots of coffee and cigarettes, working till excoriating their bodies.” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 533) Tú Mỡ was also carried away by the enthusiasm of the Nguyễn Tường brothers that he followed their example to such an extent that his wife “was not satisfied and was worried that I would get sick. But when she did not succeed in dissuading me, she would scold and threaten me that she would go to see “uncle Tam” to protest.” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 534)

The members of the team would meet on Saturday evenings in the editorial office located in the Quan Thánh Street no. 80. As Tú Mỡ recalled, those meetings had been very “familial” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 535). There they would eat *phở*, drink coffee that Khái Hưng’s wife had made and discuss their work (Tú Mỡ 2000: 535). All of them seemed to compete with each other in creativity and as Tú Mỡ admitted, he often started feeling unbearably anxious when he had not managed to issue some poem in the *Giòng nước ngược* (Against the current) column (Tú Mỡ 2000: 535).

Beside the regular Saturday meetings, the group liked to organize short one-day trips to the countryside at least once a month.⁹⁰ They either went by train or they borrowed the old car of Nguyễn Cao Luyện (1907 – 1987), fellow journalist and architect, and drove to visit famous pagodas and beautiful landscapes such as the temple Lý Bát Đế, the pagodas Tiên, Trầm, Trầm Gian, Phật Tích (Tú Mỡ 2000: 535). When the weather was good on Sunday mornings, they used to set out, taking bread, grilled chicken, white wine and cold water with them. They would have a pastoral picnic under a tree or on some hilltop and then walk around the countryside

⁹⁰ For a picture of the group on one of their trips see the Picture Supplement, p. 326.

and in the evening they would return back to Hanoi. As Tú Mỡ recalled, everybody came back from such a trip with something to write about (Tú Mỡ 2000: 535).

It was during one of those trips that the name of the group was invented. The members of the editorial office of *Phong Hoá* (Customs) journal decided to provide a more cohesive organization to their literary activities. Thus, in 1933 during a picnic in Lạng Sơn by the Tiên stream they organized themselves as the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), which was to play a major role in the modernization process of Vietnamese literature. In the book *Chân Dung Nhất Linh* (Nhất Linh's Portrait), the author Nhật Thịnh notes down a conversation recalled by one of the group members – the poet Thế Lữ:

- Not seven, but six! Look, there's Nhất Linh, Tú Mỡ, Hoàng Đạo, Thạch Lam, Khái Hưng, Thế Lữ. That comes to six altogether.

Nhất Linh put in:

- All of you have forgotten Nguyễn Gia Trí, haven't you? Missing him out is as if our group totally "lacked intelligence."

The whole group was quiet. Nhất Linh continued:

- We must come up with some name, which would be in accordance with the independent line of our group. The content of our thoughts is not to be slaves to religion, slaves to customs or to yield to anything that comes from the outside. Concerning the form, we shouldn't write according to Western or Chinese literature. My goal are stories of Vietnamese people that take place in Vietnam, in Vietnamese setting. What do you think?

Khái Hưng shouted loudly:

- So, I've already found it.

All the group bombarded him with questions:

- What is the name? Thất Tinh (Seven Stars)?
- Neither „Thất Tinh“ (Seven Stars) nor “Thất Tụng”(Missing Person). I name it “Tự Động” (Self-acting, self-propelled, automatic) once and for all.

Thế Lữ added:

- Take notice that the people could mistake it with a car, which would be bad. Do you remember, when the journal Nam Phong (Southern Wind) was established, Mr. Phạm Quỳnh called a car as “tự động” (self-propeller). If we call ourselves like that people are going to think that we are advertising some vehicle agency that would be mortifying.

Khái Hưng explained:

- “Tự Động” (self-acting, self-propelled) means that we move by ourselves, that we act ourselves, that we are neither influenced by anybody, nor controlled by any force. The two words “tự động” (self-acting, self-propelled) are very interesting, don’t you think? The group “Tự Động” is an independent group that does not live dependently on somebody’s allowance.

Nhật Linh nodded repeatedly:

- Interesting but it still reminds me too much of a car! There is the smell of petrol everywhere. Or what if we find a word similar to “tự động” (self-acting, self-propelled), for instance “tự lập” (independent) or “tự lực” (self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-strength)... Oh, yes, “Tự Lực Đoàn” (Self-Reliant Group), do you agree?

Thế Lữ mumbled for a while, then said:

- I agree with the name, especially with the meaning. But those three words seem lame. If you don’t believe me, read it out loud to see for yourself. “Tự Lực Đoàn”, there you see? The sound is displeasing

Khái Hưng laughed:

- And where is the problem? If it’s lame, let’s just add in one more foot. Nothing to be worried about. So let’s change it to “Tự Lực Văn Đoàn” (Self-Reliant Literary Group). What do you think? (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 130-131)

The need for creating a name for their circle was probably motivated by the French fashion of names and slogans describing “literary groups”. The name *Tự Lực* (Self-Strength) was chosen deliberately as a proclamation of direct opposition to the then prevalent Phạm Quỳnh’s magazine *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) subsidized by the French. Nguyễn Tường Tam and his collaborators wanted to declare, that they unlike Phạm Quỳnh were independent and free from French control (Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 113). As shall be noted below, Nguyễn Tường Tam and his group did not

advocate limited change. On the contrary, in their writings and essays they promoted a radical transformation in order to overcome the conflict between the traditional and the new, which had been tearing the Vietnamese society apart since the arrival of the French.

After having founded the group, Tam suggested a slogan that was supposed to characterize their creative endeavors: “*Trước vui thích, sau ích lợi*” (First comes pleasure, then utility) (O’Harrow 1968: 218, Nhật Thịnh 1986: 131).

4.2. Members of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) Editorial Office

When creating the editorial office of the magazine, Tam first invited his brothers and close friends to participate. Thus, Nguyễn Tường Long (1907 – 1948), alias Tứ Ly or Hoàng Đạo, joined the team. Just like Tam, he received his basic education in the village of Cẩm Giang, and then continued his secondary schooling in Hanoi. In 1930 he passed the entrance exams to the Law Faculty of Hanoi University (Trường Luật Hà Nội). After having completed his studies he held the post of a clerk at the court in Đà Nẵng. He then recorded this experience in his collection of short stories *Trước vành móng ngựa* (In the Defendant’s box, 1938). In 1932 he heard out the call of Tam and came to Hanoi to help him with publishing the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine. His first pseudonym was Tứ Ly, which denotes a “bad, unlucky hour” (*giờ xấu*), an hour that most Vietnamese tried to avoid.⁹¹ However, his uncompromising critique of the French administration soon resulted in the Sûreté closely watching him. Therefore, he changed his nom de plume again, this time to Hoàng Đạo,

⁹¹ According to the Vietnamese traditional calendar a day comprises of 12 hours. One hour lasts 120 minutes. In a day there are six “bad, unlucky hours” called “*giờ Tứ Ly*” and six “good, favorable hours” (*giờ hoàng đạo*).

which was the opposite of Tứ Ly (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 128). Hoàng Đạo soon became not only a harsh critic of the French presence in Vietnam, but also the main theoretician of the group drafting their manifesto first published in a series of articles called *Mười điều tâm niệm của ban trẻ* (Ten vows of the youth) in the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine in 1936. After 1939, he would also become Tam's closest political advisor and associate and his tragic death in 1948 would be a severe blow for Tam.

Soon afterward Tam's friend Trần Khánh Giur (1896 – 1947?), mostly known as Khái Hưng⁹², joined the editorial team as a correspondent. He signed his contributions under many pseudonyms, such as Nhị Linh, Nhất Linh, Tam Linh, Bách Linh, some of which Tam also used. Therefore, concerning the first articles in the papers, it is difficult to state whether the author was actually Trần Khánh Giur or Nguyễn Tường Tam (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 47). Trần Khánh Giur was the most discreet of the whole group. He was born into a well-off family, his father Trần Mỹ being a district mandarin in the Thái Bình province. Trần Khánh Giur received his education at the prestigious Albert Sarraut School in Hanoi and obtained his bachelor diploma in philosophy in 1927. With his education and talent he could have held a secure position in the colonial administration, but he refused for he hated the notion of leading a dependent life (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 128). Apparently, he shared this conviction with Nguyễn Tường Tam. Before commencing his career of a journalist, he was also active as petrol wholesaler in Ninh Giang (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 102). From 1931 he taught at the famous Thăng Long private school in Hanoi, where he met with Tam, who not only shared many of his opinions but also appreciated his literary talent. At that time Trần Khánh Giur published his humorous stories or leading articles for several newspapers in Hanoi. Some of his writings were also published in the former *Phong Hoá* (Customs)

⁹² For his portrait see the Picture Supplement, p. 327.

magazine under the direction of Phạm Hữu Ninh. Later on, Tam and Giur would work closely together in creating the new *Phong Hoá* (Customs) journal and also on writing prose together. Meanwhile, Trần Khánh Giur and his wife lived a modest life in a small apartment above the editorial office of the magazine. Since they had no children of their own, they adopted with Nguyễn Tường Tam's consent his third son Triều (born 15 November 1932). In the years 1933 – 1944 Trần Khánh Giur (Khái Hưng) wrote more than twelve novels, which would become classics of Vietnamese literature, five collections of stories, four stories for children and three collections of stories written together with Nguyễn Tường Tam.

At the beginning of 1933 this group of journalists was enlarged by the arrival of a young and talented poet Nguyễn Thứ Lễ⁹³ (1907 – 1989), later famous under his pen name Thế Lữ (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 48). He was born in the Thái Hà village in the vicinity of Hanoi, but spent most of his childhood years in the North Vietnamese province of Lạng Sơn, where his father worked. He received a thorough education in Chinese literary language and also in the roman script (*chữ quốc ngữ*). After having completed his secondary education, he came to Hanoi in 1929 and applied to the L'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de L'Indochine (Fine Arts College of Indochina), the same school that Tam had attended a few years earlier. However, a year later he gave up his studies rather abruptly after a rash argument with his teachers and the director of the school. Nevertheless, while studying at this institution he had had the opportunity to meet with other promising painters and intellectuals such as Nguyễn Đỗ Cung (1912 – 1977), Trần Bình Lộc (1914 – 1941), Vũ Đình Liên (1913 – 1996), Hoàng Lập Ngôn (1910 - 2006), with whom he had established a *salon littéraire* where they exchanged their opinions not only on literature. At this time, he already devoted himself to writing.

⁹³ For his portrait see the Picture Supplement, p. 327.

It was his prose that first caught the eye of Nguyễn Tường Tam. Tam first came across Thế Lữ's story *Một đêm trăng* (One Moonlit Night) in the *Nông công Thương* (Agriculture, Industry and Trade) newspapers and then his novel *Vàng và máu* (Gold and Blood), style of which Tam found absolutely impeccable (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 129). This was probably due to the fact that the rational, logic and the scientific spirit, in which the novel was written, appealed to the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). The structure of the novel is very well organized and in a very scientific and logical way explained the mystery of a Chinese hiding gold in the grotto Văn Đú. The detective, a Vietnamese mandarin, solves the mystery by using the means of logical reasoning, deduction, observation, etc. (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 139). Since having read this novel, Tam, who shared the same outlook, wanted to meet the author of these two stories and then they finally met by chance in the editorial office of *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and their future collaboration was sealed (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 49).

Thế Lữ would then become one of the leading poets in the New Poetry movement (*Thơ Mới*). Throughout 1933 – 1936 his poems were then published on the pages of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs), and then the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazines. He was one of the first Vietnamese poets, in whose poetry we can discern the influence of French poets, mainly of Alphonse de Lamartine (1790 – 1869). Just like Tam, he displayed a certain disdain for the traditional society and traditional ways of life. While a traditionally educated Vietnamese valued his own reputation conforming to the expectations imposed on him by the society, Thế Lữ systematically worked on creating the image of an independent individual walking against the current.

Nguyễn Tường Tam, Nguyễn Tường Long, Trần Khánh Giu and Thế Lữ originally formed the core of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), which was gradually enlarged by their friends, e.g. Tam's close friend from the Financial Bureau Hồ Trọng Hiếu (1900 – 1976), later known as one of the most famous satiric poets Tú Mỡ, became the head of the poetry section. Hồ Trọng Hiếu was born in 1900 in Hanoi, where he also attended school. After obtaining his baccalaureate diploma in 1918, he worked at the Financial Bureau in Hanoi, where he and Tam met and became life-long friends. In 1932 Hồ Trọng Hiếu became the member of the editorial office of the magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs), where he was responsible for the section known as *Dòng nước ngược* (Against the Current), where he published his satirical poems as well as of his contemporaries. His poems are characteristic for their connection of topical problems with the form of traditional folk songs – *ca dao*. In his poetry he denigrated the two-faced democracy of colonial Indochina claiming that unhappiness of the people stems from illiteracy.

Tam's second younger brother Nguyễn Tường Lân⁹⁴ (1910-1942), who was at that time studying at the University of Hanoi, became the editor of the short story section and would later be known under the name of Thạch Lam or Việt Sinh for the news reports. He had studied at the famous Albert Sarraut Lycée and then had applied for scholarship in France, but was declined due to his young age. Therefore, he applied for study at the Fine Arts College of Indochina. In 1931 he immersed himself into the world of journalism and literature. He was also trying to strengthen his fragile health. At that time one of his friends was Nguyen Kim Hoan, a member of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*), who had been arrested and tortured by the French. He would seek relief from the

⁹⁴ For his portrait see the Picture Supplement, p. 328.

pain in smoking opium. Nguyễn Tường Lân would often accompany him to the opium dens of Hanoi creating an addiction himself. Through this experience, he would, unlike his brothers who frequented the intellectual milieu, stay close to the ordinary people and people of the lower class, which was also reflected in his writings.

At the beginning it was Nguyễn Tường Tam, who had drawn all the cartoons and comics for his magazine. Later on the painter Trần Bình Lộc (1914 –1941) joined him in this endeavor. Soon after, two other painters became the members of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) journal and the group. Nguyễn Gia Trí (1908-1993), who met Nguyễn Tường Tam in 1933, was still studying at the L'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de L'Indochine (Fine Arts College of Indochina) and was renowned for his talent. According to Nhật Thịnh, Nguyễn Gia Trí was invited to participate in the activities of *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) after he had brought to show a humorous picture of a barber absorbed in cutting hair, whilst the main idea of the drawing was to ridicule both the backward practices of the Vietnamese people, the officers of the French administration and the French themselves (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 129; Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 49). Despite the fact that Tam did not dare to publish the caricature, he requested Nguyễn Gia Trí to join the editorial staff (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 50). Nguyễn Gia Trí then contributed many cartoons denigrating the French colonial spirit and Vietnamese traditions that he signed as *Raitơ* (Vietnamese transcription of the English word “right”).

The group was soon joined by another talented painter known as Nguyễn Cát Tường⁹⁵ (1911-1946), also known as Le Mur (meaning “the wall” in French). At the age of seventeen he was admitted into the Fine Arts

⁹⁵ For his portrait see the Picture Supplement, p. 328.

College of Indochina (Cao Đẳng Mỹ Thuật Hà Nội), where he graduated in 1934. In the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine he was responsible for the trend-setting fashion column of the magazine (Zinoman 2005: 19).

He became famous for his re-creation of the Vietnamese traditional dress *áo dài*, which he designed as “light-colored, close-fitting tunics featured longer panels, puffy sleeves; asymmetrical lace collars, buttoned cuffs, scalloped hems, and darts at the waist and chest. Lemur’s Europeanized flared pants were white with snugly tailored hips” (Wakefield 2007). His version of *áo dài* worn by the model Nguyễn Thị Hậu appeared on the front page of the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine in January 1935 and caused a veritable sensation (Vu Gia 2000: 242). The introduction of such a bold French-influenced dress sent shock waves through the traditional Vietnamese society and only the most audacious young women dared to wear it. But within time the new attire spread from Hanoi and Saigon also to rural areas.

Then another painter Tô Ngọc Vãn (1908 – 1954) became a member of the group and participated in creating the satirical cartoons not only for *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine, but also for *Ngày Nay* (This Day). In *Ngày Nay* (This Day) it was him, who was responsible for the section called *Cuốn Sổ Tay* (Notebook), which he signed as Tô Tử (Nhật Thịnh, 1986: 36). He was also known under the pseudonym Ái Mỹ.

The endeavors of the group were a success and the newspaper sold well. Nevertheless, throughout the first year the editorial office was struggling with financial problems. According to Tú Mỡ, the staff voluntarily received only 50 đồng as a salary, while the saved money was re-invested into the newspaper (Tú Mỡ 2000: 538). According to the memoirs of Nguyễn Thị Thế, Tam’s younger sister, the editors got only 30 đồng a

month, thus Tam could survive due to his wife's business, Nguyễn Tường Long (Hoàng Đạo) had to find another job, while Nguyễn Tường Lâm (Thạch Lam) contended with the sum and lived a meagre life (Nguyễn Thị Thế 1974: 103).

The main problem was obtaining enough money for the printing house and Tam had a hard time making both ends meet. The situation was solved temporarily, when a certain doctor Luyên, having sympathies toward the magazine, offered some capital enabling Tam to open his own publishing house called *An-nam Xuất bản cục* (Annam Publishing Office) (Tú Mỡ 2000: 538). However, this at first sight advantageous arrangement did not last very long, for the financial closure at the end of the year revealed, that the only one who had profited from the situation was the “generous“ doctor himself (Tú Mỡ 2000: 538-539). This discovery even more emphasized the necessity of establishing an independent group, which could be self-sufficient.

For some time the group also co-operated with the publishing house *Trung Bắc Tân văn* (Trung Bắc News). Soon afterwards, Tam founded the publishing house *Đời Nay*, so that the group could publish not only its writings, but also work of other talented authors. Thus, the writings of other young talented novelists, poets, playwrights such as Vi Huyền Đắc (1899 – 1976), Vũ Ngọc Phan (1902 – 1987), Vũ Hoàng Chương (1916 – 1976, Nguyễn Hồng (1918 – 1982), Anh Thơ (1921 – 2005), Tế Hanh (1921) were published there. The group tried to encourage the literary endeavors of young gifted writers by awarding prizes, and publishing and distributing their works. Moreover, in cooperation with the painters Nguyễn Gia Trí and Tô Ngọc Vân, who illustrated the covers and the books themselves, the group soon succeeded in producing beautiful publications, which the other publishing houses of the time such as *Nam*

Ký, Tân Dân, Mai Lĩnh, Cộng Lực, Minh Phương, Lê Cường, Tân Việt could not compete with.

In addition, the publishing house *Đời Nay* also printed a series of cheap books called *Lá Mạ* (Leaves of rice seedling plants) that were sold for about 0,25 USD and textbooks for children called *Sách Hồng* (Pink Books) (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 132). On the occasion of festivals such as Tết Nguyên Đán and Tết Trung Thu (Mid-Autumn Festival) they introduced the concept of special issues, e.g. *Đặc biệt về Trung Thu* (Mid-Autumn Special), *Số Xuân* (Spring Issue) or *Giai Phẩm* (Literary Selection) (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 132). Soon afterwards other publishing houses copied this idea and flooded the market with similar supplements and magazine specials (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 132).

Shortly after the establishment of the magazine in 1932, Tam suddenly received an invitation from the Imperial court in Huế, i.e. from Phạm Quỳnh, the Chief of Cabinet and Minister of Education, to come and teach at the prestigious *Trung học Khải Định*⁹⁶ secondary school in Huế (Tú Mỡ 2000: 542). The group perceived this act as an artifice of the government to lure Nguyễn Tường Tam away from the magazine, which would in its consequences cease to exist (Tú Mỡ 2000: 542). Tam declined the offer, despite the fact that it was the government of Annam, which had enabled him to get a scholarship in France. Furthermore, Tam and his colleagues

⁹⁶ The school was established in 1896 in Huế on the order of the king Thành Thái. It was one of the first secondary schools in the imperial city, where instruction was conducted in Vietnamese and French. It changed names many times: : École Primaire Supérieure, i.e. Trường Cao đẳng Tiểu học (1896-1936), Trung học Khải Định (1936-1954), Trung học Ngô Đình Diệm (1955-1956). Since 1956 it has been called Trường Quốc Học. During its apogee, many future outstanding personalities of Vietnamese intellectual and political life pursued their studies there, such as: Nguyễn Sinh Cung (i.e. future president of the DRV Hồ Chí Minh, Ngô Đình Diệm (i.e. the future president of the Republic of Vietnam), Trần Phú (the future first general secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party), Phạm Văn Đồng (future Premier of DRV), Võ Nguyên Giáp (famous general, the instigator of French defeat in Indochina), historian Đào Duy Anh, poets Xuân Diệu, Huy Cận, Lưu Trọng Lư and many others.

started publishing even harsher critiques of the mandarin system in Annam, taking Phạm Quỳnh as the main target of their assaults.

4.3. Policy Statement and Contents of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) Magazine

On March 2nd, 1934 the group published its policy statement, drafted by Hoàng Đạo, in their *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine. In it the members swore (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 131):

- 1) With all its strength to write works having literary value and not translate foreign literature if those books are only of literary kind. The aim is to enrich Vietnamese literature.
- 2) To prepare and translate books, which have social significance in order to elevate the individual and the society.
- 3) To be “popular”, i.e. to write books that have a popular character and also to encourage others to appreciate populism.
- 4) To use a simple and comprehensible style containing Sino-Vietnamese words the least the possible. To use a style that would be solely Vietnamese.
- 5) To be always new, youthful, to love life and to have enthusiastic thinking and to believe in progress.
- 6) To praise interesting features, beautiful pictures of the country having popular character and thus make people love their country in a popular way. Not to have a bourgeois or aristocratic character.
- 7) To enforce individual freedom.
- 8) To disseminate the opinion that Confucianism is out-dated.
- 9) To introduce Western scientific concepts into Vietnamese literature.

