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**Colonial Students on the Move:
A Global History of Student Mobility from Colonial Asia
(British India-French Indochina, 1850s-1940s)**

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This draft paper introduces my ongoing PhD research dealing with student mobility in colonial Asia, from the 1850s to the 1940s. This global approach of academic migration is based on a comparative study of French Indochina (today's Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) and British India¹. It aims to draw a global map of student migration from – but also towards, although I won't elaborate on that dimension in this paper² – colonial territories in order to demonstrate that this migrating process was a major feature of colonial higher and technical education in the 19th and 20th centuries. In other words, I argue that the shaping of westernized educational systems within Asian colonies encompassed student mobility towards imperial and foreign institutions from the start. Consequently, I examine mobility on every level – colonial, regional, imperial and international – and consider the multiplicity of actors involved in it, although to different extents: the students, of course, their relatives, public authorities but also philanthropists, missionaries, educational organizations, etc. It fosters multiple questions which I strive to answer: Who were the students? Where did they go? When? How long did they stay outside of their homelands? Why did they choose to move? How did they pick a place of study? Did they benefit from specific resources and supports? Which external actors were involved in the students' migrating process? It also implies to observe the mobility's aftermath: Did the students always come back to the colonies? What did they do once their examinations passed – or failed – and they (hopefully) became degree-holders? To what extent did their educational migration influence their subsequent trajectories, *i.e.* mainly their professional and social status?

Historiographically speaking, student mobility from colonial territories has slowly become a historical topic for about 40 years. However, one observation is striking regarding previous works: scholars have neglected global methodology so far. On the one hand, studies focusing on education within subjugated territories hardly integrate academic mobility³. On the other hand, historians of academic migration generally

¹ British India was a larger and more densely populated territory than Indochina. In order to maintain a balance within my comparative study of these two different colonies, my research focuses on the Bengal presidency – whose academic life was then dominated by Calcutta University – on the Indian side.

² But I would be pleased to elaborate on this during the discussion though!

³ See, for instance: Gail P. Kelly, David H. Kelly (ed.), *French Colonial Education. Essays on Vietnam and West Africa*, New York, AMS Press, 2000; Pascale Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice? L'expérience indochinoise (1860-1945)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2002, Suresh Chandra Ghose, *History of Modern Education in India (1757-1998)*, Hyderabad, Sangam Books, 2002.

reduce student mobility to its imperial dimension, *i.e.* to flows linking a specific colony to its metropole⁴. In that specific case, the role of capital cities (Paris and London) or renowned universities (Oxbridge, La Sorbonne and the French *Grandes Écoles*) is highlighted, concealing the multiple whereabouts of mobile students. A global history of student mobility from colonial Asia aims to transcend these epistemological and historiographical limits by underscoring connections amongst these different levels of mobility.

As a result, this paper explores three different but still interconnected ideas in order to emphasize this global dimension of student migration from colonial Asia. First, I will demonstrate that global migration from India and Indochina grew steadily from the mid-19th century up to WWII, involving an increasing number of host territories; then I will stress the convoluted trajectories of some students, connecting different territories to one another; last, I will briefly point out the complex shaping of student communities including Indian or Indochinese students during their stays abroad.

Going Global

The second half of the 19th century matched the development of student mobility in colonial Asia. British India quickly became the leading colony in terms of academic migration. Even though a handful of Indian students had already left their homeland to pursue their studies in England in the 1840s⁵, these flows reached a new scope during the following decades. According to statistics published in the National Indian Association's journal, more than 700 students travelled to Great Britain between 1865 and 1885, so an average of 35 students a year⁶. They were more than a hundred to study in the metropole in 1885, 207 in 1890 and 367 in 1900, and were predominantly men. They first enrolled at universities in London, Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh as well as at Inns of Court. Most of them were engaged in law or medical studies while others prepared and took the Indian Civil Service examination, opened to any "natural-born subject of Her/His Majesty⁷" but organized in London only until 1922. Besides this imperial mobility, some international trajectories can be observed as early as the 1880s. In 1882, Keshav Bhat became the first Indian admitted at

However, Trinh Van Thao includes a chapter on Vietnamese scholarship-holders in France in his book dealing with French education in Indochina. He does not consider 'free students' and focuses on the political dimension of student mobility though. Trinh Van Thao, *L'école française en Indochine*, Paris, Khartala, 1993.

