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# Global Students? The International Mobility and Identity of Students from Colonial India and Indochina, 1880s–1945

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This article explores the connections between student mobility and identity construction in colonial Asia from the 1880s to the end of the Second World War. It focuses on the international experiences of students from British India and French Indochina, underscoring differences and commonalities between these two colonial populations and thus, challenging the definition of ‘colonial student.’ Members of both groups went abroad to complete their educational training. While only a handful of Indians had moved to foreign territories in the last decades of the nineteenth century, international mobility picked up pace from the turn of the twentieth century on. These international students were driven by different motives that reflected individual and collective goals at the same time: getting a degree to secure a professional and social position was as important as being part of anticolonial and nationalist movements. Additionally, some of them were looking for a religious education. Belonging to a specific community—whether colonial, national, or religious—influenced student flows, and identities were in turn shaped by the experiences the students made abroad. Student unions, for example, tried on the one hand to gather students of the same origin while they also aimed to create a cosmopolitan community in some instances. However, connections with the homeland and the community of origin did not vanish during foreign sojourns.

## *Introduction*

In 1921, the yearly *Report on the Work of the Indian Students' Department* noted a “large increase of enquiries regarding education and technical training in Japan and America.”<sup>1</sup> Created in 1909 as part of the India Office in London, this department was initially in charge of supervising Indian students in Britain. However, its members were also aware of the development of student migration transcending the imperial borders. They consequently widened their field of investigation in the early 1920s, using British representatives abroad to gather pieces of information.

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<sup>1</sup> British Library (BL), India Office Records (IOR), record Q/10/1/4, *Report on the Work of the Indian Students' Department, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1921*.

A few years earlier, a similar assessment had already been made by French officials in Indochina. In 1917, the official correspondence of Governor General Albert Sarraut mentioned the establishment of associations by the Indochinese elite to send young men “to foreign countries, where the Western knowledge was taught.”<sup>2</sup> He hoped that the opening of a university in Hanoi, the capital of French Indochina, would divert these flows towards the colony.

These two examples illustrate both the agency of students from India and Indochina, able to choose places of study outside the empire they belonged to, and an entanglement of scales, connecting the colonies, their metropolises and foreign lands. Student mobility from colonial Asia actually started to develop during the second half of the nineteenth century. These flows were first directed towards colonial metropolises, either the United Kingdom<sup>3</sup> or France,<sup>4</sup> and travel outside of the metropole remained exceptional until the dawn of the following century. However, some foreign institutions welcomed a few Indians, but no Indochinese, as early as the 1880s: Nishikanta Chattopadhyah was a student in Germany around 1883 while the first Indian student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) enrolled in 1882. Three years later, Anandi Gopal Joshi became one of the first female physicians in India after having graduated from the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania.<sup>5</sup>

Imperial migration continued to increase at the turn of the twentieth century,<sup>6</sup> but this phenomenon also became more international. It included territories out-

<sup>2</sup> Archives nationales d’outre-mer (ANOM), Gouvernement général de l’Indochine (GGI), file 26 916, *Création d’une direction de l’enseignement supérieur*: “Minute du gouverneur général de l’Indochine, 1917.”

<sup>3</sup> Students came from the British presidencies and the princely states. A report by the National Indian Association (NIA) mentioned more than 700 Indian students in the UK during the twenty years preceding 1885. In 1900, another report estimated that 336 men and 31 women from India were studying in that country. See: NIA reports quoted by Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: The England-returned* (London: Routledge, 2010), 16.

<sup>4</sup> A handful of Indochinese enrolled at French metropolitan schools for vocational and higher education, including the so-called “*grandes écoles*” and “*écoles supérieures*” during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Some of these institutions were located in Algeria, recently turned into a French *département*.

<sup>5</sup> Some exceptional cases can be mentioned on the Indian side: Ross Bassett, *The Technological Indian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 69; Simonti Sen, *Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives, 1870–1910* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2005), 192; Caroline Healey Dall, *The Life of Dr. Anandabai Joshee, a Kinswoman of the Pundita Ramabal* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888).