- 10) Following only one of the previous nine points is correct, unless it is not against the other points.

This declaration was then materialized in the content of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine, which was divided into many sections that attracted the attention of the public. The periodical comprised of the following segments (Tú Mỡ 2000: 533):

- 1) *Từ cao đến thấp* (From tall to short), which focused on people and their lives;
- 2) *Từ nhỏ đến lớn* (From small to big) that concentrated on things;
- 3) *Bàn ngang* (Contrary discussions), it was Tú Ly, i.e. Nguyễn Tường Long, who was responsible for these three sections;
- 4) Then there was the humorous and attractive column *Vui cười* (Joyful Laughing), where all the members of the editorial office as well as the public published their contributions, such as jokes, anecdotes and humorous stories;
- 5) Another section was called the *Những hạt đậu dợn* (Sieved beans). It was designed to amuse people with sentences gathered in the press that had been written carelessly, incorrectly and ridiculously. Trần Khánh Giur, under the penname Nhất Dao Cạo oversaw this section. Nevertheless, due to the slight snobbery with which the group presented the factual mistakes or grammatical errors of the other journalists, they did enhance feelings of bitterness amongst many and an overall elitist impression of the group (Zinoman 2005: 20);
- 6) Trần Khánh Giur was also responsible for another section called *Cuộc điếm báo* (Survey of daily press), which presented preposterous articles selected from the daily press at the same time pointing out the factual mistakes and grammar errors;

- 7) Then, there was the poetry section called *Giòng nước ngược* (Against the current), which presented satirical poetry and was headed by the poet Tú Mỡ. His satirical poems were another characteristic and also specific trait of the journal. His verse appealed to all the readers across different backgrounds and was probably the most “Vietnamese” in comparison with the genre of short stories or the “new poetry”, which were influenced by the West as he preferred to write in traditional literary forms such as *lục bát* (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980).
- 8) In addition, there were columns with the first news reports (*phóng sự*). Thus, through the accounts written by Việt Sinh (Thạch Lam) and Trường Khanh, the readers could find out about the nightlife in Hanoi and all phenomena connected to it, such as opium dens, gambling, prostitution (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). Focusing on such a topic was something absolutely new in Vietnamese literature.
- 9) Short stories and novels published in the column *Hương Xa, Hoa Lạ* (Distant fragrance, strange flowers) served as an example of literary work for other Vietnamese authors. The so far prevailing elevated literary style influenced by Chinese literature was replaced by a lively, simple and comprehensible style influenced by Western journalistic style and literature.

In accord with their statement, the group created a totally new journalistic style that was comprehensible, simple, humorous and without any pretension to be academic so that they could appeal to the largest readership (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 101). Inspired by Hoàng Tích Chu’s⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Hoàng Tích Chu (1897 – 1933) was a journalist who greatly contributed to the reformation of Vietnamese press in the 1930s. He was one of the first editors to create a daily, whose layout was modeled after the Western press. His greatest contribution lies in his transformation of the layout of Vietnamese newspapers. After his return from France,

opinion on applying French syntax in latinized Vietnamese (*chữ quốc ngữ*), they markedly contributed to creating an absolutely new literary style (Brocheux – Hémerly 2001: 241). Thanks to their efforts Vietnamese syntax became more articulate, subtle, clear and they were convinced that after such a reform it was able to express not only feelings but also abstract thoughts (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 39). In Huỳnh Sanh Thông's words "the Self-Strength writers helped themselves to Hoàng Tích Chu's innovative ideas, but blessed with more talent, they created a prose that managed to sound both startlingly fresh and aesthetically satisfying" (Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 116).

Moreover, the *Phong Hoá* magazine introduced the Vietnamese readership to such novelties such as connect-the-dot games, crossword puzzles, and color-by-number pictures. In addition to that, the pages of the journal were scattered with a large number of advertisements of new products ranging from clothes to cosmetics, cigarettes, cars, medicine, services, etc., that were becoming more available to the proliferating middle-class.⁹⁸

However, it must be mentioned that the layout of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine still resembled many other journals of the time, i.e. it did not focus extensively on publishing domestic and international news. The content rather comprised of a range of fiction (stories, serialized novels), poetry, translations, reports, advertising, agricultural and economic information, and treatises on education, morality, and social change. The magazine was a literary magazine, which became a salient forum, where

where he had studied journalism, he started publishing broadsheets with headlines, columns, local and international news. It is noteworthy to say that Vietnamese journals of that time did not actually publish much news. Instead, one could find fiction, poetry, translations, reports, advertising, agricultural information, essays on morality, etc. It is noteworthy to say that *Phong Hoá* belonged to the latter category.

⁹⁸ For a more thorough analysis see the article of Dutton 2007: 80 – 108.

many literary genres could develop. In the following chapters, I would like to focus in greater detail on the contribution of the magazine to the development of Vietnamese literature, such as the naissance of new genres of the new poetry, fiction, reportage and satire.

4.4. *Phong Hoá* (Customs) Magazine and Its Innovations

4.4.1. *Phong Hoá* Magazine and the New Poetry (*Thơ Mới*) Movement

Besides being introduced to new prose genres the readership of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine could also follow the naissance of *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) movement that broke away from the rules of the traditional Vietnamese poetry written using prosody of the T'ang regulated verse and imagery. Impact of French literature is undeniable in this aspect. Between the years 1932 – 1945 Vietnamese poetry underwent a major transformation, which was again incomparable with the preceding centuries. Under the influence of French romantic poets⁹⁹ Vietnamese poetry changed not only in form, but also in content. The advocates of *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) movement radically opposed the canon of traditional poetry and adopted components of French prosody, structure of verse, symbolism and metaphors. These changes were also discernable in the language, which became more lucid and more concrete.

⁹⁹ The most popular were, e.g. Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), Alfred de Vigny (1797–1863), Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), Paul Verlaine (1844 –1896), Anna de Noailles (1896 – 1933), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 –1898) and Paul Valéry (1871 – 1945) (Phan Cự Đệ 1996: 30)

The *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) movement was launched by Phan Khôi¹⁰⁰, who published his poem in free verse *Tính già* (Old Love) on the pages of the *Phụ nữ tân văn* (Women's News) magazine in the March 10th, 1932 issue (Phạm Cự Đệ 1996: 30). The poem dealt with reminiscence of old love of two people, who had loved each other, yet had not had the chance to be together as they were forced to marry other partners chosen by their parents. Thus, their old love affair would then turn into “just a glance in passing”. The poem aroused a wave of reactions among Vietnamese intellectuals and men of letters. One of the more considerable responses was the one of Lưu Trọng Lư (1912 – 1991), who under the pen name of Miss Liên Hương (also known as Faifo) reproached Phan Khôi that he had written only one poem in the nouveau style. Together with the letter Lưu Trọng Lư also sent two of his own poems: *Trên đường đời* (On the route of life) and *Vắng khách thơ* (No readers of poetry). His article printed in the *Phụ nữ tân văn* (Women's news) magazine incited many young poets to create poems in free verse.

In the next phase the *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) movement moved north. The *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) published a critique of the classical Chinese prosody in the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine on September 22nd, 1932. In the article they expressed their demand of breaking away from the old rules, old sentiment, traditional literary allusions and clichés (Phạm Cự Đệ 1996: 30). The new poetry was

¹⁰⁰ Phan Khôi (1887 – 1959) was a Vietnamese writer, journalist and intellectual leader. He received Confucian education that he ended in 1905 by attaining the Bachelor degree. He took part in the *Duy Tân* (Progressive Movement) and *Đông Kinh nghĩa thực* (Tonkin Free School). Due to his revolutionary activities he spent six years (1908 – 1914) in prison. After that he worked as a journalist and cooperated with many magazines and journals such as *Nam Phong* (1918) founded by Phạm Quỳnh, *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, *Hà Nội Thực Nghiệp Dân Báo* (1920), *Hữu Thanh* (1921), *Đông Pháp Thời Báo* (1923), *Trung Lập Báo* (1924), *Thần Chung* (1929). He then worked as an editor of journals *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* (1929), *Phụ Nữ Thời Đàm* (1932) and *Tràng An* (1934). In 1956, Phan Khôi led the *Nhân Văn - Giai Phẩm* movement in Hà Nội, the aim of which was freedom of speech, of

supposed to be novel not only in its form, but it was expected to express new ideas too. Another more significant breakthrough was the publishing of other poems written by Miss Liên Hương (Luu Trọng Lư), Tân Việt and Thế Lữ (1907 – 1989) on the pages of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine January 24th, 1933.

In the years to come (1934 – 1936) not only many poems written in the new style were published, but many articles and lectures on the *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) began to appear on the pages of many magazines such as *Phong Hoá* (Customs), *Ngày Nay* (This Day), *Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy* (Sunday Novel), *Hà Nội Báo* (Hanoi News), *Sài Gòn* (Saigon). The journal *Phong Hoá* (Customs), in compliance with its battle cry to modernize, became one of the most important forums, where young poets could publish their literary endeavors in the new style. Among these young men of letters one could find the future leading figures of Vietnamese poetry, such as Xuân Diệu (1916 – 1985), Lưu Trọng Lư (1912 – 1991), Chế Lan Viên (1920 – 1989) or Huy Cận (1919 – 2005) (Đỗ Đức Hiệu et al. 2004: 1418-1520). Moreover, the poet and member of the *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) Lưu Trọng Lư oversaw the section called *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) in the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine, in which he presented his advice and ideas on how modern poetry should be written (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 125). It was also him, who introduced many young and talented poets to the public.

One of the main reasons of such a powerful development of new poetry, free of all strict poetic rules, was the fact that the young poets of the time were convinced that the traditional forms did not enable them to express their thoughts and feelings. In the new social setting caused by the modernization craze that pervaded Indochina in the 1930s the traditional

the press and democracy. By doing so he fell in disgrace with the authorities, was put on trial and died in disgrace in 1959.

forms of poetry seemed more than old-fashioned. This was also enhanced by the penetration of European culture and ways of thinking into all spheres of social life. In its consequences the young generation lost awareness of its roots. This state was also enhanced by the new system of Western education that provided the youth with different knowledge, skills, values and ways of thinking. As a result traditional poetry, which used vocabulary and allusions from ancient Chinese verse became totally incomprehensible to the young generations, which was not learned in Chinese culture and literature anymore.¹⁰¹

4.4.2. *Phong Hoá* (Customs) Magazine and the Development of Fiction

Since the slogan of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) was to modernize literature in Vietnam, Nguyễn Tường Tam and his fellow workers introduced new literary genres from Western literature. However, their biggest contribution dwells in their capacity to generate a large number of first serious long works of fiction. According to Huỳnh Sanh Thông, it was Khái Hưng and Nguyễn Tường Tam, who on the pages of the Customs magazine formed the novel as a key genre of Vietnamese modern literature (Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 117).

In general, in between 1932 and 1936 most of the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) were mostly men of middle to upper-middle class families, who had received higher education either in Indochina or in France, where they were schooled in Western science and arts (Nguyen Van Marshal 2004: 215). These men, imbued with the

¹⁰¹ For a thorough analysis of the New Poetry Movement in Vietnam see Phạm Cự Đệ: 1996. *Phong trào thơ mới*. [New Poetry Movement]. (Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học) or Hoài Thanh, Hoài Chân: 2000. *Thi nhân Việt Nam*. [Vietnamese Poets]. (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Học).

notions of individual freedom and the right for happiness produced a number of *romans-à-thèse*, in which they condemned all the aspects of the traditional society from the pervasive Confucian values, position of women in extended families, arranged marriages, polygamy to widowhood.

The novels and short stories that this group of writers produced revolved around the strife of extremely individualistic characters at least from the perspective of Confucian values that were still pervading the Vietnamese society. These individuals struggled against the demands and the expectations of the society, represented by the extended family, which was often portrayed as a tremendously overwhelming force. The main heroes and heroines of these stories often came from the same milieu as the authors of these novels, i.e. from well-established families from the urban middle-class milieu and had received good quality education either in the Franco-Vietnamese school system or at Universities in France itself. These young men and women, imbued with Western values, especially extolled individualism, personal freedom and happiness, which were however in sharp contrast with the expectations of their Vietnamese traditional families. The heroes and heroines then struggled hard to fit in, to fulfill what was expected of them, yet suffered at the same time since it seemed impossible for them to reconcile individualism with the Vietnamese traditional society and Confucian values that smothered any efforts of stepping outside the given mantinels.

The stories and novels itself were innovative and at the same time provoking in another aspect as the writers absolutely changed the optics of viewing the society and the individual's role in it, and thus negated Confucian values that the Vietnamese society was built on. This is particularly visible in the images of children and women. Children were in the traditional Vietnamese society expected to express filial piety (*hiếu*) to

their parents at all costs, were suddenly portrayed as much more enlightened, wiser, humane and compassionate than their parents. Women who in the traditional Vietnamese society were obliged to submit to their fathers, then husbands and when widows to their sons, were often depicted as much stronger in character, more intelligent, more knowledgeable, more capable than their male counterparts, who were on the other hand described as lazy, dull, boorish and benighted. In fact, everyone, to whom the traditional Vietnamese society attributed a lower position in the social hierarchy, was portrayed as more positively than those, who held higher position, i.e. students were better than their teachers; the poor and uneducated were wiser and more compassionate than the mandarins, the mother and father of the people (Jamieson 1993: 105).

Greg Lockhart holds the opinion that the attack of these authors on the traditional family system and customs related to it were yet another indirect attack on the French (quoted from Nguyen Van Marshal, 2004: 218). Should Greg Lockhart's opinion that the attack on the extended family system is an oblique way of condemning the French colonial regime prove true then we are a witness to an interesting paradox. On one hand the French had always been perceived as colonizers and oppressors, yet it was thanks to them that the Vietnamese could acquaint themselves with the attractive thoughts of the modern world, such as freeing the individual from the bounds of traditional society. It was after all the French writer André Gide, whose individualism and "*acte gratuit*", impressed Tam and other writers of his time the most.

During the Popular Front period (1936-1939), the aspect of which was an overall relaxation of censorship, the writings of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) became more overt in their critique of the colonial regime and the feudal system, corrupt mandarin and

exploitation of the poor masses. As advocates of social change they tried to encourage the young and educated intellectuals to leave their safe and comfortable lives, help the masses, in order to lead them out of the darkness and strive to reform the society. Later on, the group was to be criticized by many leftists for its patronizing standpoint since most of the initiators of all the reforms were members of the intellectual elite, of the knowledgeable middle class, i.e. the suggested reforms of society were incited from above, from the educated rich, who felt obliged to enlighten the masses (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 141, Nguyen Van Marshal 2004: 217).

As mentioned above, most of the heroes of the novels of this group came from the same milieu as the writers themselves, i.e. the personages usually originated from the upper-middle class, the mandarin class or the petite bourgeoisie. Only rarely did the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), with the exception of Thạch Lam, focus their attention on other social strata such as the peasants or workers in the cities. Nguyễn Tường Tam, who was much aware of this, even stated that it would be better for the workers and peasants to write about their own lives (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 143). Nevertheless, when the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) did concentrate on this problem, they often provided a rather passive image of the poor (Nguyen Van Marshal 2004: 221). In the story called *Nước Chảy Đôi Giòng* (Water Runs in Parallel Streams), Tam provides another portrayal of a poor, beautiful female character, who lives her life unaware of the miserable conditions and the injustice she lives in. The main male character Sinh finds her ten years later and laments:

Oh life! This is how some people's lives are! And that's all they have! One would think that a beautiful girl could not live in such poverty and baseness. One feels sorry for her, one pities her....But this beautiful girl that one pities does not know

that she is suffering. She has never thought of seeing herself as suffering. Indifferent and unmoved she lives according to her life condition....like the current of river water flowing in the riverbed (Nhất Linh 1934).

Moreover, in the already mentioned story *Hai vẻ đẹp* (Two Aspects of Beauty), Tam renders a passive and ignorant picture not only of the poor masses, but also of their masters:

Everyone around him now, from his wealthy foster mother to the ragged peasants – all seemed to be in darkness. They had become accustomed to it, since from time to time immemorial no one had informed them of their conditions. And it occurred to Đoàn that until now he, too, had been immersed in that darkness and never knew it (Cited from Banerian 1986: 48).

Many journalists, not only those cooperating with the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), were convinced that by focusing their attention on reporting the social evils they would in its consequences also reform society (Lockhart 1996: 18). Despite the fact, that most of the fiction (stories, novels) that the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) produced were more romantic in nature, on the pages of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine they also encouraged the emergence of articles that would depict reality as it was (Lockhart 1996: 18). Việt Sinh (Thạch Lam), Tam's younger brother, who focused on the reportage, wrote in one of the editorials:

.... A book, stories or a newspaper is the same, if you want to get people to enjoy reading them, you must make people happy, or move them. And if you want them to be happy or moved, you need writings that correspond with reality. The situation of the times, things that the ears hear and the eyes see, are all living lessons, influencing people and making them ponder (Việt Sinh 1933: 1, translation by Woodside 1976: 81, cited from Lockhart 1996: 19).

However, it would be the second journal of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group), the magazine *Ngày Nay* (This Day) that would focus more on reportage, as shall be mentioned below.

4.4.3. *Phong Hoá* (Customs) Magazine and Caricature and Satire

Cartoons and caricatures made their first appearance on the pages of Vietnamese press in the 1920s (Marr 2003: 261). However, it was Nguyễn Tường Tam, who contributed the most to the emergence of caricatures and satire in the Vietnamese press. As was mentioned above, during his studies in France he was carried away with the satirical magazines *Le Canard Enchaîné* (Chained Duck) and *Le Rire* (Laughter) that enjoyed great popularity with the French readership.

Le Rire (Laughter) belonged to one of the most successful Parisian humor and satirical magazines that were published since 1894 to 1950s. The journal was renown for its biting and uncompromising critique of the leading French politicians and vices that plagued French politics, such as corruption, bad management and petty quarrelsomeness. In addition, the vitriolic caricatures attacking the French political leaders were often drawn by prominent artists of the time, among whom we can state Théophile Steinlen, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, René Georges Hermann-Paul, Juan Gris, Lucien Metivet, Georges Meunier, Jean-Louis Forain and many others.

Le Canard Enchaîné (Chained Duck) was (and still is) one of the French leading satirical weeklies. It was published in 1915 by the couple Maurice and Jeanne Maréchal and Henri-Paul Deyvaux Gassier as a satirical journal featuring investigative journalism, the aim of which was

to uncover and speak of all the public scandals in France not only from the field of politics but also from the world of business and law. At the beginning most of the artists and journalists affiliated with the journal were of leftist orientation (mainly Communist and Social parties), however in the 1920s the journal broke away this alliance. Nonetheless, up until now it does still retain its leftist political bias.

Tam apparently enthralled by these two journals returned to Tonkin with the aim of establishing a similar kind of magazine. After overcoming his initial failures, he managed to fulfill his dream on the pages of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine, which became the first satirical journal in Vietnam. It was Nguyễn Tường Tam, who under the pseudonym Đông Sơn, supplied the first caricatures. However, unlike the French tradition of caricature, which had always been very political, the satire in *Phong Hoá* (Customs) journal focused more on the social and cultural critique of Vietnamese society (Dutton 2007: 85). This was undoubtedly the result of heavy censorship to which all the press in Indochina was subjected.

Thus, the caricatures published in the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine depicted the clash between the old (*cũ*) and the modern (*mới* or *tân*). The old or traditional was embodied in three figures *Lý Toét*, *Xã Xê* and *Bang Bành*. *Lý Toét* was a caricature of a typical village chief, i.e. *lý trưởng*, whom Philippe Papin called the “good peasant half-wit” and David Marr “anachronic village elder” (Dutton 2007: 80-81). This good old man was always depicted wearing a cap, long tunic and trousers. He was also equipped with a black umbrella, which functioned as a status symbol indicating his village provenience. *Lý Toét* first appeared on the pages of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine on May 26, 1933 in a caricature depicting him as he peers at a street-side water faucet mistaking it for a funerary stele (Dutton 2007: 84).

Lý Toét became an archetypal character and was used by many illustrators who wanted to depict the clash between the tradition and modernity. Soon after Lý Toét's first appearance the readers of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine were invited to contribute their own pictures of this little fellow and his struggle to comprehend the modern (Dutton 2007: 85). Thus, soon visual stereotypes of all types of individuals ranging from French officials, members of Vietnamese mandarinates, village elders, westernized women, peasants, etc. were created (Marr 2003: 261-262). For example the French were often portrayed as a big man, with a moustache an enormous round belly and wearing big shoes (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 193).

As shall be apparent from the overview of Lý Toét humor that George Dutton put forth in his article *Lý Toét in the city*, the topic of politics was avoided altogether (Dutton 2007: 91). Since the focus of the caricatures was based mainly on the social and cultural critique, one can find many depictions of *Lý Toét* struggling with amenities of modernity, such as telegraph lines, electric lines, scales, telephones, cars, public toilets, traffic police stands, etc. (Dutton 2007: 91).

From the above-mentioned topics, it is discernable that the main topic of the caricatures was the clash of the old and the new, of the traditional and the modern. However, the artists focused only on the cultural and social sphere rather than politics, which was partially the consequence of the censorship of the French colonial regime. On the other hand, the focus on modernity in the caricatures was also in line with the battle cry of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) to modernize all aspects of Vietnamese society.