⁴See, for instance: Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919-1939*, New Brunswick-Oxford, Transaction Publishers, 1989; David M. Pomfret, « "Colonial circulations": Vietnamese Youth, Travel, and Empire, 1919-1940 » in Richard I. Jobs, David M. Pomfret, (ed.), *Transnational histories of youth in the twentieth century*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 129-130; Sumita Mukerjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: the England-Returned*, London, Routledge, 2010.

⁵ Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism. Indian Travellers and Settlers (1600-1857)*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, p. 367-375.

⁶ Sumita Mukerjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities...*, *op.cit.*, p. 16-17.

⁷ Committee of the National Indian Association in conjunction with the Students' Department, India Office, *Handbook of Information for Indian Students relating to University and Professional Studies, etc., in the United Kingdom*, London, National Indian Association, 1914, p. 23.

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)⁸. One year later, a female student, Anandibai Joshee, joined the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania⁹. Her foreign curriculum remained exceptional at that time, even though it incited some Indian women from the Hindu elite to undertake further studies. Germany formed another host country: in an 1892 speech given in Secunderabad, Nishikanta Chattopadhyay narrated his academic experience in this European country in the 1880s¹⁰. Furthermore, these global paths covered regional territories: in the late 1890s, the colonial government in India expressed some concerns regarding the "disloyal attitudes of Indian students in Japan¹¹". However, global mobility remained limited during the 19th century: on the Indochinese side, imperial flows prevailed, leading a few students to mainland France or to the new *département* of Algeria.

A change happened in the early 1900s: Indian mobility towards non-imperial destinations reached a new breadth. In 1906, there were about 50 Indian students in Japan and a hundred in the US. Some associations participated in fostering this migrating process: the Japan-India Association helped student from the British colony to settle in the Land of the Rising Sun while the Association for the Advancement of Scientific and Industrial Education of Indians, founded in 1904 in India, aimed at collecting 100 000 rupees a year to send thirty students abroad. Above all, Indochinese students joined this global move, first through the organization of *Dông Du* ("Going East", in Vietnamese) movement in 1905. Its leader, Phan Bội Châu, a Vietnamese anticolonialist, promoted the training of young Vietnamese men in Japan so that they could fight against the French colonial power once back in Indochina. Between 1906 and 1908, at least a hundred Vietnamese arrived in Japan. Consequently, the first decade of the 20th century can be considered as a global turn regarding student mobility from colonial Asia. Mobility participated in achieving educational but also political, social or economic goals and continued to increase in the following decades: although *Dông Du* was abolished in 1908, some Vietnamese joined foreign territories afterwards, mainly China and the USSR. Here, differences between Indian and Indochinese mobility routes appear: English-speaking countries – and first and foremost the US – attracted Indian students but almost no Indochinese. Nation-wide figures collected by the US Committee on Friendly Relations with Foreign Students from 1929 to 1947 referenced only one Indochinese student in the country, in 1942¹². Despite this geographical divergence, global mobility remained a common feature in India and Indochina up to WWII.

⁸ Ross Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, Cambridge-London, Harvard University Press, 2016, p. 16, 37-42.

⁹ Drexel University Archives, Rachel Bodley Collection : « Letter from Anandibai Joshee to Alfred Jones, 28 June 1883 ».

¹⁰ Simonti Sen, *Travels to Europe. Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives, 1870-1910*, Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2005, p. 192.

¹¹ British Library, India Office Records, carton R/1/1/225 : *Disloyal attitude of three Indian students in Japan*.

¹² *The Unofficial Ambassadors*, New York, Committee on Friendly Relations Among Foreign Students, 1929-1947.

Convoluting Trajectories

However, this global depiction of student mobility from Asian colonies could conceal the complexity of some student paths. Flows should not be considered as simple return trips between the homeland and a specific place of study as they were at times made of multiple hops. First of all, a quite important number of students enrolled at colonial universities before joining imperial or foreign schools. Admission books from Oxford colleges illustrate this trend: in 1892, Joges Chandra Chauduri, from Bengal, matriculated at New College after having graduated from Calcutta University¹³. In 1926, Vu Hien from Hanoi planned to stop his studies at the Indochinese university to travel and join his friend Hoang Van Bich studying in Nancy¹⁴. Keshav Bhat epitomizes these multiple steps connecting different places and institutions: after some preliminary studies at Bombay University, he first joined Great Britain before reaching Massachusetts. Additionally, some youths changed their places of study after their arrival in foreign territories.