<sup>6</sup> In 1907, a British report estimated that 700 Indians were studying in England at that time whereas tens of Indochinese students joined France, sometimes supervised by patronage committees. For this report see: Lee-Warner Committee, “Report of the Committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India in 1907 to inquire into the Position of Indian Students in the United Kingdom,” in *Report of the Committee on Indian Students* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office for the India Office, 1922), 74; Sara Legrandjacques, “De pérégrinations en fondations. Circulations étudiantes et formation de l’enseignement supérieur en Indochine,” *Actes du colloque «Universités et grandes écoles. Mobilités et circulations internationales étudiantes et scientifiques d’hier à aujourd’hui»* (Nancy: to be published).

side of the British and French empires. Japan attracted dozens of Indians and hundreds of Vietnamese in the 1900s.<sup>7</sup> The former also went to institutions in North America and continental Europe, especially Germany.<sup>8</sup>

These trends intensified in the interwar years. Regional mobility was still developing. Indian students continued to reach Japan while the Vietnamese deserted the archipelago's schools until WWII. Some of them chose to enrol at Chinese schools. Moreover, the USSR became a new educational hub. In Moscow, some schools were dedicated to foreign students, including the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, also known as Stalin School.

However, scholars have overlooked this global dimension of colonial education so far. Whilst some of them have already examined academic mobility from colonial Asia, their studies are generally restricted to sojourns in the metropolises and focus on only one empire.<sup>9</sup> In the late twentieth century, historians emphasised the political dimension of student migration. Daniel Hémerly<sup>10</sup> and Scott McConnell<sup>11</sup> respectively associated flows of students from Indochina with the development of left-wing ideologies amongst the Vietnamese diaspora, in which the students played a major part. More recently, academics have distanced themselves from this political focus, paving the way for a broader thinking on identities. David Pomfret highlighted the impact of travels on the shaping of the Vietnamese youth. Shompa Lahiri drew attention to “the grappling of two cultures and the discourses through which they constructed each other,”<sup>12</sup> comparing British and Indian identity during their metropolitan encounter. Sumita Mukherjee zoomed in on the fashioning of Indian students' identities during their stays in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,<sup>13</sup> while Elleke Boehmer drew a more general picture of Indian arrivals in the metropole as her study does not only focus on students but encompasses every category of migrants.<sup>14</sup> In addition to its political dimension, mobility has recently been considered through its individual, social, intellectual, cultural and religious aspects.

<sup>7</sup> “Chroniques,” *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1906, 3–53.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/1847, file 2128, *University Education in Germany and Facilities available for Indian Students; Enquiries, Printed Reports from Governments*.

<sup>9</sup> Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identity*; Trinh Van Thao, *L'école française en Indochine* (Paris: Khartala, 1993); David M. Pomfret, “‘Colonial Circulation’: Vietnamese Youth, Travel, and Empire,” in *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard Ivan Jobs and David M. Pomfret (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 115–143.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Hémerly, “Du patriotisme au marxisme: l'immigration vietnamienne en France de 1926 à 1930,” *Le Mouvement social* 16, iss. 90 (1975): 3–54.

<sup>11</sup> Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919–1939* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identities, 1880–1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), XI.

<sup>13</sup> Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals, 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Based on these observations, this article aims to globalize historical investigations on student mobility from colonial Asia by examining its connections with identity. How did identity shape student mobility while being fostered by these academic flows? It consequently explores the international dimension of academic migration, focusing on host countries outside of the British and French empires from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. It also breaks down scientific barriers between these two empires, comparing experiences from their two main Asian colonies, India and Indochina. The British “Jewel in the Crown” and the French “Pearl of the Orient,” as these territories were sometimes named during the colonial period,<sup>15</sup> were also the greatest suppliers of mobile students from colonial Asia. Indochina was integrated into the international flows of students mainly through its Vietnamese population, while Laotians and Cambodians hardly crossed the imperial boundaries. Only a few Buddhist students traveled to neighbouring lands, especially Siam, to complete a religious training, following paths preceding the colonial conquest.<sup>16</sup> So far, none of them have been found in more distant lands, including Japan, the US, and the USSR.<sup>17</sup> This comparative study of Indian and Indochinese trajectories therefore challenges the definition of the “colonial student” by underscoring differences but also commonalities between these two colonial populations.