Another favorite topic of Vietnamese cartoonists was the changing relationships between men and women caused by the modernization

movement. The 1920s and 1930s in Indochina were marked by an intense debate on the position of women in society and their rights. Therefore, the caricaturists also focused their attention especially on this issue, often depicting the newly emerging insecure stance and behavior of Vietnamese men towards the emancipated young ladies (Marr 2003: 262).

The *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) also depicted other contemporary international and domestic political and cultural figures ranging from Adolph Hitler (1889 – 1945) and Benito Mussolini (1883 – 1945) to the scholar and politician Trần Trọng Kim (1883 – 1954) and the minister of the Imperial Court Nguyễn Văn Tâm (1895 – 1990) (Marr 2003: 261-262). Moreover, other representatives of the intellectual and business elite were not spared either. The main targets of this ridicule were most often Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882 – 1936), one of the most talented Vietnamese translators of that time and also editor of many newspapers such as *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* (News of the Center and North), *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal) or *Annam Nouveau*, and Phạm Quỳnh (1892 – 1945), the editor of the journal *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) and future Prime Minister at the Imperial court, was not spared either. His magazine Southern Wind (*Nam Phong*) was often depicted as a toothless crone forgotten by life (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 36). Journalists working in *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine also attacked the bun of the scholar Nguyễn Văn Tố (1889 – 1947), who was represented by a figure called Bùi Tố (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 397), and the arrogant manners of the renowned lawyer and intellectual Nguyễn Mạnh Tường (1909 – 1997). Another influential lawyer Lê Thăng was portrayed as a drunkard, and the doctor of sciences Nguyễn Công Tiếu was depicted as treating chicken-cholera (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 397). Another victim of ridicule was the famous poet and staunch supporter of traditional poetry Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu (1888 – 1939), also

known under his nom de plume Tản Đà.¹⁰² From the above-mentioned enumeration, it is apparent that most of the attacked personalities were renowned, well-educated, erudite men that were held in high esteem and respected by the populace. Therefore one is forced to pose a question to which degree these attacks were motivated by the competition of the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) with other intellectuals for dominance of Vietnamese cultural scene.

This assumption can be well illustrated by the ambivalent relationship of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Reliant Literary Group) with the poet Tản Đà. Despite the New Poetry movement that dominated the poetic scene in the 1930s Tản Đà as the representative of the traditional poetry and the proponent of the T'ang style was still extremely popular with the readership. Since the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) considered his literary style to be backward, they often printed sneering caricatures of him and ridiculed his literary style (Tú Mỡ 1988: 533). Moreover, they did not hesitate to remark on his weakness for alcohol. However, Tản Đà had a good sense of humour. Tú Mỡ recalled that one day, after having read another poem ridiculing him *Giời đầy Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu* (Heaven full of Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu) Tản Đà came to the editorial office of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) journal rocking with laughter: “The poem is very interesting but insolent.” When Khái Hưng asked him if he was angry with them, he replied laughing: “We are like farceurs on a stage, who often mock each other in the theater so that the people buy cheeriness.

¹⁰² Tản Đà was born in 1888 in Khê Thượng, a village at the bottom of the Tản Viên hill, which rose above the river Đà. He had Confucian upbringing and education. He was very talented in composing poetry both in Chinese and Vietnamese. Despite his unchallenged talent he never succeeded at the state exams and failed to get a position in the administration apparatus. He was perceived to be a dilettante and patriotic drinker.¹⁰² It was said that due to his disappointment in love he became a cynic and a hedonist. Despite the success of the *Thơ Mới* (New Poetry) movement Tản Đà managed to dominate the Vietnamese poetry scene for more than twenty years and was perceived to be one of the greatest Vietnamese poets of the time (Đỗ Đức Hiếu et al. 2004: 1590-1593).

But when we finish playing roles, we are still colleagues, so why should we be angry at each other!” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 537)

From that moment on, Tấn Đà gained more respect from the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) and they eventually started cooperating together. Later, when the group started publishing the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine, Nguyễn Tường Tam invited Tấn Đà to participate in the editorial office. Thus, ironically he became responsible for the column of the “T'ang poetry” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 537), the style of which had been a target of mockery of the group a few years earlier.

During the Popular Front period (1936 – 1939) as a consequence of the more relaxed atmosphere and abolished censorship, the editors, journalists and cartoonists became more overt in their critique of the French colonial rule, often condemning the inequality, exploitation and repression so characteristic for the Indochinese society of that time (Marr 2003: 262). The members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) did not hesitate to start depicting the lot of the ordinary people and their oppression by the mandarinates, the greedy village notables and the French colonial regime (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 191). For example on the pages of the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine published on 10.10.1937, one could find a caricature of Lý Toét staring at a French colonial officer dragging in chains an arrested Vietnamese civilian. Lý Toét comments the happening with the following statement: “Quý hóa quá, Nam, Pháp đã chặt tinh thân” (It’s marvelous, Vietnam and France have rebonded their relations) (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 191).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ For more examples of political satire on the pages of Vietnamese press see Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 191 – 204.

According to the memoirs of Nguyễn Vỹ, the magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs) undoubtedly succeeded in its mission to brighten up the society since every week the readership eagerly waited for the magazine to be published (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 399). Nevertheless, not everyone was so appreciative of the tone of the magazine. Many members of the intellectual elite criticized it for its scathing humor that according to them had nothing to do with the customs of the country (Nguyễn Vỹ 2000: 399).

4.5. The *Ngày Nay* (This Day) Journal

The *Phong Hoá* (Customs) journal grew extremely popular with the readership, which enthusiastically participated by sending many of its contributions to the editorial office. Despite the evident success, Nguyễn Tường Tam was much aware that the possibility of its closure hanged above the journal due to French censorship as the group became more and more virulent in their attacks of the French colonial regime. In order to prepare the group for that foreseen option, in 1934 he and his colleagues started publishing another magazine called *Ngày Nay* (This Day), drafted according to the French *Paris Match*. The publication was intended to be built around timely feature stories and investigative reports illustrated with high quality photographs (Jamieson 1993: 157). Tam named his older brother Nguyễn Tường Cẩm, who had temporarily returned to Hanoi from Saigon due to health problems, the managing director. While their younger brother Nguyễn Tường Lân, known as Thạch Lam, became the editor-in-chief. The youngest of all the Nguyễn brothers, Bách was also summoned to come and help out despite being busy with attending school. Tam also looked for other correspondents and soon Trọng Lang and Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912 – 1939) started cooperating with the editorial office (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). The style of work had to be completely changed since

the staff was obliged to leave their sedentary way of writing articles and go out into the streets to find topics for their reports, to do interviews and to take photographs (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). For those reasons the editorial office, had bought several cameras, all the equipment for developing pictures and even installed a developing chamber in the basement of the editorial office, where they would develop photos late into the night (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980).

Thus, in 1934 the weekly *Ngày Nay* (This Day) was published concurrently with the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine. Despite the fact that *Ngày Nay* (This Day) soon became popular among readers, it had to shut down after only thirteen issues. There were several reasons for the closure. Firstly, the magazine was extremely costly, since its photographs on glossy paper were very expensive to produce. In addition, the group also lacked time to publish another high-quality journal beside the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine. Thus, the editorial office was dispersed as Nguyễn Tường Cẩm went back to Saigon; Nguyễn Tường Bách started studying for his baccalaureate again and the others returned to their previous activities (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980).

Tam's prediction proved to be correct, as in 1935 the French colonial authorities suspended the publication of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine for three months due to its severe criticism of the French colonial rule. The closure of *Phong Hoá* (Customs) journal initiated the reappearance of the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) on January 30, 1935 (Lê Hữu Mục, 1958: 87). The revue was published three times a month – every 1st, 10th and 20th (Lê Hữu Mục, 1958: 87). The new editorial office was found at 55 Hàng Bún Street (Lê Hữu Mục, 1958: 87). Its objective, content and form were to be different from that of *Phong Hoá* (Customs) as the editorial of the first issue stated:

“*Ngày Nay* is a journal presented to you today. The aim of *Ngày Nay* is to lucidly inform you about our people’s way of life in this era, about its every aspect, material and spiritual.

....

When *Phong Hoá* was born, focusing on satire and literature, it was welcomed by you. It pushed the press to progress further and it dispersed the backward thoughts that obscured the minds of our people. We must learn to perceive life with discerning eyes and then strive cheerfully. *Ngày Nay* as the second journal of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary group) will also try to set that goal but through different methods. We shall take you from forests to lakes, from cities to the countryside, in order to show you the current situation in the society. That current state is what you need and want to know the most. We shall go to observe and collect the facts, in order to inform you. In addition, we shall take a lot of pictures that are going to be inserted into the articles to make them more lucid. Due to that reading the article will be as if you had gone to the place yourselves” (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 89).

The new magazine was not conceived primarily as satirical; therefore, it contained fewer mocking cartoons and images than its forerunner. The journal *Ngày Nay* (This Day) aimed to provide facts and information about life of the population in different regions of Vietnam (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 41). In fact, the group did utilize the content of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine, but under different headings, i.e. the columns *Từ cao đến thấp* (From tall to short) and *Từ nhỏ đến lớn* (From small to big) were joined into one section called *Người và việc* (People and Things), Tú Mỡ’s section of satirical poetry *Giòng nước ngược* (Against the current) were transformed into the general poetry section (Tú Mỡ 2000: 545).

In general the staff of the magazine was almost identical to that of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine. Therefore, the editorials were written by Hoàng Đạo; the news section was produced by Tú Lý (Hoàng Đạo), Lê Ta (Thế Lữ), Nhị Linh (Trần Khánh Giư), Đoàn Phú Tứ; critiques and cover stories were provided by Trọng Lang (Trần Tấn Cử) and Nguyên Hồng;

plays and dramas were furnished by Vi Huyền Đắc, Đoàn Phú Tứ, Khái Hưng (Trần Khánh Giư) and Thạch Lam; the stories were written and edited by Khái Hưng (Trần Khánh Giư), Nhất Linh (Nguyễn Tường Tam), Thế Lữ, Đỗ Đức Thu, Thạch Lam, Thanh Tịnh, Trần Tiêu; Thế Lữ, Tản Đà, Xuân Diệu, Huy Cận, Nguyễn Bính, Phạm Văn Hạnh contributed to the poetry section and caricatures were drawn by Tô Tử (Tô Ngọc Vân), Righter (Nguyễn Gia Trí), Nhất Sách (Trần Bình Lộc) (Tú Mỡ 2000: 545-546).

In 1936 Tam's fear materialized as the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine was closed down definitely, the cause being Hoàng Đạo's sharp critique and biting satire of the French establishment and especially of the highest collaborating mandarin Hoàng Trọng Phu (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 41; Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 87).

After having published this biting satire, the magazine *Phong Hoá* (Customs) disappeared from the scene after publication of its 110th issue on March 26th, 1936 (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 87). The *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) was thus left only with journal *Ngày Nay* (This Day) as its sole forum of expression. Even though the overall atmosphere in Indochina became more relaxed after 1936 and the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) could publish more freely again, after this experience its members had become more prudent and were inclined to auto-censorship more than before (Tú Mỡ 2000: 546).

4.5.1. New Statement of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Reliant Literary Group) in the *Ngày Nay* (This Day)

In the same year, Hoàng Đạo, the group's theoretician, drafted another program of the group. It was first published as a series of ten articles in the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine under the heading *Mười điều tâm niệm của ban trẻ* (Ten vows of the youth). The ten vows comprised of: 1) be for the new without any hesitations, while modernization means Westernization; 2) have faith in progress and trust that things can get better; 3) live according to ideals; 4) work for the benefit of society; 5) train one's character; 6) recognize the role of women in society; 7) acquire scientific spirit; 8) create without having the thought of reward in mind, 9) cultivate the body, and 10) have sense of organization (Nguyễn Văn Ký 1995: 103; Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 113). The ten above-mentioned vows were yet again a mixture of tradition and modernity as the vows "live according to ideals", "work for the benefit of society" and "training one's character are Confucian values. On the other hand, stressing the scientific spirit and recognizing the role of women in society represent modern aspects.

As the above mentioned ten points indicate, Hoàng Đạo and the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Reliant Literary Group) were convinced that there was not much to be worth maintaining from the traditional society and an even greater deviation from Confucianism is more than apparent. Thus, their opinions signaled a rupture with the traditional society. They were also fundamentally against the "neutralists", represented by the editor of the *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) magazine Phạm Quỳnh (1892 – 1945), who called for the synthesis of the Chinese (i.e. traditional) and the Western (i.e. modern) cultures. As Hoàng Đạo wrote:

For all practical purposes, the notion of striking a happy medium has utterly failed. Those people who want to pick and chose become hesitant, timid, lacking any guiding principle as to what to retain and what to discard. For instance, they want to adopt Western individualism because they rightly think that individuals must develop their potentialities before rapid progress can occur. Yet they also wish to save the system of the extended family whose credo is obedience. As a result they become indecisive, perplexed, like Buridan's ass standing between a bowl of water and a handful of hay, not knowing whether to drink or to eat; or they are like a fellow lying in bed between his chief wife and his concubine not knowing which way to turn. Such indecision cannot get them anywhere.

While debating whether they should move forward or backward, those people remain fixed to the spot. They are like horses pawing the ground furiously but unable to take a single step forward. Given the failure of the Middle way, there is no alternative left but to modernize in a bold fashion (Quoted from Huỳnh Sanh Thông 1984: 115).

As the years passed by the magazine slowly changed its contents again and became more oriented towards colonial politics. Hoàng Đạo continued writing editorials on topics such as acute problems in society, political parties, struggle for national independence, struggle against political oppression, and opposition to the imposed heavy tax system (Tú Mỡ 2000: 546-547). In addition, in 1937 Hoàng Đạo published a pamphlet called *Bùn Lầy Nước Động* (Slums and Huts) in which he severely criticized the French colonial administration and called for political, economical, social, cultural and school reforms (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 16). Furthermore, he condemned the corruption of the colonial regime and shed light on the suffering and exploitation of the common people. In the booklet, he called for numerous reforms of the French colonial regime in the spheres of politics, economy and education (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 120).

According to Tú Mỡ due to this overt political orientation a large part of the public perceived *Ngày Nay* (This Day) as a journal of a rebellious group, which was becoming more critical of the French colonial regime and the living conditions in Indochina (Tú Mỡ 2000: 522). As the 1930s

were coming to a close *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) was running out of breath and its members were more and more often encountering obstacles in their daily lives. The director of the Financial Bureau, where Tú Mỡ was still working, threatened to fire him if he continued to write for “subversive” press. Finally, the magazine was banned by the colonial administration after the outburst of World War II (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 2000: 154). But Tam’s prediction that “one day *Ngày Nay* (This Day) will be republished again as a phoenix rising from its own cinders,” (Tú Mỡ 2000: 533) showed to be correct, for five years later it would reappear again as a loudhailer of the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese Nationalist Party). However, its existence was to be only fleeting, since Việt Minh would be brisk in closing it down again.

5. Nguyễn Tường Tam's Literary Activities

Vietnamese literature of the 1930's was written within a turbulent cultural encounter between the old (the traditional Vietnamese society based on Confucian values) and the new (Western culture and its values brought by the French). Vietnamese intellectuals having both the classical Confucian education and also diplomas from French universities produced a large body of literature, in which they strove to resolve urgent social and cultural dilemmas that plagued Vietnamese society under French colonial rule. The short stories and novels provided them with a space, where they could articulate their emotional and intellectual quandaries that overwhelmed them. Members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Reliant Literary Groups) and Nguyễn Tường Tam especially were typical representatives of this new literature.

During his activity within the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Reliant Literary Groups) Tam published seven novels in serialized form on the pages of the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) and *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine. In these writings he continued to disseminate his ideas aiming to reform and modernize Vietnamese society. In general his novels reflected the profound conflict in modern Vietnamese society, between Confucian values and extolled personal happiness. In the first half of the 1930's Tam's work was known for its interest in romantic love, the oppression of young women in Vietnamese traditional society, and their revolt against the oppressive family structure. At this point one can discern the influence of the French writer André Gide (1869 – 1951), whose concept of “free act” appealed not only to Tam but also to other Vietnamese authors writing in the 1930s (Tuan Ngoc Nguyen 2004: 52). After 1936 Tam also shifted his focus of interest and started concentrating on the lot of the ordinary people,

especially the peasants, and on ways of improving the miserable conditions in which they lived.

As has been noted in the preceding chapters, the French censorship of the press was very strict and any discussion of political problems that could endanger their colonial policy on the pages of journals and magazines was banned. On the other hand, the censorship of literature was more relaxed giving the authors an opportunity to discuss many issues connected to social change. In David Marr's words "a good proportion of fiction, drama and poetry were written with quite serious social and political objectives in mind" (Marr 1981:51). In the 1920's and the first half of the 1930's one could discern three main topics around which the debates of Vietnamese intellectuals revolved: Westernization of society, the status of Vietnamese women in the society and the question of Vietnamese identity (Wilcox 2006: 205).

The question of women and their position within the changing Vietnamese society became a focal point of Vietnamese intellectuals as early as the beginning of the 20th century. This topic became a central theme not only of Tam, but also of other writers reflecting on modernization of Vietnamese society, partially also due to the fact that the treatment of women's question was acceptable for the French colonial regime.

The founders of the *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Tonkin School for the Righteous Cause) movement opened the doors to their lectures to women enabling them to get the same education as men, which was still shocking for most of the Confucian literati. In 1907 the newspapers *Đăng Cổ Tùng Báo* (Old Lantern Miscellany) started publishing a column called "Women's Voices", which was designed as a forum for women. The discussions within these feature articles revolved around women and their

position within the Vietnamese traditional society labeling most of the customs related to women such as polygamy, wedding practices, funeral rituals, and education as outdated and backward (Dang Thi Van Chi 2010).

The column of “Women’s voices” also appeared on the pages of the *Đông Dương* (Indochina) magazine. Most of the articles in the column were written by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, who signed them under a female name Đào Thị Loan. As a Francophile and great admirer of French culture, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh severely attacked and criticized Vietnamese women and their status within Vietnamese traditional society. He condemned especially the outdated habits and practices related to women’s every day lives from childcare to betel chewing. However, it must be noted that his articles were based on a rather biased comparison of Vietnamese and French women, in which French women were portrayed more favorably (Jamieson 1993: 77). It must be noted that Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was also married to a French, which was an extremely rare phenomenon at the time, as it was more common for French men to have Vietnamese lovers, but not vice versa.

Women issues were also discussed in the *Nam Phong* (South Wind) magazine headed by Phạm Quỳnh, who also often commented on the changing status of women. Phạm Quỳnh, who viewed the women’s issues differently, was especially worried about the moral decadence of Vietnamese women. He was convinced that: “when men lack virtue, it is harmful for the society, but not so harmful as when women become unsound, because unsound women famage the very roots of society” (Phạm Quỳnh 1917: 207-17, quoted in Jamieson 1993: 87).

In 1918 the debates concerning women and their rights culminated in the establishment of the very first women’s magazine entitled *Nữ giới chung*

(Women's Bell) published in Saigon. The magazine headed by Srong Nguyệt Anh (1864 – 1922), daughter of one of the last great Confucian literati and poets Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, focused mainly on the question of equality of sexes, however the in Srong Nguyệt Anh opinion the equality of sexes implied that “women had common interests with men, women were as intelligent as men, but intellectual equality was not the same as similarity in their roles, and for women to take care of the family and help their husbands educate children was natural” (Nữ giới chung, 22.2.1918, quoted in Dang Thi Van Chi 2010).

The heated debates over women's rights and women liberation continued throughout the 1920's.¹⁰⁴ More and more magazines focusing on these topics sprang up in all parts of Vietnam. We can mention, e.g. *Phụ nữ thời đàm* (1932 – 1934, Women's discussions) in Hanoi, *Phụ nữ tân tiến* (1932 – 1934, Women's Modern Advance) in Huế and *Phụ nữ tân văn* (1929 – 1935, Women's news).¹⁰⁵ In addition to the discussions on the pages of the press female intellectuals held a series of lectures, in which they discussed a wide range of topics related to women, their life within the traditional society, their liberation and organization (Dang Thi Van Chi 2010).

It must be noted that these discussions found their way also on the pages of short stories and novels written at that time. Women and their changing status thus became a focal theme in the newly emerging genre of short story and novel written in the latinized script. In 1925 Hoàng Ngọc Phách (1896 - 1973) sent ripples through Vietnamese society after having

¹⁰⁴ For a very detailed analysis of the women's rights debates see e.g. Marr 1976: 371 – 389.

¹⁰⁵ For more information on these magazines and topics their discussed see Marr, David: 1984. *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920 – 1945*. (Berkeley: University of California Press).

published his famous novel *Tố Tâm* (1925, Pure Heart).¹⁰⁶ In short, the novel portrayed the inexorable and unsolvable clash of modern individualism, which was being more and more embraced by the Francophile, educated, urban elites, with the traditional bonds of the Vietnamese extended family system. The novel sent shock waves through Vietnamese society and triggered a wave of Werther-like suicides in Hanoi, where young and desperate girls chose to end their lives by hurling themselves into the West Lake.¹⁰⁷

Literature that was produced in the 1920s and the 1930s therefore focused on the position of women within the Vietnamese extended family system. The new era and the contact with the West and its values, especially with individualism, brought to the fore the need to completely reanalyze the relationships within the family and the rights and obligations of its members. Given this context, it is of no surprise that women played an important role in Nhất Linh's writings and were presented as proponents of social change. In their attacks of the traditional Vietnamese society the writers often portrayed women as pure, idealistic and enlightened characters, which contrasted greatly with the traditional system that was often described as corrupt, cruel and smothering.