Educational but also personal, political, economic and even environmental factors could guide the students' choices. In 1906, Rathindranath Tagore arrived in California. He was supposed to enroll at Berkeley but had to face an unexpected closure of the university due to an earthquake. Thence, he decided to reach Chicago, convinced that the University of Illinois was located there. He eventually had to move again to Urbana-Champaign, the actual location of the aforesaid university. A few years later, one of his fellow countrymen was forced to leave London where he was engaged in law studies but this time, for political reasons: Virendranath Chattopadhyaya – whose father was an alumnus from Edinburgh University – was close to the Indian anticolonialist movement. A warrant of arrest was issued against him after Sir Curzon-Wyllie's murder by an Indian activist. He consequently fled to France and then, to Germany where he enrolled at Halle university as a student in comparative linguistics. On the Indochinese side, France sometimes became a hub linking colonial territories with communist schools in the USSR. Some students attended preparatory classes in Paris' suburbs before reaching Moscow and its University of the Toilers of the East. This institution, also known as Stalin school, had been founded in April 1921. First dedicated to minorities from the Soviet Union, it quickly extended its audience to foreign students including those coming from colonies. Nguyen The Vinh arrived in France in 1922. He was convinced by a relative to pursue his higher studies in the metropole and enrolled in business classes in Montpellier. Once graduated, he spent some time in Paris where he discovered the communist milieu. He then decided to further his educational training in Russia. He was eager to "study communist theory and to see by himself the practical results of October Revolution¹⁵".

¹³ New College Archives, Admission book, December 1854-January 1902.

¹⁴ David Pomfret, « 'Colonial circulations'..., op.cit. », p. 129.

¹⁵ Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), Service de liaison avec les originaires des territoires de la France d'outre-mer (SLOTFOM), carton III, dossier 44, sous-dossier « Déclarations de Nguyễn Thế Vinh recueillies par la Direction de la Sûreté générale indochinoise », p. 84., p. 6.

Between Aloofness and Cosmopolitanism

Indian and Indochinese students visited and lived in a wide range of places, including several countries and continents. This leads to one additional question: did their mobility participate in forging global student communities? In other words, did academic migration impact the students' identities? The answer is obviously complex and non-Manichean. Each student developed his/her own experience of travel and studies abroad. However, the development of student journals and associations gives clues about the students' sense of belonging. In Edinburgh, an Indian association was organized as early as 1883¹⁶. The first Indochinese association, the *Association des étudiants annamites*, was created in Marseille in 1912¹⁷. In the US, *The Hindustanee Student* was published in 1914-1917 as the Hindustan Association of America's journal¹⁸. Many additional examples could be given, covering different places. Furthermore, public authorities but also private organizations at times fostered these colonial identities: in Paris, la *Maison des étudiants de l'Indochine* ("Indochinese Students' House") was built in 1928-30 to accommodate students from Indochina. In Moscow, students at Stalin school were generally sorted according to their colonial or imperial belonging.

On the contrary, a few cosmopolitan initiatives can be mentioned. In October 1906, Rathindranath Tagore, whose extraordinary trajectory has already been exposed, took part in the foundation of the University of Illinois' Cosmopolitan Club. This organization aimed to "cultivate social and intellectual relationships between persons of different origins through a variety of activities and services¹⁹". The founding committee was actually including three Indians, some American students and a Russian. This club did not aim to erase the students' national identities but to facilitate extra-national exchanges in academic life.

Conclusion

This brief overview of my research delving into student mobility from colonial Asia underscores a quite long-lasting tradition of academic migration on a global scale. Indian and Indochinese students aimed to hold degrees from foreign institutions deemed prestigious or of high-quality, sometimes compensating a lack or an incompleteness of higher and technical education in their home colonies. Different push and pull factors fostered their imperial and international paths, whether they be educational, cultural, economic, political, etc. In a nutshell, colonial students from Asia integrated larger academic flows that had been developing since the 19th century, sometimes stimulating transnational links with local and foreign students. If scholars have generally emphasized the imperial dimension of student mobility, the global dimension of this migrating

¹⁶ *Edinburgh Indian Association, 1883-1983*, Centenary Issue, 1983.

¹⁷ *Journal officiel de la République française*, 24 April 1912, p. 3983.

¹⁸ *The Hindustanee Student*, vol. 1-3, 1914-1917.

¹⁹ Breana McCracken, "Cosmopolitan Club Postcards," Student Life and Culture Archives, University of Illinois, accessed June, 27th 2018, <https://archives.library.illinois.edu/slc/cosmopolitan-club-postcards/>.

process must be reassessed and considered as one of the main features of colonial education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.