The body of writing that Nhất Linh and his group *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Reliant Literary Group) produced often portrayed female characters as victims of Vietnamese traditional society, its values and customs. In addition, in Wilcox's opinion "female characters were used as moral exemplars, instruments intended to convey a particular message" (Wilcox 2006: 208). It must be noted that in the short stories and novels of the 1920s and 1930s of Vietnamese intellectuals were often alluding to

¹⁰⁶ For the content of the novel see the preceding chapter "2.6. Vietnamese Literature from Tradition to Modernity."

Vietnamese identity, nation and its liberation via women (Wilcox 2006: 208). The same tendency can be found also in writing of Nhất Linh and his group.¹⁰⁸

However, the debates concerning women and their status within the society or Vietnamese identity were a part of a much larger debate concerning tradition and modernity, in other words the clash of the old and the new. Indubitably, Nhất Linh's own writing project was in line with this trend. In many of his novels via his female characters he attacked the traditional within Vietnamese society. However, from the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Reliant Literary Group) manifesto and even from his articles published in the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine, one could come to the conclusion that Nhất Linh was an ardent proponent of modernization and radical social change. This can be illustrated on an excerpt of Nhất Linh article in the *Phong Hoá* (Customs) magazine:

Eastern culture venerates the family. The individual can be no more than an element of the family. The ideas or actions of the individual must be subjugated to the family hierarchy. And a nation is just a larger family, also with a hierarchy just like the one in a small family.

The West attaches importance to the individual. Within the family, or in society, anyone can develop his or her own ideas. No one is forcibly restricted to the following teachings of Aristotle or any other sage...

In the West anyone can follow his natural reason and start a discussion. In the East everyone must follow the teachings of the ancients. So many matters concerning society, the family, the relations between sexes – all must be resolved in different ways because they are based on different premises. In regard to these differences, merely examining European society with an objective eye is sufficient for us to determine which is superior and which is inferior. But because

¹⁰⁷ For a more thorough analysis of this phenomenon see Linh Vu 2009: 25-46.

¹⁰⁸ For a brief analysis of Nhất Linh's political messages in his novels see e.g. Hue-Tam Ho Tai 1992: 250 – 253.

of the different set of premises, we cannot synthesize all the good features of the two cultures of the East and West....

Our nation, for better or worse, is a place where Eastern and Western cultures have met, and we have been unable to follow the rule of the golden mean. We must choose one of two paths: one is to retain our old mores, to follow the men of antiquity; the second is to follow the new civilization, taking science as our base, having roots on reason.

Following either path has advantages and disadvantages, and it is not yet certain where truth lies. But when the old civilization is put into practice with the results before our very eyes, we are dissatisfied with those results. We can only place our hope in Western civilization, although we do not yet know where that civilization will lead us. Our destiny is to go into the unknown, to keep changing and to progress.¹⁰⁹

However, when looking closely at the content of Nhất Linh's novels one is forced to come to the conclusion that Nhất Linh's radicalism was not at all that extreme. At this point through treating Nhất Linh's depiction of women and love I would like to illustrate that Nhất Linh himself remained more rooted in tradition and Confucian values more than he might himself have realized. As shall be shown below Nhất Linh's heroines were in fact pure embodiments of Confucian values, who often reinstated Confucian values rather than opposed them. Therefore, Nhất Linh's own radicalism and his depiction of the new woman struggling against the extended family system was very tame - a standpoint that he also shared with his close colleague Khải Hưng.

When Nhất Linh made his modest and careful first steps on the literary scene in the 1920s the picture of women that he provided was very traditional. In 1925, i.e. the same year, in which Hoàng Ngọc Phách's

¹⁰⁹ As I have not had access to the Customs magazine, I am relying on secondary sources. (*Phong Hoá*, October 20, 1932, quoted from Jamieson 1993: 173-174).

ground-breaking novel *Tố Tâm* (1925, Pure Heart) was published,¹¹⁰ Tam also issued his first novel known as *Nho Phong* (Confucian Manners), which he had started writing in 1924.

Nho Phong (Confucian Manners) is a typical example of the Chinese scholar-meets-beauty stories (*caizi jiaren*; in Vietnamese *tài-tử giai-nhân*) that was still very popular among Vietnamese readership. It is a story treating a love affair of a talented Confucian scholar Dương Văn and Lê Nương, a daughter of a poor retired mandarin. The old man expresses a wish for the two of them to get married. However, he dies before this can happen. On his deathbed he beseeches Lê Nương to lead a virtuous life in accordance with the Confucian morals. Lê Nương is obliged to go and live in the house of her uncle, a very rich man. He has his own intentions with her and wants to marry her to one of his affluent acquaintances. Nonetheless, Lê Nương is reluctant to fulfill his demands, and remains persistent in her desire to marry Dương Văn. Finally, her uncle is forced to concede. After joining her husband's family, she lives in accordance with Confucian values. She takes care of her parents-in-law, her husband and child, working ceaselessly until her husband finally passes the civil exams after many failures.

Given the above-mentioned synopsis, it is apparent that the novel was rather conservative. Despite the fact that it had been written in prose, it visibly copied the style of traditional versified narratives (Schafer – Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh 1988: 759; Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 90). According to Bùi Xuân Bào, one can discern the influence of the popular Chinese author of mandarin duck and butterfly fiction Xu Zhengya and Vietnamese writer Hoàng Ngọc Phách (1896-1973) (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 90). Moreover,

¹¹⁰ For more information on the novel see the chapter “2.6.2. New Fiction in the Vernacular and Subsequent Literary Debates.”

according to Lê Hữu Mục, the influence of the *Tale of Kiều* is indubitable (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 20).¹¹¹ In its structure and used literary techniques the novel remained to be the type of romance scholar-meets-beauty, i.e. it was conforming to the traditional versified narratives in its topic, its plot and especially in its didactic message that it carried. Moreover, the heroine of the novel was a perfect embodiment of Confucian values. It is noteworthy to say, that even Tam's mother found the narrative a bit too naive (Nguyễn Thị Thế 1974: 69).

Regardless of the fact that its 3 000 copies were sold out immediately, it did not arouse any noteworthy reaction of the public, since its attention was oriented at the epochal novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart) by Hoàng Ngọc Phách, which had caused an unexpected upheaval among the Vietnamese public and literary circles.¹¹² However, it is noteworthy to say that Hoàng Ngọc Phách only hinted some of the pressing issues related to the role of the individual, within the traditional family i.e. his/ her personal freedom and his/ her right to choose one's partner. Interestingly, at that time Nguyễn Tường Tam ignored this topic altogether. Nevertheless, it is the latter, who would declare a war to the Confucian manners a few years later.

After having published his novel *Nho Phong* (Confucian Manners), Nhất Linh immersed himself into writing again. A year later, he succeeded in publishing a collection of short stories *Người quay tơ* (The Silk Spinner). The collection contained ten short stories written by Tam and one translation of Tolstoy's story: *Người quay tơ* (The Silk Spinner), *Nô Lệ* (Slaves), *Chiến Tranh* (War), *Giấc mộng Từ Lâm* (A Dream of Tu Lam),

¹¹¹ Bùi Xuân Bào shares the same idea, tracing the similarities mainly in the passive stance towards misfortunes of *Kiều's* father and that of Dương Văn in *Nho Phong* (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 89).

¹¹² For more information on the reaction see the preceding chapter: For more information on the novel see the preceding chapter "2.6.2. New Fiction in the Vernacular and Subsequent Literary Debates."

Sư Bác Chùa Kênh (The bonze of the Kênh Pagoda), *Làm Gì Mà Băn khoăn Thế?* (Why Worry So Much?), *Giật Mình Tỉnh Dậy* (Waking up with a Start), *Truyện Người Ca Kỳ Họ Nguyễn* (translated in Kiến Văn Lục), *Bạch Liên* (Story of Bach Lien), *Vuông Vải Trắng* (A Square of White Cloth), and *Sự Thật ở Miệng Trẻ* (Truth from Young Lips, translation of Tolstoy's story).¹¹³

The range of the topics covered in the stories is varied, some are romantic, others carry bibliographic traits of Tam's life, other are ghost stories that were also very popular with Vietnamese readership in the 1920s and 1930s. Nonetheless, the picture of women that Tam provides in these stories is yet again very traditional and still displays a heavy influence of Confucian morality, despite the fact that the 1920s were marked by an ongoing women's rights debate. However, Tam seems not to have been influenced by these discussions. It is noteworthy to say, that despite the modernization craze that was slowly pervading Vietnamese society in the second half of the 1920's, Tam remained traditional in a certain sense, not only in his writings as in his life as discussed above. His sister Nguyễn Thị Thế even recalled in her memoirs that at that time Tam used to hate Western clothes and would walk around wearing traditional Vietnamese attire and shoes (Nguyễn Thị Thế 1974: 69).

Therefore, women presented in the *Người quay tơ* (The Silk Spinner) are yet again an embodiment of Confucian morals: Từ Nương from the story *Người Quay Tơ* (The Silk Spinner) is a woman living in accordance with Confucian imperatives. She is a good, virtuous, and faithful wife, who works night and day to support her husband. She stays loyal to him, when he is imprisoned. She takes care of her in-laws in an exemplary manner and even refuses to remarry despite the fact that they urge her to do so.

¹¹³ For the list and synopsis of all the stories see the Appendix.

Bạch Liên from the story *Bạch Liên* (Story of Bach Lien) is also a typical representative of a loyal and virtuous wife, who remains faithful to her husband in spite of his apparent maltreatment of her. She endures all the harassment despite her disappointment and in no way does he contest the situation, in which she is living. Another female character, Thảo, from the story *Vuông Vải Trắng* (A Square of White Cloth), is an exemplary widow, who chooses to remain loyal to her husband after his death even though she has the possibility to live with a mandarin at the Royal Court. However, she declines the offer.

To conclude, prior to his stay in France (1927 – 1930), women in Tam's fiction remain very traditional indeed. Only after Tam's study trip in the West, the depiction of women in his work started to change, which is undoubtedly the consequence of him being exposed to Western values, thought and literature. It was after all in France, where Tam got acquainted with the writings of André Gide¹¹⁴, whose heroes that defied to be tied down by any principles probably appealed to Tam the most. Gide's radical individualism called for individual fulfillment at any cost, even at the expense of one's life. One of Gide's main principles was "*l'acte gratuit*", i.e. his heroes go as far as to transgress all social and human values only to prove their absolute liberty. Thus, Gide is strongly against the institution of family, since it is the family that oppresses the individual and prevents one from achieving personal happiness. This influence would be more than apparent in Tam's writings that he produced after his return from France. However, Tam's individualism never reached such radical heights as Gide's, as the heroines of Tam's novels strive to free themselves from the yokes of the traditional family (in their minds), yet they never really undertake any dramatic nor radical actions in order to break away.

The new development in the portrayal of women can be traced in the first short story collection that he had produced after his return from France. He wrote this short story collection called *Anh Phải Sống* (You Must Live) together with his friend and colleague Khái Hưng. It is an anthology of thirteen stories that had been written between 1932 and 1933 (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 59, Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 54). Each of the authors wrote six stories. The last one, called *Dưới Bóng Hoa Đào* (Underneath the Peach Blossoms), they wrote together.¹¹⁵ According to Phạm Thế Ngũ the joint creative efforts of both men cause great confusion among literary critics since it is hard to distinguish what is Khái Hưng's and what is Nhật Linh's contribution (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 141).

Looking at the stories and their topics more closely several observations can be made. Firstly, they are written in first-person narratives. Secondly, the stories are romantic, melodramatic, with an open ending. The moralizing tone and the emphasis on Confucian morals (*luân lý*) disappeared despite the fact that the women in the stories still did behave in accordance with Confucian morality. Love depicted in the stories is often presented as painful, marked by disappointment and suffering and often remains unfulfilled. If the lovers do manage to overcome obstacles and be together, then their happiness is only short-lived and their love is shattered by fatal circumstances that prevent them from being happy together. The main focus of the stories still remains on the couple – man and woman – with the attention aimed at the inner, psychological life of the main protagonists. Before the innermost life of the main characters had been rarely mentioned in Vietnamese literature (Prévot 1993: 198). Thus, the

¹¹⁴ For more information on André Gide see e.g. Sheridan, Alan: 1999. *André Gide: a life in the present*. (Harvard University Press) and Conner, Tom: 2001. *André Gide's politics: rebellion and ambivalence* (Palgrave Macmillan).

¹¹⁵ For a list and the synopsis of all the stories see the Appendix.

reader could suddenly “peek inside” the soul of the hero/ heroine and discover his/her feelings, desires, doubts and pain.

The depiction of women also becomes more varied yet most of them have one thing in common: self-sacrifice. Most of the female characters in the stories sacrifice themselves for their lovers, e.g. the wife of Trạch from the story *Bóng Người Trên Mù* (A Silhouette in the Fog) prevents her husband from attending to her in her illness and forces him to taking advantage of the opportunity of driving the Governor-General of Indochina:

The words of Mr. Chánh were resolute. I was hesitant not knowing what to think. When I had returned home, sat down at the bed and looked at my wife I realized that I could not go no matter what, even if I lost my job.

My wife noticed my worried expression and wanted to know its cause. I told her everything. After she had finished listening, her face lit up as she said:

- You must go!! There is no reason to be so vacillating!! I am all right. I am feeling much better. Tomorrow evening when you come back, you buy me a present (Nhat Linh 1995: 64).

He concedes to her wishes to make her happy. While he is fulfilling her wish, she dies.

Mrs. Hiên depicted in the story *Đầu Đường Xó Chợ* (The Wretched) is yet another example of a virtuous wife (in accordance with Confucian morals) who stays loyal to her boorish husband who mistreats her on an every day basis:

The first time I saw her I felt sorry for her instantly. Now I know that I had those feelings for her because she was still young, pretty and charming, but had to marry an ugly, opium-addicted man. But she didn't think like me. All day long, she would sit immersed in weaving fishing nets while her husband was out pulling the riksha. Whenever she managed to sell her nets, she would buy opium for her husband. In those moments she would be cheerful and very happy. She did not think about

herself. She wore a brown faded shirt with patches on her sleeves, shoulders and back. Yet she would not save any money to buy herself a new shirt (Nhất Linh 1995: 125).

Nhất Linh shared the preoccupation with love and self-sacrifice with his colleague Khái Hưng. In reality it was Khái Hưng who then continued to write one of the most famous novels on the topic of women's sacrifice for love at the time – *Nửa chừng xuân* (In the Midst of Spring, 1934) and Nhất Linh wrote the preface to the novel elaborating on love and sacrifice even further:

Young people, especially those of the weaker sex, in the enthusiasm of their youth, want to enjoy life to the full. If they meet with obstacles in the area of love, of course they will be disappointed and discouraged. Discouragement leads to suicide.¹¹⁶ This plight has been the theme of many novels. Mai of *Nửa chừng xuân* is also disappointed, but proudly she does not want to accept defeat by returning to the old way, something she could easily do. Instead, she lives a simple life with courage and without complaint, willing to sacrifice her own happiness. Although life has given her a scar that will never fade away, though she has witnessed her happiness shattered like a flower in a strong wind, still Mai proves that she loves life very much... **Mai learns to use the bitter pleasure of self sacrifice to console herself in her days of sadness and to encourage herself to continue her life with vigor and optimism** (Phạm Thế Ngũ 1965: 441, quoted from Cong Huyen Ton Nha Trang 1982).

Nhất Linh and Khái Hưng both celebrated and glorified selflessness, altruism and self-sacrifice and perhaps unwittingly raised it to an ideal norm for the Vietnamese woman followed even today. The same topic of a loyal, selfless and altruistic woman appears again in another of their

¹¹⁶ This sentence is an allusion to the novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart) by Hoàng Ngọc Phách, the heroine of which dies of a broken heart due to an unfulfilled love affair.

joint efforts, i.e. in the novel *Gánh Hàng Hoa* (Flower Girl), which was published in 1934.¹¹⁷

The novel treats the subject of sanctity of marriage and friendship and traces the changing relationship among three people, Minh, his wife Liên and their friend Vãn. The heroine of this novel Liên is depicted as an ideal woman in terms of Confucian morality. Her behavior is in line with the “four virtues” (*tứ đức*) that every well-brought up girl should display, i.e. in her conduct she displayed the following characteristics: *phụ công* (she was dexterous in all tasks), *phụ dung* (she was of modest, feminine character), *phụ ngôn* (she was pleasing in conversation), *phụ hạnh* (and well behaved).¹¹⁸ Throughout the novel Liên places the happiness of her husband before her own and works ceaselessly to support Minh and help him attain success and realize his life goals. Despite the fact that the novel still revolves around ideal of self-sacrifice, we can discern vague traces of feminine emancipation, which are to be found only at the end of the novel, when Liên starts to win her husband back.

In the novel *Đời Mưa Gió* (*Tempestuous Life*, 1934), another novel that Nhất Linh wrote with his colleague Khái Hưng, we can distinguish a considerable shift in treating the topic of women and their struggle for independence from the oppressive extended family and Confucian morality.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ For the synopsis of the story, see the Appendix.

¹¹⁸ For more information on Confucian virtues of women see e.g. Rosenlee, Li Hsiang Lisa: 2007. *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation*. (Sunny Press); Ko, Dorothy – Haboush, JaHyun Kim - Piggot, Joan: 2003. *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China*. (University of California Press); Yo, Insun: 1990. *Law and Society in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam*. (Seoul: The Asiatic Research Center).

¹¹⁹ For the synopsis of the story see the Appendix.

It is a story of a young man and respected teacher Chương, who is known among his friends for his rather misogynic relationship towards women. However, his embittered attitude begins to change after he meets two girls - Thu and Tuyết, who both seem to have a liking for him. While Thu is the embodiment of a virtuous woman brought up in Confucian morality, Tuyết is a splendid prostitute, who lives a roaming life on the margins of the society. Chương, who is oblivious of the public opinion or the traditional way of life, moves her in and lives with her. Their happiness is not meant to last since Tuyết decides to leave him. She writes him a letter, though, in which she tells him of her past. Chương finds out that she came from a rich family and thus had received good education. While frequenting school in Hanoi, she was leading quite a merry life. When reached the age of seventeen she complied with the wishes of her family and married a man that they had chosen for her. He was a son of a mandarin family, yet very foul, weak and incompetent.¹²⁰ Not being able to live with her in-laws any longer, Tuyết decides to leave her husband and her child, never to return again. Below is an excerpt of Tuyết's letter:

I am a child of a ... noble family. If you believe it or not, it is up to you. When I was a child, I learnt French. When I was fourteen, I succeeded in passing my exams and my family let me go to Hanoi to study at the primary school for girls
Even though I came to Hanoi from a small province for the first time, soon enough I acquired the city manners. My family was rich and my parents spoiled me. The year I turned sixteen, i.e. two years later, I lagged behind no one in food or clothing.... In my mind I had many dreams of the future, of a long brilliant life spent with my future husband. Many young, handsome, and talented mandarins' sons looked at me with moved eyes full of desire and dreams.

¹²⁰ As has been stated above, in most of the romantic novels of the first half of the 1930s, it was the husbands who were often portrayed as weak, incompetent, boorish, etc. while their female counterparts displayed more strength of character, will, humanity, virtue. Tam's novels of this period were in line with this representation of men and women.

Heavens have endowed me with a lively mind and a heart too easy to be moved. So whenever I saw some man, I was convinced that he loved me and I wanted to love him. Luckily, due to my upbringing I was able to contain my overly passionate feelings...

And then when I was seventeen, my mother told me that someone had asked for my hand in marriage.

So at the end of that year I left school to live with my husband's family... How could I have understood?

How could I have known my husband's face? I just knew that he had asked for my hand. He married me with pomp and splendor and I became his wife, a daughter-in-law. Just like that.

My husband. Foul! If had only a part of the good character of other men that I had often met or imagined, then I could be at peace in this life. Heavens, he just had one characteristic: he was the favorite child of a mandarin family. You wouldn't think that a person of seventeen or eighteen years could be as foolish as a ten-year-old child and not know anything. But he knew how to be a husband and a year later a son was born.

Absolutely miserable, we lived at the expenses of the in-laws and what more we had a wet nurse.

My husband left school and was unemployed (he had managed to study till the first grade of the French-Vietnamese school). I was subordinate to my mother-in-law just like a servant. Where was gone my beautiful life of the bygone days when I vied with my friends? In addition, my husband's parents were old-fashioned and overly critical to any trifles of their daughter-in-law.

Try to imagine those days.... But enough, the more I talk, the more ashamed and wicked I feel.

And not long after that I...had an affair with one man from the neighborhood.

Then one day, when I was with my husband on a train, I caught a glimpse of my lover at one local railway station. I got off and left for good.

Since then I have never returned to my husband's house. Even though my parents were looking for me, I just dodged here and there. Gradually, my parents started to consider me as a repudiated child. What more, as a child that was already dead. And my husband, as I have heard somewhere, found himself a new wife (Khái Hưng - Nhất Linh 1934).

The character of Tuyết resembles the dissatisfaction of the young Westernized urban population with the traditional system of the great (extended) family and the concept of arranged marriages. It is also first

Nhất Linh's and Khái Hưng's novel, where we can discern their first signs of open revolt against traditional Vietnamese society and its conventions, etc. The heroine has the courage to rebel against the life imposed on her by her family, however she finds herself lost and isolated for she has nowhere to go in a society where the traditional still predominates. Therefore, Tuyết is condemned to aimless and restless wandering as there is no place for her in the society, which is still permeated with Confucian values.

Đời Mưa Gió (Tempestuous life) became an instant best seller among the urban readers (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 124). It was one of the first of Nhất Linh's indirect attacks against the extended family, Confucian morality and tradition. In this novel both Nhất Linh's as well as Khái Hưng attack the concept of arranged marriages. In the traditional Vietnamese society marriage was not a matter of the two people concerned but rather of the whole families. One can characterize traditional marriage in the Vietnamese society by a proverb "Where the parents say, the children will settle" (*Cha mẹ đặt đâu con ngồi đấy*). Pre-marital love did not come into play at all. If the children were not satisfied with the choice of their partner they did not have many options how to solve the situation. The expected behavior was to surrender to the demands of the family. The other extreme solution was to sever the ties and leave home. However, such behavior was perceived as an expression of lack of filial piety (*bất hiếu*) and ungratefulness. Therefore, many young people did not have the courage to stand up against this oppressive reality and follow their heart. Most of them submitted to the demands of their family just as Tô Tâm and Đạm Thủy did in Hoàng Ngọc Phách's novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart). Nhất Linh's Tuyết, however, did not submit to the pressure. She fell low and became a prostitute, since as mentioned above the individual who broke away from the traditional system had nowhere to go. It seems that Nhất Linh and Khái Hưng did not know how to solve the situation either and the only outcome

that is presented in the book is the necessity of emancipating the individual from the extended traditional family (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 124).

Nhất Linh's critique of the traditional family became even more hard-hitting with the publication of his next novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties, 1934-1935).¹²¹ It is a story of Loan, a girl from a decent family, who, as many other female characters in Nhất Linh's novels, received modern education. Despite the fact that Loan loves her childhood friend, she too is forced to marry Thân, a boorish young man from a family to which Loan's parents owe money. At first Loan, as an educated and an emancipated woman, tries to oppose this arranged marriage, as we can see in the following passage:

Loan raised her head and looked in front of her. Then she said leisurely:

- Yes, so please let me decide especially in this case if I will or won't get married. I have tried to tell you many times that I cannot...

Mrs. Hai was angry:

- Oh, so you can't... You must realize that you are a grown-up... you must know how to think!

Loan was still calm and moderate:

- Dear mother, that's exactly it. And that is why, since I am an adult, I do know how to think. So I am also telling you that I cannot marry into that family.

Mrs. Hai said:

- You must be joking?

Loan answered:

- No, I am not joking at all. I consider this matter very important for my life, but it concerns only me, nobody else.
- And what about me? It seems that you are not taking into consideration my promise at all.
- Dear mother, why did you promise them anything? For how many years have you been accepting presents from them? If only had you listened to what I have been telling you from the very beginning? They came and brought the

¹²¹ For the synopsis of the story see the Appendix.

engagement presents, and you still accepted. It's not my fault that you did not let me know. You threaten me as if I weren't a part of this family.

Mrs Hai looked furious.

- Oh, so now it is you who is scolding me. Right, so I took the liberty, but you must know why I made that decision. I spend the money on your education, on your upbringing and then you come back and argue with your parents...That's wrong!

Suddenly, seeing her husband crossing the veranda, Mrs Hai raised her voice:

- Come and see your child scolding me.

Mr. Hai turned around and grumbled at Loan:

- You shouldn't be rude.

Loan looked at him and answered:

- Dear father, but I am not being impolite. I would never dare to be rude to my mother. But at least my mother could let me talk to her about what is right and wrong concerning my own life.

Mr Hai gravely looked at his child and said:

- We have already taken a decision on this matter and we will also arrange everything for you. You don't need to discuss anything. Where did you learn the habit of talking back to your mother if she says something to you? Even though times have changed, some rules must be followed otherwise it would be unbearable!

Loan lowered her head and thought for a moment. Then she said in a resolute voice.

- Dear father and mother, you let me go to school, therefore you cannot treat me as you would an uneducated child anymore. It is not true that I am arrogant. This is natural. The fault is not in me. According to me, discussing with you about what is right or wrong does not mean any lack of filial piety.

Seeing tears running down her mother's face, Loan turned around and told Mrs. Hai:

- Dear mother, I apologize for causing you trouble. But it is better than to make you sad forever. If I hadn't gone to school, I would have listened to your words as if they were an order that I couldn't oppose. I would be like every other oppressed person and then I would risk and kill myself. Now that would be disrespectful towards one's parents. But speaking clearly so that you know is just going to worry you only for a while. You are angry with me, because you cannot imagine that I would dare to talk back. But I consider that the right thing to do.

After having halted for a while, Loan continued speaking:

- Yes, I acknowledge that I am too modern. I have gone to school, yet I cannot behave in accordance with what I have learned there. Now I have to depend on your authority.

Even though Mr. and Mrs. Hai realized that what she had said made sense, they could not avoid being surprised and worried. They vaguely saw that their child was distancing them and had become a person in a society different from the traditional one...Mr. and Mrs. Hai belonged to the middle class and made their living in the trade of selling mats. They only knew how to follow the customs that their ancestors had handed over. They would have never thought that in the current society there would be such a big change. Only since their child started going to school, did they gradually come into contact with that change. And now, facing such an important affair they felt more and more clear and worried, because they realized that their child did not share the same viewpoint of life as them anymore, and that difference was big (Nhất Linh 1935).

In the end, Loan concedes and decides to fulfill her parents' wish to marry Thân. However, she has a hard time to put up with this sacrifice and is haunted by deep regrets. Even though she tries to be a good daughter-in-law, she soon discovers that her task in the new family is just to serve. It had become evident that she had been married to serve not to be a wife. Furthermore, once lying next to her husband Loan realizes that she has been reduced to a baby-making machine: "She did not need passion: her destiny was to be a baby-making machine, therefore she was supposed to perceive herself so. Even her husband's behavior always reminded her that it was her lot and nothing else" (Nhất Linh 1935).

Despite all her disappointment, Loan tries to be a good wife and she patiently endures the ill treatment from her husband, mother-in-law and even sisters-in-law. She gives birth to a baby boy and thus fulfills one of the main Confucian duties of a proper wife. However, the baby falls sick and since in accordance with the Confucian values it does not belong to her but to the husband's family, it is the mother-in-law, who decides on the treatment of the boy by taking him to a local pagoda, where a shaman tries

to heal him. Loan rushes the boy to the hospital but it is too late and her son dies. Since her pregnancy was difficult Loan too has to undergo an operation. Despite its success, Loan loses the possibility to conceive again. Since her in-laws insist on having a male descendant, Thân gets a concubine and Loan's position in the family worsens:

Loan looked down unable to bear watching Tuat bowing down on the mat in the ritual of prostrating to the ancestors and Mr. and Mrs. Clerk, because that sight made Loan remember how several years ago she had stepped into the house of her husband for the first time. She felt that at that time she was like Tuat is now. Even though her position towards Tuat is different, but they are still two people that have been bought to surrender themselves to prostrating in acceptance of being baby making machines, housemaids serving without wages. Before, when Loan had been married to become officially a proper wife, the ceremonies had not been so false as they were now carried out only to conceal and even more to allow an adultery.

Suddenly the voice of Mrs. Clerk was saying: "Where are you, first daughter-in-law? Sit up here so that she can perform the ceremony."

Loan cast a glance at everybody without comprehension. She asked herself surprised:

Tuat prostrating to me? Tuat kowtowing to Thân?"

By then Tuat had arrived before her, looking down at the ground with her blushing cheeks, looking self-pitiful and shy, yet very submissive as if she were only waiting for Loan to say a word before falling down in prostrations, as one would do when kowtowing to some god who can bestow happiness or misfortune.

Loan thought to herself: "Why should two people who share the same lot as we do kowtow to each other in order to bring more shame upon themselves?"

In that moment of bewilderment she unintentionally looked at Duc, who was staring at her. Loan and Duc realized that in that group of twenty people, who were standing there, only they two understood each other. Thân was sitting calmly in the chair with a serious face as if he were just about to step into a very solemn ceremony.

Loan raised her hand in a gesture of her refusal and said:

"Enough. That will do. I cannot accept this."

Suddenly, the voice of Mrs. Dao was heard:

"That won't do! You just sit up so that she can perform the rituals. If you don't want to, it's up to you. However, a ritual must be carried out as a ritual. What must be above, will be above, what must be beneath, shall be beneath. This person is going to live with you for

a long time. If you do not accept this she will think that you disapprove of her and that can lead to more trouble.”

Loan suddenly understood why Mrs. Dao had come. She was representing the family of the first wife and she had come here only to issue orders. Loan was intending to stand up and go to another place when Tuat sat down on the mat and bent her head to carry out the ritual. Loan had no choice but to sit back and accept what was going on. She did not want to display her discontent fearing that other people would suspect her of being unsatisfied with her husband having a concubine.

She felt her face burning and felt embarrassed instead of Tuat. Frowning she looked down at Tuat, who was bowing down at her feet, and thought:

“Human or an animal?”

Then she turned around and looked at Thân asking herself what was he thinking in his mind. She asked herself what kind of love Thân felt towards the person who was kowtowing to her (Nhất Linh 1935).

Gradually, Loan alienates the whole family and the tension in the house culminates when Loan and Thân have another argument, which has a tragic ending. During a scuffle that breaks out between them, Thân falls on a penknife that Loan is holding and dies. Loan is accused of murder and is trialed. Her mother-in-law as a key witness accuses Loan of planning the whole murder, of picking up the quarrel on purpose in order to create a convenient situation in which she could stab Thân to death. The prosecutor’s speech was so convincing that by the time he had finished, it seemed Loan was to be prosecuted for a premeditated murder. After the prosecutor had finished his speech, there was complete silence in the courtroom and it seemed to everybody that Loan had no chances of being freed. Yet Loan sat there motionless not displaying any sign of emotion. It was the turn of her lawyer to deliver his speech:

“Loan did not murder her husband. That is a fact. The doctor’s testimony, the testimonies of the servants that are in accordance with the statements of the accused, revealed clearly that all the contradictory testimonies of the members of the the family of the deceased are calumny stemming from hatred. And when Thị Loan was holding

the knife that was no crime. That bronze vase can also kill a person. Thị Loan has the right to protect herself, protect herself by any means.

I was just talking about hatred, and if I am not mistaken, the public prosecutor has just also mentioned that the entire household hated Miss Loan. But that does not prove that Loan is guilty.

That people hate her is not an evidence of her being disdainful. Miss Loan is an educated woman, i.e. she is a progressive woman. However, “progressive” does not have the same meaning as “romantic.” Thị Loan is a modern woman who was nevertheless willing to obey the words of her mother and she married a traditional husband and lived in a traditional family. My words here are based on evidence.

Then the lawyer demonstrated a paper and continued speaking:

This is a letter that Miss Loan wrote to teacher Thảo, her friend who is also present here today. Allow me to read a sentence that Thị Loan wrote in the letter: “I am going to live as anybody else, I am going to obey and make my husband’s family my own. I am going to consider my husband’s parents as my own. Who knows whether I am going to be happy there.”

Have you, gentlemen, heard this clearly? Miss Loan wanted peace but they did not let her have it.

I do not want to mention the person who died. Certainly not in such a way that would not be flattering for the deceased. But, gentlemen look at Miss Loan sitting here. A person as beautiful as Miss Loan...

Hearing laughter in the room, the lawyer repeated the last sentence:

Yes, I must mention the beauty of Miss Loan. Miss Loan is educated, she is beautiful and has just entered a phase of life and she is full of thirst for a beautiful life. But because of filial piety towards her parents she willingly married an ignorant husband and for many years she lived reconciled with her destiny. Furthermore, Miss Loan, a modern girl, who has not a child, accepted a second wife for her husband so that his family had a child carrying on the line! A person like this is not an immature woman as the public prosecutor has just said.

For many years Miss Loan had to withstand many terrible and bitter events. I would only like to remind the case of Miss Loan’s son, who tragically died.

Then the lawyer recounted how Mrs. Clerk had taken her grandson to the shaman ... Thảo had clearly told him this history.

It was the mother-in-law herself who had killed her grandson without even knowing it. And still it was her who shifted the blame of killing the child on Miss Loan! Now she still blames Miss Loan of killing her own husband. Little does she realize that her child died

because of her own fault, because of the twisted and stern morality? It is the mother-in-law and the old-fashioned morality who are the guilty here.

We cannot not to see this. It is the French themselves who have come here and have brought the Western culture. It is the French themselves who have taught our people new ways of reasoning, who have given them new concepts of life.

The public prosecutor says that the French came here to preserve the foundation of protectorate of the people and that this foundation is the family. I share the same opinion. But with all our strength we have also taught them to progress and now we must let them do so. To restrain them is unwise and also impossible.

Current Vietnamese society is not the same as the society of the 19th century. Current family cannot be left intact as the family of the preceding century. In the countries of the Far East, Japan, China, Siam, and especially in China – the first ancestor of East Asian culture, the sphere of family today is not the same as it was before.

To preserve the family! But please do not confound the preservation of family with preserving slavery. The system of has been abandoned for a long time now, and whenever we think of it, we cannot help shuddering with horror! Therefore, nobody would have thought that his terrible system still prevails in the Vietnamese family!”

Due to negligence, due to customs handed over Miss Loan’s mother-in-law took advantage of her rights as well as hundred thousand of other mothers-in-law in Vietnamese society.

People who have absorbed the new culture became saturated with ideas of humanity, personal freedom, thus naturally they strive to find ways to escape this system. This desire is right. But escaping is not as easy as we may think. Besides, people who had to live patiently in submission like Miss Loan here could not withstand that cruel system and had to sacrifice their lives.

The lawyer pulled out of his briefcase several old documents marked with a red pencil and read out loud several passages such as:

“There, gentlemen, as you can see, it is first and foremost us who are guilty. We have taught them the new but we have not created appropriate space which would match their new concepts.

Are you accusing Miss Loan of murder? Miss Loan did not murder anybody! Are you accusing Miss Loan of disrupting the family? But it was Miss Loan herself who ardently wanted to live peacefully within the family. There is only one thing Miss Loan is guilty of and that is going to school in order to train her intelligence and become a new person and then having to return and live with an old-fashioned person. That is her only guilt. But Thi Loan has redeemed this guilt by much misery already.

By releasing Miss Loan, gentlemen, you will perform an act of justice. Which means that, you will express that the inhuman system of family has reached its last days and that it must cede its place to a different family system that would be more appropriate with the current new life, with concepts of people, who have received new learning. Gentlemen, if you release Miss Loan, you will free a person who has been unjustly accused. You will free a woman, who has endured much misery because she wasted her youth and sacrificed herself for this severe society of the old and the new” (Nhất Linh 1935).

The final speech of the attorney was so convincing that Loan was proclaimed “not guilty.” Only after that she could “sever the ties” with her in-law family and go and live life of her own. The readers would meet her later in another novel *Đôi Bạn* (Two Friends) that Nhất Linh was to write in two years time.

The final speech can also be viewed as Nhất Linh’s own accusations of the traditional Confucian society and values and the extended family that oppressed the individual right for happiness and personal freedom. In the words of Neil Jamieson, “it was not Loan alone who was on trial, but the entire individualistic ideology of which she was a symbol and for which Tam was the leading and the most articulate spokesman” (Jamieson 1993: 146). In this novel as in the ones written before Nhất Linh launched a harsh critique of the traditional society and the Confucian values that it promoted. Nhất Linh focused his attention mainly on analyzing and criticizing the concept of extended family and the power that it exercised over the life of an individual, in Nhất Linh’s case, a young woman. One of the aspects of family life that Nhất Linh denounced was arranged marriage, a topic that he had already touched in the novel of *Đời Mưa Gió* (Tempestuous life), published in 1934. It is quite paradoxical though – since Tam himself without any protests expressed, had stepped into marital life through an arranged marriage – as has been stated in the

preceding chapter. We can only speculate about whether he had felt stifled by his family or not.

In the novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties) Nhất Linh also focused his critique on the relationship between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law in the extended family. However, he was not the first to have done so since many Vietnamese folksongs had bitterly condemned this type of a relationship of a mistress (mother-in-law) and servant (daughter-in-law) who “can never have anything good to say about each other” (Marr 1976: 373). Thus, in Nhất Linh’s novel, as soon as Loan got married she discovered that she was not expected to be a wife but a servant. This kind of marriage also known as *hôn nhân gả bán* (give-sell marriage) was quite common in Vietnamese traditional society. Wealthier families often married their sons to poorer and sometimes even much older girls. The wife would then take care of her husband, bring him up and at the same time help out in the household. Therefore, by marrying the son, the family actually acquired another labor force, that needn’t have been paid for the work as the servants would. On the other hand, for the poorer families such a marriage was often a solution to their miserable conditions. Either the girl was married to gain much needed money or to repay a debt. The latter being the reason why Loan was married to Thân:

Not seeing Mr. Hai anywhere, Loan asked her mother.

“Is father sleeping?”

“No, your father went to Hai Phong three days ago.”

Loan guessed that there was something different from the usual and asked.

“Why did he go, mother?”

Mrs. Hai did not answer.

Loan said: “I can see that you are worried. What happened, mother?”

Mrs. Hai was quiet for a while, then asked Loan to sit next to her and said:

“Our family will soon be in danger. Father went to Hai Phong to go in search of money to repay the debts. But I am sure it won’t be of any use.”

Loan asked: “How much do you owe?”

“Three thousand.”

”To whom, mother?”

”To Mrs. Clerk, the mother of your husband.”

Loan was stunned:

”How long have you been owing them?”

”Since last year, since the time you were still at home.”

Seeing Mrs. Hai shake her head miserably, Loan frowned and said angrily:

”Does it matter if we don’t have money to pay?”

“Does it matter? She has been threatening us with confiscation.”

Mentioning this, Mrs. Hai could not hold her exasperation any longer and tears started streaming down her face. Loan was sitting calmly thinking. She knew that Mrs. Clerk wanted to take revenge upon her. Beside that, there was no other reason why the two families should be angry with each to such an extent that they would demand the repayment of debts so vehemently.

Loan looked at her mother half compassionately, half angrily. Now she has realized clearly the reason why her mother was forcing her with such persistence to marry Thân. She has just found out that she had to leave school, because her family had been hard-pressed

And it was Mrs. Clerk who had saved her family. Her marriage was just business. ok
(Nhất Linh 1935)

Nhất Linh also attacked the phenomenon of polygamy (*đa thê*) and the concept of “three subjections” (*tam tông*) of a woman,¹²² and of “four virtues” (*tứ đức*).¹²³ However, these expectations concerning the behavior of an ideal wife were rather old-fashioned and in contradiction with the values and conviction of young progressive women with Western education. And even though Loan tried hard to submit to these rules and

¹²² As had been stated in the first chapters of the dissertation, throughout her life woman in Vietnamese traditional family held a submissive position for unwed she had to obey her father (*tông phụ*), married she was subjugated to her husband (*tông phu*), and widowed she had to obey her son (*tông tử*), i.e. *tại gia tông phụ, xuất gia tông phu, phu tử tông tử*.

¹²³ In order to be considered as virtuous or good, she was obliged to have the following characteristics: *phụ công* (dexterity in women’s tasks), *phụ dung* (modesty, femininity, elegance), *phụ ngôn* (pleasing in conversation), *phụ hạnh* (well behaved).

“Be respectful to superiors and yielding to inferiors”(kính trên, nhường dưới), her “progressive” education did not allow her to yield completely, which later caused grave confrontations with her mother-in-law. As a good wife Loan was obliged to take care of her husband’s parents for not doing so would again be considered as a transgression of filial piety (*bất hiếu*). Thus, Loan found herself completely trapped.

The novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties) became an instant best seller and is considered to be one of the most celebrated novels of the 1930s in Vietnam (Jamieson 1993: 146). Most of the reviews competed with each other in ovations. Introducing the novel on the pages of the newspaper *Loa* (Speaking Trumpet), one of the best literary critics Trương Tửu called the novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* as a “magnificent chaplet placed on the head of individualism” (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 170). Trường Chinh evaluated the book as: “A masterpiece of modern literature. Moreover, the novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* does not have only social significance. It also has psychological importance that cannot be disputed” (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 83). While Nguyễn Lương Học, who issued his review on the pages of *Tinh Hoa* (Essence) newspaper, remarked that “the austere family that Nhất Linh describes exists only in the remote countryside, while the city has progressed greatly already and the author, who firmly takes side with the new, only pushes a door that has already been opened.” (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 148) The book was such a success that in South Vietnam it became a required reading of the high school curriculum until the unification of the two countries by the Communists in 1975 (Jamieson 1993: 146).

In spite of reaping the tumultuous applause of the Westernized urban public, the novel also stirred a number of opposing reactions from other well-known intellectuals. Nguyễn Công Hoan, another prominent journalist and writer, criticized the novel as the “first half of it is

unnecessary, while the other half also serves nothing” (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 148), i.e. Nguyễn Công Hoan did not appreciate the depiction of the position of a daughter-in-law in an extended family; in addition he did not agree with the solution (severing the ties) that Nhất Linh had proposed. Nguyễn Công Hoan also noted, “If *Đoạn Tuyệt* is not a weapon of a deliberate saboteur, then it still remains to be final ruse of a radical revolutionary” (Nhật Thịnh 1986: 83).

A year later, he even published his novel *Cô giáo Minh* (Schoolteacher Minh, 1936), which was his own reaction to the extreme individualism promoted not only in the writings of Nhất Linh but the whole *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group). The situation in which the main character, schoolteacher Minh finds herself is almost identical with the one that Loan encountered in *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties). She too sacrifices her love and yields to her mother’s wishes and marries Sanh, a man whom she does not love. She too is disappointed in marriage. Furthermore, she also has to put up with maltreatment from her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. The similarities between the first halves of the novels are so striking that after the apparition of the book Khái Hưng accused Nguyễn Công Hoan of plagiarism (Jamieson 1993: 147). Nevertheless, Nguyễn Công Hoan presents a different solution and overall outcome of the situation, which can be seen as a confirmation of Confucian values and the traditional Vietnamese society.

As the oppression from her husband’s family worsened, Minh became more disillusioned and sour. In order to escape her fate, with the help of her friends from the Office of Education she arranged for herself to be transferred to a teaching post outside Hanoi. Unfortunately, her husband’s family finds out her plan and prevents her from accepting the position. The situation worsens and after Minh is severely beaten up by her mother-in-

law, she also decides to sever the ties and to leave the oppressive family. She plans her escape with patience and has Nha, one of her old admirers, come to pick her up at night having told him that it was an emergency trip. In the moment of leaving and finally severing the ties, she hesitates and asks herself: “Should I really follow the European ideas to smash an Asian family?” (Jamieson 1992: 152). After much pondering she decides to stay with her husband’s family and does her best to overcome the differences and bring about the reconciliation between both the generations. She takes pains to understand her in-laws point of view and gradually both sides become slowly fond of each other. Thus, the message of Nguyễn Công Hoan was that the old and the new could co-exist together, while severing the ties was just a manifestation of egoism.

After its appearance on the literary scene, the novel was widely discussed mainly by the critics. However, according to Bùi Xuân Bào, despite its literary artfulness, the novel *Cô giáo Minh* (Schoolteacher Minh) was a flop with the readers, since they were not at all convinced by the solution of the situation that he had strived to assert (Bùi Xuân Bào 1972: 224). Furthermore, the angry members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) dedicated one whole issue of the *Phong hoá* (Customs, no. 180) to attack Nguyễn Công Hoan (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 87). This issue, which was released on March 26th 1936, was also the last one to be published (Lê Hữu Mục 1958: 87).

After having put up with such critique of his work, Nhất Linh continued with his scorching criticism of the Confucian society. After publishing the novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties), he wrote another book in which he denounced the morality put forth by the Confucian ideology. His new novel called *Lạnh Lùng* (Loneliness) appeared for the first time on the pages of the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine, where it was issued in a

serialized form from number 16 July 12, 1936 to number 28 on December 13 the same year (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991: 126). A year later it was published in book form.

It is an account of a young girl Nhung, widowed for more than three years, who falls hopelessly in love with Nghĩa, the teacher of her nephews. Nhung was also forced to marry a man, whom she did not love, but she had deep respect for him. She tries hard to be a good widow not only because of her upbringing, but also due to her vanity:

Nhung talked to her mother-in-law pretending not to see that the guest was watching, examining her. She felt as if at that moment she was a rare flower in the house, which was boastfully displayed to be praised whenever the guests came over. Nevertheless, she felt delighted every time she was shown admiration: praise even though it was false still satisfied Nhung's pride in her human dignity (Nhất Linh 1989: 28).

After three years of widowhood, she cannot bear it any longer and she submits to her craving. She has a love affair with Nghĩa, but her happiness has a fleeting taste for she is caught in between her opposing desires. On one hand she would like to leave the virtuous life at her in-laws' that suffocates her and start a new life with her lover. On the other hand, she does not have the courage to do so. Furthermore, she fears the public opinion and what the people will say if they find out about her affair. While encouraging her younger sister to follow her heart, oppose the choice of husband her parents made and marry the man she truly loved, Nhung realizes more and more the restrictions of the society she is living in:

“Enough, you just have to try a little longer. Just for a little while and then all of it will be over. You will go far and everything will be forgotten.” The moment she said those words, she realized clearly the merciless oppression of the petty society

that surrounded her. In a few days her younger sister is going to leave with her husband, but she herself had absolutely no idea if she would ever be able to escape. Be it her parents, her mother-in-law, her neighbors or many other things – all these were forcing her not to live her life the way she really wanted. She knew that everybody wanted her to be a widow, who would honor her deceased husband and never remarry. Thus she had to live a lonely life and worship him. She caught a glimpse of the horizontal panel with the sign *Tiết Hạnh Khả Phong* (Honors to Faithful Widow) hanging on the wall in the living room of her house – the final reward for those who lived a virtuous life like her (Nhất Linh 1989: 76).

She cannot make up her mind and break away with the expectations imposed on her by her surroundings:

Nghĩa continued:

- I only have one dream and that is to marry you.

What Nghĩa has just said worried her because when she was in love she just wanted to forget that matter. Many obstacles made her think that marrying Nghĩa was just not possible. In order to comfort him pretending that she has been preoccupied by that matter for a long time but has not found a way how to resolve the problem, she asked him:

- And how shall we do it?

Nghĩa was a bit surprised by her question. He did not understand:

- If you really love me then what do you need to think about? I was sure that you would never doubt my love for you. I am poor, but we love each other and we will earn our living. When I think of it I feel immense happiness. [...]

Nhung said sadly:

- If you could just understand the misery I have been living in for so long. If only I had met you when I wasn't married. Where would I have been? Now, I am just a widow.... it's so hard.

Nghĩa looked angry:

- So, you are that worried about rumors?

After having hesitated for a while, Nhung continued speaking:

- No, it's not that. But look at it this way. Even though I love you a lot, I still cannot abandon my parents, my siblings and neighbors so imperturbably. My mother has suffered a lot because of Phuong. If I do the same, she'll be heart-broken and die. She'll die because she won't be able to bear twice the disgrace to

the family reputation caused by both the daughters. Please, try to understand (Nhất Linh 1989: 87-88).

In the end she does not find enough courage to follow Nghĩa. Her preoccupation with her reputation and her mother seems stronger than her love for him. She continues to see him in secret even though she slowly realizes that her mother-in-law is aware of her liaison. Nevertheless, due to her weakness she condemns herself to a life of loneliness:

- She looks very young, don't you think? I would say around twentish.
The guest's sentence was like a melody resounding in her ears. Nhung smiled thinking:
- Nghĩa wasn't lying when he praised me for looking young like an eighteen-year-old girl.

Even though it was cold, Nhung opened her under dress in order to reveal two white and round arms. She splashed water, closed her eyes to feel distinctly the warmth of the water on her hands and suddenly she recalled Nghĩa's passionate kisses on her skin. A gust of cold wind penetrated the room. Suddenly Nhung felt infinite sadness inside. Looking at her fresh and beautiful face, she realized that soon enough when looking at her appearance she will see hair dotted with fog, glazed eyes and just like her pink cheeks Nghĩa's love that will have faded. Months, years, spring of her life will pass by never to return again! Nhung saw four words in gold appear in front her eyes:

Tiết Hạnh Khả Phong (Honours to the faithful widow).

When she has two jaws of rickety teeth and gray hair, that rare reward is going to terminate her life, a life of a young widow, who honored her husband, never remarried and guarded her good reputation (Nhất Linh 1989: 176).

Once again Nhất Linh succeeded in stirring the public opinion. This time it was the traditional concept of widowhood that Nhất Linh had attacked. In the traditional Vietnamese society the role of the woman in the family became even more salient after the death of her husband. The widow substituted the man as the head of the family, even though she was

theoretically subordinate to the eldest son. She could not leave the household, but had to stay and take care of her children and her in-laws, if they were still alive. Despite the fact, that the legal codex did not treat the question of the widow in great detail, the widow was obliged to mourn her husband's death for the period of three years (27 months). In case she remarried she would automatically lose her children, which would remain in the care of the husband's relatives. The law encouraged widows not to re-marry even though the mourning period had passed, expecting them to stay with the husband's family. These faithful wives were then rewarded in many ways, e.g. by a gift of property, or by the title *Tiết Hạnh Khả Phong* (Honors to Faithful Widow).

Through the character of Nhung Nhất Linh asks two crucial questions challenging the traditional conservative mores of the Neo-Confucian society that condemned widows to a life of loneliness: "Why should a widow not be allowed to get married like a girl? Is remaining a widow the only way to keep a good reputation with her parents and family" (Nhất Linh 1989: 159). By raising these two questions Nhất Linh again appealed to the Westernized youth and women who started to contest the double morality that pervaded the traditional Vietnamese society, i.e. why could widowers go and marry while widows could not. Despite the support and enthusiasm of the public, words of critique were also to be heard. Trương Tửu¹²⁴ (1913 – 1999) accused Nhất Linh of destroying moral principles

¹²⁴ Trương Tửu was a writer and literary critic also known under his pseudonyms Nguyễn Bách Khoa, Mai Viên and T.T. He started publishing in the 1930s in such magazines as: *Loa* (Speaking Trumpet), *Đông Tây* (East, West), *Ích hữu* (Utility), *Tiếng trẻ* (Young Voice) and *Hà Nội* (Hanoi). At the beginning he focused on writing prose. In between 1937 and 1940 he published eight novels, but none of them was considered as successful. At the time he was considered as a writer of the third or even fourth category. However, when he switched to literary critique his reputation soared. He drew the first noteworthy attention of the public after having published *Kinh thi Kinh thi Việt Nam* (1940, Vietnamese Book of Songs), in which he analyzed Vietnamese folk poetry from the sociological perspective. He was also the founder of the literary group *Hàn Thuyên*, which most of literary critics labeled as Trotskyist. In 1943 Trương Tửu gained wide acclaim for his book called *Nguyễn Du và Truyện Kiều* (1943, Nguyễn Du and the epic *Kiều*), in

and virtues (Nguyễn Tường Bách 1980). He also blamed Nhất Linh for advocating “sexual freedom” and appealed to the public: “All the parents who want to prevent their daughters from being debauched, should not let them read the book *Lạnh Lùng*” (Phạm Thế Ngũ 2000: 149).

In spite of stirring great discussion about the lot of widows in Vietnamese society, it is noteworthy to say that Nhất Linh, as in many novels he had written before, did not offer any solution to the problem probably partially due to the fact that he must have been aware of the complexity of free choice. Moreover, his personages, paradoxically, remain faithful to the conservative Neo-Confucian mores. Just like the heroes of Hoàng Ngọc Phách’s novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart), Nhung chooses to remain loyal to her family and save the good reputation by renouncing her love for Nghĩa. She prefers to fulfill the expectations imposed on her by society rather than to follow her heart and find enough courage to contest the hypocritical morality. Ironically, just like Hoàng Ngọc Phách had done before, Nhất Linh actually re-affirmed the Neo-Confucian conservative morality that he had opposed with such fervor.

In 1937 Nhất Linh published another collection of stories *Hai buổi chiều vàng* (Two Golden Afternoons). The collection contains six stories in a rather romantic tone.¹²⁵ Most of the stories in the collection are of romantic and melancholic nature and most of them have an open ending. Nhất Linh’s depiction of love is of love yet again painful and unfulfilled. Most of the characters in the stories suffer in their unselfish love and often sacrifice themselves for the happiness of loved ones. It is probably the

which he applied the theories of dialectic materialism in the literary analysis. After having published this volume he became one of the most acknowledged literary critics, who was held in high esteem until the 1950’s where he was overthrown from the pedestal after having taken part in the first dissent movement in Vietnam – the Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm affair, which called for greater freedom of expression.

¹²⁵ For the list of the stories and their synopsis see the Appendix.

story of *Cái Tái* (Eraser) that is the most revealing concerning Nhất Linh's vision of happiness as in the story Nhất Linh writes that "Happiness is only in one's heart. Happiness lies in the peace of one's soul." This statement can be considered as a key to Tam's perception of free love and of individualism. As has been mentioned many times while studying in France Nhất Linh discovered André Gide, whose writings he admired the most, especially the concept of *l'acte gratuit*.

As it is apparent from above, Nhất Linh just like Gide considered the family as the most oppressive force that one had to cope with. Yet, looking closely at Nhất Linh's writings, it is evident that unlike Gide, he did not let his heroines or heroes smash the institution of family. Moreover, it is more than apparent that Nhất Linh carried in himself the legacy of Confucian feelings of obligation and debt (*on*), the fulfillment of which is not only a duty but also brings with it a certain joy and realisation that one does not live only for oneself but for others. Even though the heroines of his novels may have modern, progressive and emancipated thoughts about love, personal happiness and the right to choose one's partner, most of them always bow to tradition, follow it and what more sacrifice themselves for the good of others. Not even Loan from Nhất Linh's novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties, 1934-1935) does any radical steps against the wish of her family. She does verbalize her discontent with the arranged marriage and her right for personal happiness. Nonetheless, she does not undertake any steps to free herself from her family. On the contrary, she, too, just like a well-brought up daughter imbued with Confucian values sacrifices herself for her parents. What more, even in her husband's family in the beginning she tries to fulfill the requirements of a virtuous and respectful wife and daughter-in-law. Her opposition to Confucian morality is not that radical at all. In addition, her liberation from the oppressive family is not an "*acte gratuite*" but rather a result of a series of events over which Loan

has little control. It was the unhappy incident of involuntary killing of her husband and the attorney's speech that liberated her, not her own actions.

The same case applies for his following novel *Lạnh Lùng* (Loneliness, 1936). The heroine called Nhung mulls over her personal happiness and future. She is madly in love with Nghĩa, who is willing to carry the consequences of violating social conventions, help her break away from her in-laws family and lead a new life with her. However, in the end Nhung does not have enough courage to follow her heart and prefers to "sacrifice" her personal happiness for the reputation and contentment of her family. This novel once again stirred a wave of contradictory reactions, since at first sight it may have seemed that Nhất Linh launched yet another radical attack on Vietnamese traditional society. However, at a closer look we are forced to come to the conclusion that Nhất Linh was not that extreme in his assault as his heroine only pondered over her happiness, yet in the end did not do anything to endanger her family and continued playing the role of a virtuous widow. It is therefore paradoxical that Nhất Linh, who wrote with the aim to show that Confucian is out-dated, probably unwittingly restored Confucian values that he so overtly despised.

Only in one novel did Tam dare to make that break with the society. That was the case of *Đời Mưa Gió* (Tempestuous life) that he had written in 1934 in cooperation with Khái Hưng. One of the Heroines of the story is Tuyết – a splendid prostitute with whom Chương, the Hero of the novel falls in love with in. Tuyết is the only heroine in Nhất Linh's stories that makes that radical break with the family even if it means a road to perdition. Despite her courage to break away with the tradition and against the life imposed on her by her family, she finds herself lost and isolated for she has nowhere to go in a society where the traditional still predominates. Therefore, Tuyết is condemned to aimless and restless wandering

incapable of settling down with the man, who loves her, out of fear that if she did she would bestow upon him the same ostracism in which she had found herself. The conclusion of the novel reveals that Vietnamese society of the time was not ready for radicalism of that kind and Nhất Linh himself must have been aware of it.

6. Conclusion

As has been mentioned above, the objective of this dissertation is not only to describe the personality and life of Nguyễn Tường Tam - Nhất Linh in historical context, but also to analyze his work in the perspective of the emancipation endeavors and modernization of Vietnamese society during the French colonial rule in Indochina. Despite the fact that Tam was perceived as an ardent advocate of utter modernization of Vietnamese society as well as an representative of radical individualism in Vietnamese literature, the analysis of sources regarding him revealed this characterization to be too simplistic and in a certain sense also misleading. By changing the optics of perception of Tam's character I aimed to prove that despite Tam's loud call for deracinating Confucianism from Vietnamese society, with his life, his example but also work he embodied a true Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) and in his work he often probably unintentionally reinstated Confucian values.

However, the analysis of Tam's life generated several more general questions regarding the function of literature as such and the question of relation between tradition and modernization efforts.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines literature as the “writings whose value lies in the beauty of form or emotional effect” (<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/bps/rexroth/essays/literature.htm>). Other sources characterize „literature“ as the sum of all preserved texts and written documents in different languages. Concerning the function of art literature, among the most presented are the aesthetic, formative and informative functions.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Among the formative and informative belong the educational function (development of thinking and expression), instructional function (the creation of moral and aesthetic

Until the beginning of the 20th century, Vietnamese literature developed under the influence of Chinese literature, which was evident especially in the use of literary Chinese and the prevalent influence of Confucianism. It is noteworthy to mention that in the realm of literature Confucianism stressed especially the ethical role of literature and its influence on society rather than the aesthetic or entertaining function. Therefore, the epic as such was for a long time seen in Vietnam as harmful and immoral in its depiction of immoral social phenomena.

In the 20th century, Vietnamese literature underwent a florescence often perceived as revolutionary, as under the influence of Western literature and thought it began to change substantially. The first fundamental transformation was the abandoning of using literary Chinese and the acceptance of a new language and script, i.e. Vietnamese language written down in latinized script - *chữ quốc ngữ*. The *belles lettres* written in this language began to develop in the 1920s and 1930s on the pages of Vietnamese press, which from the most part focused on social issues. Tam's magazines *Phong Hoá* (Customs) a *Ngày Nay* (This Day) were no exception. The first Vietnamese modern stories, novels, reportages, and poetry freed from the strict rules of T'ang prosody were published on their pages

Even though literary theory stresses especially the aesthetic function of literature, i.e. its ability to evoke an aesthetic experience and feelings), the formative and informative functions also play a significant role. Even though it is indubitable that Vietnamese literature in the 1920s and 1930s changed substantially not only in language and style, but its authors also

values), social function (drawing attention to serious social problems) and entertaining function (amusement, relaxation). For more information on the functions of literature see e.g. Culler, Jonathan: 2009. *Literary Theory*. (New York: Sterling Publishing Company)

started stressing its educational, instructive, social and entertaining function. It is noteworthy to say that most of Vietnamese literary production of this period focused on the resolution of pressing social issues of that time. Nguyễn Tường Tam - Nhất Linh and the members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) were no exception. By careful reading of the manifest of the group from the year 1933, in which the members swore to create writings of literary value, to translate literature having social significance in order to intellectually elevate the individual and society, to create popular literature, to promote individualism, and to spread the idea that Confucianism is outdated, it is apparent that the aesthetic function was not the only purport of literature. What more, most of Nguyễn Tường Tam's (Nhất Linh's) writings were *romans-à-thèse*, in which he concentrated on the pressing issues of the time, for which was characteristic for the clash of the West and the East, the new and the old, modernity and tradition as the encounter of Western and Eastern culture in Vietnam during the French colonial rule triggered profound social changes with which the Vietnamese population was coming to grips only gradually.

Tam's writings are no exception in this respect and what more they illustrate the fact that when studying and analyzing Vietnamese literature of this period it does not suffice to focus only on its aesthetic function. Tam's novels and short stories, as well as the writings of other Vietnamese authors, are closely linked with reality and context within which they were created. As has been mentioned above, the objective of Tam's novels was to depict and solve the pressing problems of the time, to reform the Vietnamese society, its customs and traditions. This fact becomes a stimuli for reflection concerning the study of modern Vietnamese or Asian literature in general, as the study of literature in this context can serve as an important source for the history of mentalities.

Another significant theme of Tam's life and work is the relation of tradition and modernity. On the pages of his journals, short stories and novels, Tam and his colleagues called for modernization, or even "Westernization" of Vietnamese society. In their caricatures they depicted the modernization efforts of the 1930s in Vietnam and denigrated the traditional aspects of Vietnamese society. Thus, another question emerges in front of us, i.e. is it possible to completely break free from tradition and entirely modernize or "Westernize" a society rich in local tradition?

We can answer this question unequivocally negatively, as the careful analysis of Tam's life proves that one cannot extricate oneself from tradition. As has been previously mentioned the red thread of this thesis is the fact that despite Tam's ardent effort for social reform and societal modernization he remained to be a Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) in the traditional sense. Moreover, Tam's attempt at social reform was also driven by his sympathy for the Vietnamese people, which is also one of the typical features of a Confucian gentleman.

The traditional Confucian traits in Tam's actions can also be perceived as a confirmation of the strength of primary socialization, i.e. a process in which man as a biological creature becomes a fully-fledged member of society via interaction and communication with others. During this process, the individual also internalizes the values, norms and patterns of behavior valid in the given society. Even though one re-socializes oneself many times during one's life, it is in general accepted that the strength of primary socialization is more profound than one is aware of. Given the fact that Tam grew up in a family of a Confucian literati and spent the first years of his life under the watchful eyes of Vietnamese Confucian patriots, he must have internalized Confucian values relatively strongly. For that matter his life is a proof of that. The question that arises, however, is whether he

himself was aware of this fact? Was his withdrawal to the mountain city of Đà Lạt and his ardent interest in orchids an expression of his nervous sickness, as is often stated? Was it a just a pastime? Or was it an absolutely deliberate step and a personal message to the outside world in the spirit of Confucian “hermits”, who left the state administration, when a bad ruler seized power in the state? Was it a reflection of his own life related to the example of the Chinese poet Qu Yuan? The answer is not unequivocal. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that it is impossible to eradicate tradition, as it influences the life of an individual even when one tries to defy it or stand out against it.

7. Appendix

Synopsis of selected Nhất Linh's stories and novels:

The collection of short stories *Người quay tơ* (The Silk Spinner), was published in 1927 and consisted of the following stories: *Người quay tơ* (The Silk Spinner), *Nô Lệ* (Slaves), *Chiến Tranh* (War), *Giấc mộng Từ Lâm* (A Dream of Tu Lam), *Sư Bác Chùa Kênh* (The bonze of the Kênh Pagoda), *Làm Gì Mà Băn khoăn Thế?* (Why Worry So Much?), *Giật Mình Tỉnh Dậy* (Waking up with a Start), *Truyện Người Ca Kỹ Họ Nguyễn* (translated in Kiến Văn Lục), *Bạch Liên* (Story of Bach Lien), *Vuông Vải Trắng* (A Square of White Cloth), and *Sự Thật ở Miệng Trẻ* (Truth from Young Lips, translation of Tolstoy's story).

The story *Người Quay Tơ* (The Silk Spinner) was written by Nhất Linh in 1926 and displayed a heavy influence of Confucian morality. It is an account of a love story of Từ Nương, a silk spinner from the village Xuân Nghi, who at the age of sixteen marries her sweetheart, a young student. She works hard in order to support her husband in his studies. (A typical thing for a traditionally brought up Vietnamese woman to do.) After receiving his Bachelors degree, her husband leaves for Hanoi where he takes part in some clandestine activities of the scholars' movement. He is arrested by the French and transported to the Poulo Condore prison. Từ Nương lives dutifully taking care of her parents-in-law, who after four years of their son's absence give her the permission to remarry again. The girl refuses, even though her husband sends her letters from prison beseeching her to do so. After the death of her mother-in-law she asks for the approval to see her husband in prison. She lives a miserable life with him for a period of three years and gives birth to a girl. Her husband pleads her to take the child and raise it back at home. She returns to her village and

takes up her silk weaving again. There she is struck by misfortunes: she learns of her husband's suicide, her child dies in her arms and she loses her mind.

In another story called *Giấc mộng Từ Lâm* (A Dream of Tu Lam) we can yet again discern Nhất Linh's iniquity about life. The story is somewhat of a dialogue between two men, one having a Western style of education and consequently a dispiriting bureaucratic job in the colonial administration and his friend Trần Lưu, who is forced to give up his studies after the death of his parents. His last day of school he expresses his inquietude concerning his future. Both of the men meet after two years of separation. The story that unfolds is in fact almost Trần Lưu's monologue, in which he describes the events of the past two years, how he wandered in the countryside and the hardships he had to put up with. One day, however, Trần Lưu came across Từ Lâm, a small village, atmosphere of which was so alluring that he decided to stay and observe the life of its populace. There he met a beautiful young girl, whose father he had met when he had been teaching at another village. Soon love blossoms between them. He decides to leave and wander for a year before coming to ask for her hand in marriage. They eventually get wed and live in harmony; while Trần Lưu tries to pursue his objective of building an ideal village and helping the people change their lives for the better.

Chiến Tranh (War) is a story of a twelve-year-old boy called Kỳ, who is pursuing his studies in Hanoi. Due to the difficult financial situation of the family, he is forced to give up his schooling, return to his native village and study at a district school. Moreover, Kỳ is a victim of his cousin's and his friends' severe critique and bullying. The story seems to have been inspired by Tam's own life and it probably depicts his own feelings after he had

been forced to leave school and return to the village after the death of his father in Laos.

Sư Bác Chùa Kênh (The bonze of the Kênh Pagoda) treats the topic of a Buddhist monk. In the Kênh Pagoda there lives a young novice who is renowned everywhere for his qualities of a true Buddhist monk. He is of high erudition, masters the rituals, recites prayers etc. One day he discovers a dime-sized hole in a two-meter high stone statute in front of the pagoda. Suspicious, he pours water into it, which then gushes out from the statue's navel. He marks the spot where the water current fell, digs up the ground and finds a pot full of gold. After this discovery, he takes the gold and disappears from the pagoda leaving his religious life to start a new one. Three years later he stands in the elections for chamber of representatives of the Hanoi city. In this story Nguyễn Tường Tam probably wanted to show the power of money and its capacity to corrupt even the morals of an outstanding monk.

The story called *Làm Gì Mà Băn khoăn Thế?* (Why worry so much?) is more or less a philosophical contemplation of the author's opinions on life. The Hero of the story is a twenty-year old young man Phạm Đài, who makes an impression of an already old man. He goes to school but twice a week he also works at some office. Nevertheless, he is constantly worried. He spends a lot of time reflecting on life and considers his job meaningless. He becomes more and more dispirited deciding to leave his job and return home to work in industry. But he still finds no peace and makes up his mind to leave his strenuous job and immerses himself into Taoism in conviction that in order to guard one's soul at ease, one must flee from the wordly life to nature. Thus, Phạm Đài leaves his house, his wife and children and sets off for the mountains. He soon finds out to have been wrong, for even in the deep forests he is still incapable of restoring peace in

his soul. While reading this story, the question that comes to one's mind is to what extent was Tam actually writing about himself. He certainly must have shared the Hero's distaste for the boring bureaucratic job. Was he also plagued by worries? Did he find life in society of the time suffocating? Did he want to disassociate himself from his marital life?

The story *Giật Minh Tinh Dậy* (Waking up with a Start) is about a family, which during the flower season goes to the marshes to grow lotuses. They live in a straw hut and catch fish for food. Next to the thatched house, there is a bank with old Chinese graves. On one rainy day the father of the family goes to lie down in the straw hut. In his dream he feels a snake wrapping around his body. He wakes up with a start, scaring off the snake, which crawls away. The terrified man looks out of the hut and sees shadows of two people digging up a grave. However, he does not see any body to be buried. The two figures put in a coffin, and then fill in the tomb again. One of the men looks in the direction of the hut, his eyes shining like those of a ghost. Then lights went out and the night was peaceful again. The man went back to sleep terrified thinking of the snake that just a while ago was lying on his stomach. The following morning, when he walks out of the thatched house, he sees a fresh grave and next to it a body of a big snake entangled in the dust.

Truyện Người Ca Kỳ Họ Nguyễn (Story of a Songstress from the Nguyễn Clan), which was translated from the collection *Kiến Văn Lục* is a record of the life of the Prime Minister Khâm Lân. When he was a small child, his evil stepmother forced him to leave his studies, return home to raise buffaloes. He is too distressed by this and chooses to leave the house and go begging. One day he arrives at the Dịch Vọng, where one man takes pity on him, brings him under his roof and takes care of him so that Khâm Lân can study. The same year, a village festival is organized and since Khâm

Lân is too tattered he stands leaning by the columns of the village communal house. One of the songstresses performing on the stage suddenly catches a glimpse of him while she is performing and is left speechless. The next day she turns up at his house and for the next three months she comes to visit him bringing money with her. The next year, he passes not only the district exams but also the prefectural and the palace examinations. His proud adoptive father plans to marry him with a girl from a noble family, but he declines not wanting to betray the songstress. Nevertheless, when he is getting ready for the metropolitan exams, she tells him that she does not dare to expect him to be her husband and their ways part. One day he goes to a feast organized by the family of madame Đặng Hầu, where he sees a woman resembling the songstress playing the castanets. He learns that it is indeed her. She married a patrol sergeant, but soon after the marriage her husband died. She had some money left, but her younger brother gambled it away and she was forced to start singing again. Khâm Lân is moved by her destiny and takes her with him.

Bạch Liên (Story of Bach Lien) is originally a Japanese story. It is about a young and thoughtful girl, who has been brought up to have all the qualities of a virtuous wife. However, when she gets married, her illusions get shattered since her husband is an unbearable, indifferent and cold man. Moreover, he is passionately in love with one songstress, who is not as pretty as Bạch Liên, but seems to have a strong charisma. Bạch Liên is forced to withstand much misery and pain since all her dowry has been transferred into the hands of her husband, who spends most his nights out of the house. One day he returns home after having spent three days away from the house and Bạch Liên, too indignant, falls to the ground and dies. At that moment the husband realizes what he has done and repents but it is too late.

The story *Vuông Vải Trắng* (A Square of White Cloth) is an account of a poor scholar Minh Tử, who marries Trần Thị, a girl from an affluent family. After the wedding he moves into her house in order to have means for studying. However, by doing so he brings upon himself the scorn of his wife's family. The situation culminates to such an extent that Trần Thị refuses to obey her husband. Fed up, the young scholar packs up his books and leaves his wife's house in his ragged clothes. On his way he meets a group of girls and ashamed of his state (he does not even have a loin cloth) hides himself in a well. They take pity on him and one of the girls called Thảo brings him a few squares of white cloth that she has just finished weaving. He is hesitant not knowing what to do, when the canton chief comes and takes him to his house to be a teacher for his children. In the following year, Minh Tử passes the first doctoral exams and becomes a mandarin at the Court. He remembers what Thảo did for him, puts on old ragged clothes and sets out to find her. He learns that she is a widow raising children alone. He wants her to live with him but she declines because she wants to remain faithful to her deceased husband.

The short story collection *Anh Phải Sống* (You Must Live) was written between 1932 and 1933. It is an anthology of thirteen stories that had been written, of which Nhất Linh had written six stories: *Tháng Ngày Qua* (Days and Months Pass By), *Bóng Người Trên Mù* (A Silhouette in the Fog), *Nắng Mới Trong Rừng Khuya* (New Sunshine in the Forest at Night), *Giết Chồng*, *Báo Thù Chồng* (To Marry, in order to Revenge One's Husband), *Đầu Đường Xó Chợ* (The Wretched), *Nước Cháy Đôi Giòng* (Water Runs in Parallel Streams).

Tháng Ngày Qua (Days and Months Pass By) is a romantic story of Giao, who frequents his friend's Minh's house to help him with his studies. Day by day, he falls hopelessly, i.e. platonically, in love with his friend's young

and beautiful wife, who also seems to have feelings for him. The situation is very difficult for Giao and both the young people manage to avoid temptation only by chance. A few years later Giao meets Minh's wife again, which triggers sad reminiscences of a love unfulfilled, of a love that was just a dream.

Bóng Người Trên Mù (A Silhouette in the Fog) is an account describing the love of a train driver Trạch and his wife through life and death. One day Trạch gets the opportunity to drive the Governor-General of Indochina. He declines at first, because his beloved wife is gravely sick. She, however, convinces him to take advantage of the opportunity. He fulfills her wish and drives the train. Meanwhile, his wife dies. During the journey he feels uneasy. Moreover, a silhouette in the fog keeps appearing in front of the train. The tension rising he decides to stop the train only to find out that if he did not do so the train would have crashed down into a chasm. He finds a butterfly trapped in one of the train front-lights and he realizes that the silhouette was the shadow of the butterfly. Nevertheless, he is convinced that his wife's soul changed into a butterfly in order to save him from death.

Nắng Mới Trong Rừng Khuya (New Sunshine in the Forest at Night) is yet another light romantic story of love between Phương and Minh. Phương on the pretext of a hunting trip comes to visit the house of Mr. Hàn Trí, who is at the moment living in Hanoi. There is only one woman at the plantation, a young girl called Minh, whom Phương loves. He scolds her for having left Hanoi and wants to know the reasons why she didn't tell him. She avoids giving him an answer. They spend a few fleeting, yet happy moments together. Before he leaves, Minh decides to reveal the truth to Phương, i.e. to tell him that the only reason why she left him was that she found out that she was suffering from tuberculosis and hoped that the climate at the

plantation would be beneficial for her healing. However, her final days were coming to a close.

Giết Chồng, Báo Thù Chồng (To Marry, in order to Revenge One's Husband) is a story yet again with moral implications, i.e. it extols the loyalty of widows to their deceased husbands. Liệt, a young, beautiful, virtuous but poor girl, is lucky and marries a canton chief. But, one day her husband is killed and his family is dispersed. Liệt refuses to go to the funeral services and continues to dress lavishly and noticeably stirring resentment among the villagers for her apparent disloyal behaviour. Liệt deliberately becomes intimate with an old man Bá Mịch, whom she suspects of having murdered her husband. However, she does not let him consummate the marriage, since she wants to find enough evidence in order to revenge her first husband. She succeeds with a ruse and turns Bá Mịch over to the authorities.

Đầu Đường Xó Chợ (The Wretched) is a story describing the poor people of the lowest classes (cake sellers, rickshaw pullers, dealers in pottery etc.) living in wretched conditions in slums and the main features of their everyday life. The narrator and his siblings are forced to leave their native village after their father, a local mandarin, died, and move to the slums in the city. The story is a description of the life of the lowest classes as seen by a thirteen year-old boy. The person, whom he admired the most in his new wretched life, was Mrs. Hiên, a beautiful, young wife of an ugly and opium addicted riksha-puller. Despite all the mistreatment from her husbands side Mrs. Hiên remained a faithful wife, who worked hard to scramble enough money to secure their livelihood and buy opium for her husband.

Nước Chảy Đôi Giòng (Water Runs in Parallel Streams) is a story of a young man Sinh from a rich family who comes to visit one of his friends in Phả Lại. On his way home he rents a boat. Suddenly he hears a noble voice. He is surprised because he thought that the only people working at the boat are an old married couple. He descends down and meets their beautiful eighteen-year-old daughter. He spends the night talking to her. Reaching his destination, he leaves thinking that he will never see her again and thus he imprints her image into his memory. However, ten years later a coincidence brings them back together. He is a father of a family and she too is a married woman. Sinh taken aback then reflects on life coming to a conclusion that happiness does not stem from riches but from peace of one's soul.

After publishing this collection of stories, Nhật Linh and Khái Hưng collaborated together on two other novels: *Gánh Hàng Hoa* (Flower Girl, 1934) and *Đời Mưa Gió* (*Tempestuous life*, 1934).

Gánh Hàng Hoa (Flower Girl) treats the subject of sanctity of marriage and friendship. It is a story of a boy Minh and a girl Liên, who have known each other from childhood. When Minh's parents die, Liên's mother adopts him and the two young children grow up together. On her deathbed Liên's mother pleads them to get married. They fulfil her wish and live a modest, but happy life together. Liên sells flowers in order to support Minh, who is still studying at the Pedagogy Faculty. However, after successfully completing his studies, Minh loses sight due to an accident. Liên tries to find a cure for his illness with the help of his good friend Văn. However, Minh soon becomes suspicious and is convinced that Liên and Văn are having a love affair behind his back and wants to commit suicide in order to relieve the burden of his wife taking care of him and let the two young healthy people get married. However, Liên is a good wife living up to the

ideals of the Confucian morality and Văn is a loyal friend. Despite all the hardships, Liên remains supportive and encourages her husband to start writing for the newspapers so that they have extra money for his treatment. Minh hears out his wife's and his best friend's appeals and eventually becomes a successful and renowned writer. In addition, his lot becomes better after he recovers his eyesight due to an eye-operation. Vain, he falls in love with a beautiful girl called Nhung and his marriage with Liên is almost in ruins after he decides to move in with his new lover. Văn, a faithful friend, intervenes and due to his reasoning Minh realizes what he has done and is very ashamed himself. Meanwhile, Liên also makes an effort and eventually succeeds in winning Minh back.

Đời Mưa Gió (*Tempestuous Life*, 1934) is another novel that Nhất Linh wrote with his colleague Khải Hưng. It is a story of a young man Chương who is working as a teacher at Lycée du Protectorat in Hanoi. He is a respected intellectual, who is known among his friends for his rather misogynic relationship towards women, which was a consequence of a failed relationship with a beautiful girl called Loan. However, his embittered attitude begins to change after he meets two girls - Thu and Tuyết, who both seem to have a liking for him. Thu is a respectable girl from a good family and with her upbringing she would be a good match for Chương. Nonetheless, Chương falls hopelessly in love with Tuyết, a splendid prostitute, whom he happens to save after she is attacked at night by one of her former lovers. Chương, who despite his good reputation is oblivious of the public opinion or the traditional way of life, moves her in and lives with her. Their happiness is not meant to last since Tuyết decides to leave him. She writes him a letter, though, in which she tells him of her past, i.e. she had been a girl from a rich family and with decent education. She was forced to marry a man whom she did not love and even bore a child to him. Being a victim of her husband's family, she decided to rebel

and leave. However, this revelation does not weaken Chương's love for her and he continues to search for her and takes care of her in those short periods when she gets tired of her lovers and her carefree life and comes back to him. She is unable to leave her libertine life while Chương keeps waiting for her. Tuyết returns for the last time on the eve of Tết in a miserable and sickly state. She remains deaf to Chương's pleas to stay and start a new life with him. The next morning she is gone, never to return again.

After publishing *Đời Mưa Gió* (Tempestuous life) Nhất Linh produced a story called *Nắng Thu* (Autumn Sun, 1934), which he had written by himself. It is a simple love story of a young student Phong, who is studying at the Cao Đẳng in Hanoi. When he returns to his native village, there he meets a mute girl called Trâm. Trâm is the adoptive child of Phong's aunt Mrs. Hàn, who treats her mercilessly and Trâm is reduced to being a mere servant in the household. What is more, she is the target of Mrs. Hàn's daughters' hatred caused by her beauty. Phong, who loves her deeply, wants to marry her, but Phong's younger cousin Viễn is also interested in her. However, when Trâm turns him down, he accuses her of seducing him. Phong is disappointed but luckily he receives a letter from Trâm explaining that the story has been made up by Viễn, who hates him. Phong believes her and loves her even more. However, Mrs. Hàn accuses Trâm of being pregnant with one of the neighbors and Phong, who is too trusting, feels betrayed by her leaves for Hanoi. Brokenhearted, Trâm flees from Mrs. Hàn's house. Then, one day Viễn, who is gravely ill, calls Phong to confess his false accusation of Trâm. He pleads him to go and find her so that he can ask for forgiveness. At that moment Phong stops doubting Trâm, rushes to find her and he begs for forgiveness and both of them find happiness at each other's side.

Nhất Linh's critique of the traditional family became even more hard-hitting with the publication of his novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties, 1934-1935). It is a story of Loan, a girl from a decent family, who, as many other female characters in Nhất Linh's novels, received modern education. Loan is in love with Dũng, a boy from a mandarin family, who broke away from his roots, leaving behind the life of wealth and comfort.¹²⁷ Loan and Dũng sincerely love each other, but none of them dares to disclose their feelings to the other. Their ways must part since Loan is married to Thân, a boorish young man from a family to which Loan's parents owe money. At first Loan, as an educated and an emancipated woman, tries to oppose this arranged marriage. In the end, Loan concedes and decides to fulfil her parents' wish to marry Thân. However, she has a hard time to put up with this sacrifice and is haunted by deep regrets. Even though Loan tries to be a good daughter-in-law, she soon discovers that her task in the new family is just to serve. It had become evident that she had been married to serve not to be a wife. Furthermore, once lying next to her husband Loan realizes that she has been reduced to a baby-making machine: "She did not need passion: her destiny was to be a baby-making machine, therefore she was supposed to perceive herself so. Even her husband's behavior always reminded her that it was her lot and nothing else."

Despite all her disappointment, Loan tries to be a good wife and she patiently endures the ill treatment from her husband, mother-in-law and even sisters-in-law. She gives birth to a baby boy and thus fulfills one of the main Confucian duties of a proper wife. However, the baby falls sick and since in accordance with the Confucian values it does not belong to her but to the husband's family, it is the mother-in-law, who decides on the treatment of the boy by taking him to a local pagoda, where a shaman tries

¹²⁷ Nhất Linh created the impression that Dũng took part in some anti-colonial and anti-feudal organization without actually explicitly stating so. A fact that many literary critiques would

to heal him. Loan rushes the boy to the hospital but it is too late and her son dies. Since her pregnancy was difficult Loan too has to undergo an operation. Despite its success, Loan loses the possibility to conceive again. Since her in-laws insist on having a male descendant, Thân gets a concubine and Loan's position in the family worsens.

Gradually, Loan alienates the whole family and the tension in the house culminates when Loan and Thân have another argument, which has a tragic ending. During a scuffle that breaks out between them, Thân falls on a penknife that Loan is holding and dies. Loan is accused of murder and is tried. Her mother-in-law as a key witness accuses Loan of planning the whole murder, of picking up the quarrel on purpose in order to create a convenient situation in which she could stab Thân to death. The prosecutor's speech was so convincing that by the time he had finished, it seemed Loan was to be prosecuted for a premeditated murder. After the prosecutor had finished his speech, there was complete silence in the courtroom and it seemed to everybody that Loan had no chances of being freed. Yet Loan sat there motionless not displaying any sign of emotion. It was the turn of her lawyer to deliver his speech, which was so convincing that Loan was proclaimed "not guilty." Only after that she could "sever the ties" with her in-law family and go and live life of her own. The readers would meet her later in another novel *Đôi Bạn* (Two Friends) that Nhất Linh was to write in two years time.

Nhất Linh's other novel *Lạnh Lùng* (Loneliness) appeared for the first time on the pages of the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine, where it was issued in a serialized form from numero 16 July 12, 1936 to numero 28 on December 13 the same year (Hoàng Ngọc Thành 1991:126).

reproach him later.

It is an account of a young girl Nhung, widowed for more than three years, who falls hopelessly in love with Nghĩa, the teacher of her nephews. Nhung was also forced to marry a man, whom she did not love, but she had deep respect for him. She tries hard to be a good widow not only because of her upbringing, but also due to her vanity. After three years of widowhood, she cannot bear it any longer and she submits to her craving. She has a love affair with Nghĩa, but her happiness has a fleeting taste for she is caught in between her opposing desires. On one hand she would like to leave the virtuous life at her in-laws' that suffocates her and start a new life with her lover. On the other hand, she does not have the courage to do so. Furthermore, she fears the public opinion and what the people will say if they find out about her affair. While encouraging her younger sister to follow her heart, oppose the choice of husband her parents made and marry the man she truly loved, Nhung realizes more and more the restrictions of the society she is living in. In order not to succumb to the temptation of physical love, she tries to avoid her lover Nghĩa. However, the attraction is too strong for her and she yields. She has an affair with him and he begs her to marry him. Yet, she cannot make up her mind and break away with the expectations imposed on her by her surroundings. The situation gets too unbearable for both of them and Nghĩa decides to leave. Moreover, on many occasions he faces the fact that Nhung seems to be more worried about her name than being separated from him. She even starts avoiding him hoping he would go away and thus resolve her situation. However, they cannot live without each other and Nhung finally makes up her mind to leave and marry him. She even tells her mother of her intention. In the end she does not find enough courage to follow Nghĩa. Her preoccupation with her reputation and her mother seems stronger than her love for him. She continues to see him in secret even though she slowly realizes that her mother-in-law is aware of her liaison. Nevertheless, due to her weakness she condemns herself to a life of loneliness.

In 1937 Nhất Linh published another collection of stories *Hai buổi chiều vàng* (Two Golden Afternoons). The collection contains six stories in a rather romantic tone: *Hai buổi chiều vàng* (Two Golden Afternoons), *Mười năm qua* (The Ten Years That Passed), *Cái Tẩy* (Eraser), *Vết Thương* (Wound), *Câu Chuyện Mơ Trong Giấc Mơ* (A Dream in a Dream), *Lan Rừng* (A Forest Orchid).

Nhất Linh wrote the first story in the collection *Hai buổi chiều vàng* (Two Golden Afternoons) immediately after the novel *Lạnh Lùng* (Loneliness) had been published. It appeared on the pages of *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine no.19 (August 8th, 1936) to no. 22 (August 23rd, 1936) (Nhật Thịnh, 1986: 85). It was also known under its other heading: *Anh ấy đã trở về* (He Has Returned). The story revolves around the relationship of three characters: Lộc, Thoa (Lộc's wife) and Triết (Thoa's friend). In the beginning Triết perceives Thoa as his younger sister, because he has known her since their childhood. He took care of her, protected her and kept helping her till she married Lộc. Lộc, however, gets arrested because he seems to be involved in some revolutionary activities. Triết tries to help Lộc without any success. In order to protect Thoa, he takes her back to their native village. Despite the fact that he loves her, he unselfishly continues to take steps to free her husband. Thus, the return of Lộc brings happiness to Thoa, while to him only pain and misery.

The account *Mười năm qua* (The Ten Years That Passed) is yet again another love story of a young man and a prostitute. Trung and Hà are madly in love with each other. However, they are separated by fate since Hà decides to leave Trung because she does not want him to catch tuberculosis, from which she is suffering. She conceals her sickness from him, choosing to leave in silence and go to hospital to die. There, before

her death, she writes him letters to reveal her love for him and the true cause of their separation.

On the other hand the story *Cái Tẩy* (Eraser) has a more philosophical touch to it resembling Nhất Linh's romans-à-these. In this narrative Nhất Linh once again addresses the issue of personal happiness. It is a story of two classmates – Huy and Vượng. Vượng is a good student and succeeds in attaining his engineer degree. One day on the way to his native village his car breaks down. Leaving his driver repair the engine he walks into a notion store in search of something to drink. There he bumps into Huy, whom he has not seen for a long time. Unlike Vượng, Huy despite being a talented student failed his exams due to an unhappy accident. The professor irritated by the draught caused by the fan and eraser that did not weigh down the papers properly had reduced his mark. After his failure, his girlfriend Liên leaves him for a more successful man and Huy unable to put up with it blames the eraser for the fiasco. He leaves the city, returns to his native village, opens a notion store, marries an ordinary girl and lives a peaceful life.

Vết Thương (Wound) is a story about three sisters Dung, Thuận and Trinh. Their husbands are all involved in clandestine revolutionary activities and are eventually deported and detained on the island of Côn Đảo, a prison for political prisoners. The three sisters live together quietly, trying to comfort each other in their grief. Unfortunately, they receive news that Dung's husband died in prison, while Kỳ and Dịch, husbands of the two younger sisters, are released. The fact that her husband died, while her brothers-in-law were released, leaves a profound wound on Dung's soul and the pain causes her to estrange herself from her family.

After this short break in writing Nhất Linh published another novel called *Đôi Bạn* (Two Friends, 1937). According to Phạm Thế Ngũ this novel gives away the influence of Nhất Linh's most favourite foreign authors André Gide and Dostoyevsky. In this novel he brought back to light the two Heroes of the novel *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Severing the Ties) – Loan and Dũng. In this work of fiction Dũng is depicted as a child of a rich mandarin Tuân Vũ, the governor of the province. Dũng suffers due to his background, which he perceives as the main cause of alienation between him and his less fortunate friends.

After a student strike, Dũng is forced to leave school, return to his native village, where he studies at home and meets with his friends and Loan. He is convinced that even by studying at home he can still pass the exams. In his free time he immerses himself in thoughts pondering about his brothers and himself and what the future may bring. One day Dũng has had enough of his empty life and decides to leave his father and family, whom he perceives as parasites living a dull and unprofitable life. Moreover, contrary to the concept of filial piety Dũng considers his father to be an avaricious and corrupt man, who willingly serves the French. He and his friends want to overturn the colonial system and feudal order and build a new one. Finally, all of them choose the revolutionary path and Dũng bitterly leaves his home. Thereafter, he engages himself in unspecified revolutionary activities that lead him to China.

The novel *Đôi Bạn* (Two Friends) was followed by *Bướm Trắng* (White Butterfly), which Nhất Linh wrote in 1939, but published it a year later on the pages of the *Ngày Nay* (This Day) magazine. In this narrative Nhất Linh presents a different attitude to the life of city youth. Unlike in the novel *Đôi Bạn* (Two Friends), the youth here is youth living a life of pleasure void of any ideals. This is the only Nhất Linh's novel, where we

can discern a more profound influence of André Gide's radical individualism. It is important to note that Tam's previous preoccupation with social justice and moral obligations does not appear so substantially in this novel.

His novel *Bướm Trắng* (White Butterfly) is a story of a young student Truong, who is forced to give up his studies of law at the Hanoi University due to diagnosed tuberculosis. Meanwhile, he falls in love with Thu, an attractive girl from a decent family, who seems to reciprocate his love. It is important to note that Thu is an embodiment of Confucian values. However, Truong, convinced of the inevitability of his death, immerses himself into the life of pleasures. Soon enough he exhausts all his funds. He declines the proposition of his uncle to marry a girl from a rich family and rather takes up a job in Hải Phòng in order to be far from Thu.

After a month of working in an office in Hải Phòng, he starts missing his life in Hanoi. Out of boredom and wanting to test Thu's love for him, he misappropriates a certain sum of money from the safe of the bureau. He then goes to Hanoi, where he spends most of the money on a horseracing track. He even has the audacity to visit the family of Thu as if nothing has happened. His transgression, however, is treated on the pages of the press and Thu also gets to find out about the dissipated life he has lead before. Truong turns himself to the police and is condemned to four months in prison. There he wants to ease his penance and demands a medical check-up hoping to spend the rest of his sentence at the prison hospital. The doctor, however, comes to the conclusion that Truong does not suffer from tuberculosis and is actually quite healthy. After being released from jail Truong visits Thu with the intention of asking her to run away with him. But he has lost Thu forever. There is no chance of them being together for

he has fallen too low to merit her. Therefore, he returns to his native village, where he marries a country girl.

8. Picture Supplement



Picture 1: Collège du Protectorat (*Trường Thành chung Bảo hộ*) in Hanoi
Source: <http://www.travelweekly.com.vn/photos/1717-old-hospitals-schools-and-opera-house-in-hanoi>



Picture 2: Medicine faculty of the University of Indochina (*Cao Đẳng Đông Dương*) in Hanoi
Source: <http://www.travelweekly.com.vn/photos/1717-old-hospitals-schools-and-opera-house-in-hanoi>



Picture 3: L'École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de L'Indochine (Fine Arts College of Indochina)

Source: <http://www.travelweekly.com.vn/photos/1717-old-hospitals-schools-and-opera-house-in-hanoi>



Picture 4: Nguyễn Tường Tam's silk painting called *Cảnh Phố Chợ Đông Dương* (Scène de Marché de rue Indochinois, Market Scene of an Indochinese Street, 1926-29). Sold at Sotheby's in Hong Kong in 2010.

Source: <http://www.vietthuc.org/2010/12/29/hai-v%E1%BA%BB-d%E1%BA%B9p-c%E1%BB%A7a-nh%E1%BA%A5t-linh/>



Picture 5: Tam playing his clarinet
 Source: <http://saigonecho.com/main/vanhoc/tho/cac-thi-si/19735-nht-linh-va-ei-thi-s-lam-th-trao-phung-va-th-lc-bat-ting-phap.html>

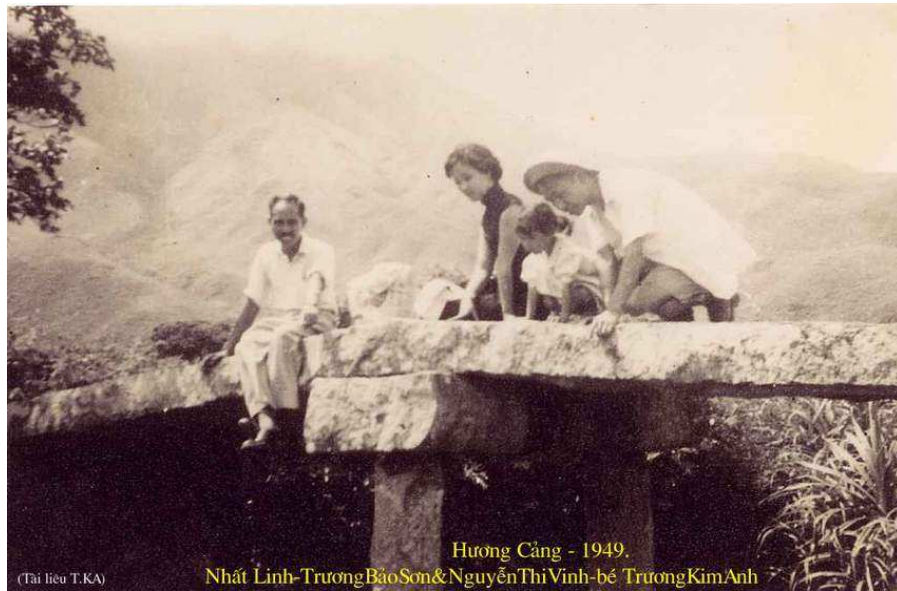


Picture 6: Nguyễn Tường Tam in Shanghai in 1942. He is the fifth man standing from the right.
 Source: <http://www.gio-o.com/NhatLinh1942ThuongHai.jpg>



Picture 7: Picture of all representatives of the the United National Front of Vietnam with the emperor Bảo Đại in Hong Kong. Nguyễn Tường Tam is the fourth person from the left standing in the third row. Hoàng Đạo Nguyễn Tường Long is standing in the left corner in the last row.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/suche.php?res=2486&rb=0102>



Picture 8: Nguyễn Tường Tam with his friend and colleague Trương Bảo Sơn, his wife, writer Nguyễn Thị Vinh and their daughter.

Source: <http://www.gio-o.com/NhatLinh1948.jpg>



Picture 9: Chrysantemums – painted by Tam in Hong Kong in 1948

Source: <http://truongxuabancu.freepowerboards.com/viewtopic.php?f=10&p=10294>



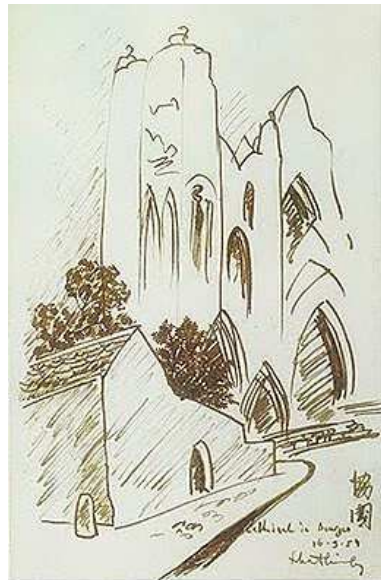
Picture 10: Nguyễn Tường Tam with his five and two children (Thoa and his son, future writer, Nguyễn Tường Thiết) in Hanoi in 1951

Source: <http://ngoi-viet.com/absolutenm/anmviewer.asp?a=124780&z=16>



Picture 11: Tam visiting his friend the painter Nguyễn Gia Trí in 1953. Tam is sitting with his protégé's (Nguyễn Thị Vinh's) daughter in the front of the picture.

Source: <http://www.gio-o.com/TruongKimAnhNhatLinh.html>



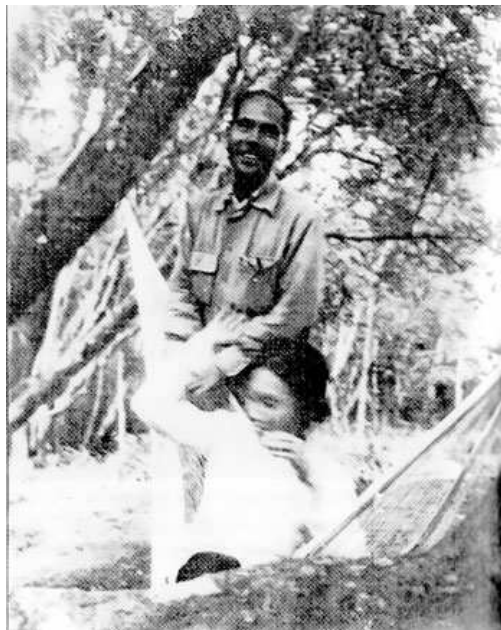
Picture 12: Cathedrale de Bruges

Source:

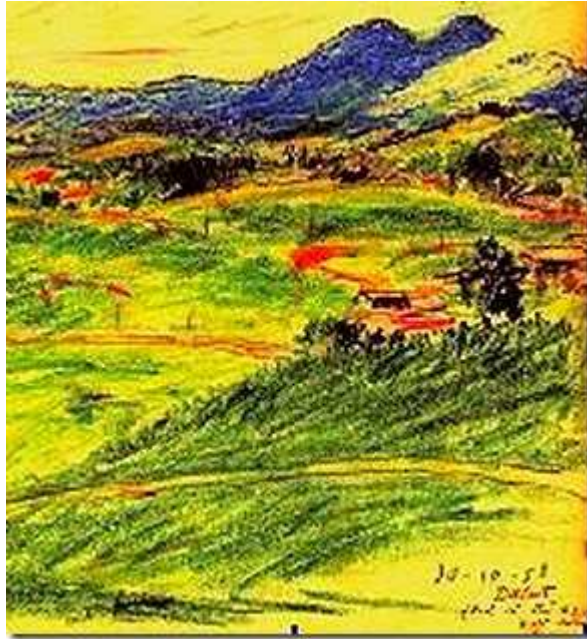
<http://truongxuabancu.freepowerboards.com/viewtopic.php?f=10&p=10294>



Picture 13: Tam playing his clarinette in the forest near the city Đà Lạt.
Source: <http://ngoi-viet.com/absolutenm/anmviewer.asp?a=124780&z=16>



Picture 14: Tam and his wife in Đà Lạt.
Source: <http://www.thanhvien.com.vn/News/0308/Pages/200850/20081214001323.aspx>



Picture 15: Picture of Đà Lạt.

Source:

<http://truongxuabancu.freepowerboards.com/viewtopic.php?f=10&p=10294>



Picture 16: One of Tam's drawings depicting orchids.

Source: <http://www.gio-o.com/NhatLinhPhongLanDenTrang.jpg>



Picture 17: The house in 19 Đặng Thái Thân Street, which Tam shared with his friend Lê Đình Giỏi.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/suche.php?res=12640&rb=08>



Picture 18: Nguyễn Tường Tam (on the left at the back) and his family in Đà Lạt in 1956.

Source: <http://ngui-viet.com/absolutenm/anmviewer.asp?a=124780&z=16>



Sài Gòn 1960, trong buổi họp Văn Hóa.
 Hàng ngồi, từ trái qua phải: Linh Bảo - Quý Hương - Nguyễn Thị Vinh.
 Hàng đứng, từ trái qua phải: Bình Nguyễn Lộc - Duy Lam - Đỗ Đức Thu
 - Nhật Linh - Trương Hùng - Nguyễn Thành Vinh - Trương Bảo Sơn.
 Đến năm 2009, hơn nửa số nhà vẫn hiện diện trong hình đã quý tiên.

Picture 20: Nguyễn Tường Tam at a cultural meeting with young, promising writers and translators, most of whom he supported. Tam is the man standing in the middle of the row at the back.

Source: <http://www.rfviet.com/forum35/showthread.php?p=286290>

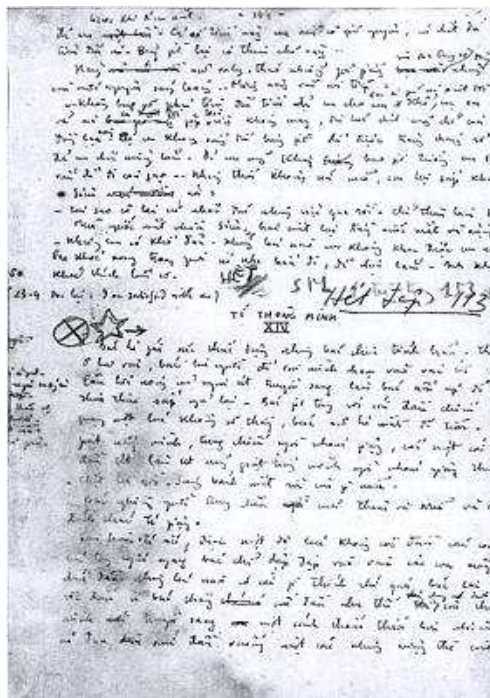


Picture 21: Tam in Saigon in 1960

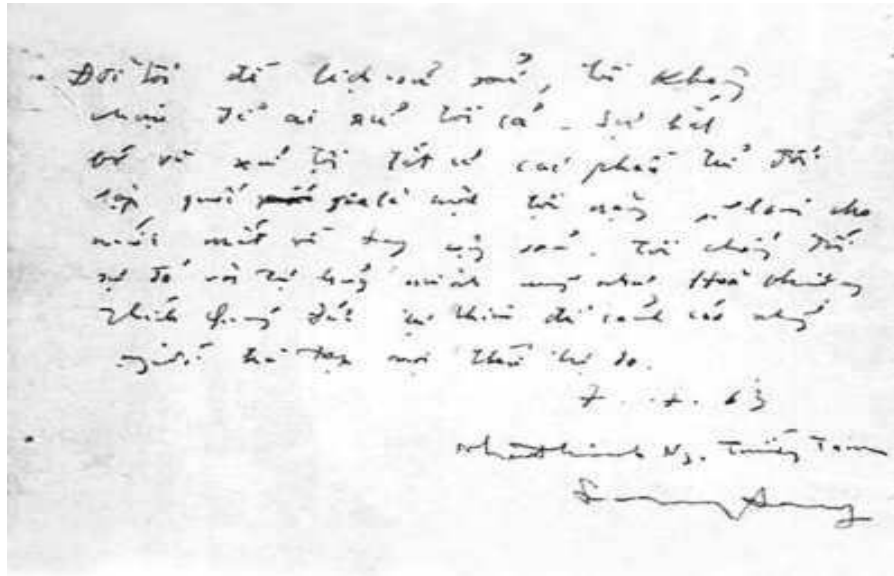
Source: <http://www.gio-o.com/nhatlinhright.html>



Picture 22: Tam (on the right) and his friend Trương Bảo Sơn in Saigon in 1960
Source: <http://www.rfviet.com/forum35/showthread.php?p=286290>



Picture 23: The manuscript of the novel *Xóm Cầu Mới*.
Source: In possession of Nguyễn Tường Thiết. Retrieved from <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/suche.php?res=10209&rb=0302>



Picture 24: Nguyễn Tường Tam's testament.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/suche.php?res=2486&rb=0102>



Picture 25: Students gathered in front of the Grall hospital waiting to commemorate Nguyễn Tường Tam

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=13623&rb=0302>



Picture 26: Photo of university students carrying Nguyễn Tường Tam's coffin out of the morgue onto the yard of the Grall hospital. His nephews and Nguyễn Tường Quý and Nguyễn Tường Đăng (children of Thạch Lam) are carrying the wreath.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=13623&rb=0302>



Picture 27: Here is a picture of high school students attending the funeral.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=13623&rb=0302>



Figure 28: Many journalists, writers and intellectuals gathered around Nguyễn Tường Tam's coffin at the the Gò Vấp cemetery.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=13623&rb=0302>



Figure 29: Many members of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc dân Đảng) participated at the funeral. Here is a photo of the Party's wreath.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=13623&rb=0302>



Figure 30: A photo of the priest and chairman of the Vietnam Pen Club Thanh Lãng reading his farewell speech.

Source: <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=13623&rb=0302>



Picture 31: The members of the *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* (Self-Strength Literary Group) on one of their trips

Source:

<http://www.thanhvien.com.vn/News/0308/Pages/200850/20081214001323.aspx>



Picture 32: Trần Khánh Giu, Tam's closest associate and friend, who would become of the most famous romantic novelist of Vietnamese literature
Source: <http://www.vietnamvanhien.net/khaihung.html>



Picture 33: Excentric poet Thế Lữ
Source: http://tho.com.vn/Ladoth/167/ArticleDetail/Details/ItemID/2329/Mod/542/Van_hoc.aspx



Picture 34: Portrait of Nguyễn Tường Lân by Đinh Cường.
Source: http://vietnamlit.org/wiki/index.php?title=Thach_Lam



Picture 35: Nguyễn Cát Tường – a portrait.
Source: <http://thoangsaigon.com/index.php/ao-dai-va-ngay-t%E1%BA%BF/>

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