Last but not least, this article takes a look at the multiplicity of actors involved in international student mobility, including national and anticolonial activists as well as student unions. By considering these external actors, it draws attention to the shaping of identities transcending the students themselves, based on national, regional or even political senses of belonging.

Using archive material from Europe and Asia, student journals and memoirs, this paper first examines the motives fostering student mobility at a global level. It then observes how identities were negotiated during stays abroad, underscoring the complex shaping of student identities.

### *From Individual to Global Motives?*

A quick overview of student mobility from India and Indochina uncovers its global dimension that spans at least three different continents, but also shows the differences between the Indian and Vietnamese routes. At first glance, the

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<sup>15</sup> On these names, see for instance: Ching Selao, *Le roman vietnamien francophone. Orientalisme, occidentalisme et hybridité* (Montréal: Presses Universitaires de Montréal, 2010), 45–103.

<sup>16</sup> Ann-Ruth Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860–1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> On the development of student mobility from Cambodia and Laos towards the US during the second half of the twentieth century, see: Meyer Weilberg, *Asian American Education: Historical Background and Current Realities* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1997), 156–204.

students' imperial belonging seems to influence their educational trajectory. The common use of English oiled the wheels of Indian student mobility towards the US. This was not possible for many Vietnamese students, most of whom could only master French. Between 1920 and 1945 only one of them studied at a US university.<sup>18</sup> The Catalogues of Columbia University, including information on the university officials and students, mention two Indochinese students in 1925,<sup>19</sup> but a thorough look into the university's directories show that they were actually members of the Chinese diaspora in Indochina, sometimes benefiting from an English education outside of the colony, in cities such as Hong Kong.<sup>20</sup>

However, if the necessity to learn the local language could pose a big hindrance for studying abroad, as mentioned in a letter from an Indian student complaining about having wasted six months to learn Japanese,<sup>21</sup> it did not prevent students from moving towards foreign lands. The language issue is not a sufficient factor to explain the shaping of international mobility. Other motives fostered student circulation. Individual goals were one of the main motives to study abroad, but national and anticolonial purposes played a role as well. Students were part of wider communities, based on political or religious features.

### *A Matter of Professional Status*

Students from India and Indochina left their homeland for higher or technical training as some courses were often unavailable in their countries. This phenomenon started in India as early as the 1840s, when Dwarkanath Tagore, a member of the Bengali elite, sent four Indians to London to complete their medical and surgical training after having successfully taken the Calcutta Medical College examinations.<sup>22</sup> The first *école supérieure* in Indochina, specialized in medical teaching, opened in 1902. Before that date, a few students from wealthy families had joined metropolitan faculties and schools.<sup>23</sup>

The later opening of universities and higher education institutions did not put an end to this pattern of movement. Despite the establishment of higher and technical education in India, from the 1850s, and in Indochina, from the 1900s, facilities for further studies remained incomplete. Schools were progressively established in

<sup>18</sup> "Statistical Summary by Countries of Foreign Students in the Colleges and Universities of the US for 1939–40," in *The Unofficial Ambassadors* (New York: Committee on Friendly Relations Among Foreign Students, 1941), 26.

<sup>19</sup> Columbia University Archives (CUA), *Columbia Annual Report 1925*, 350.

<sup>20</sup> About the education of the Chinese diaspora, see: Tracy C. Barrett, *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia: The Overseas Chinese in Indo-China* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> Michael H. Fischer, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travelers and Settlers in Britain (1600–1857)* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 369; Cécile Deer, *L'empire britannique et l'instruction en Inde (1780–1854)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 142.

<sup>23</sup> Pascale Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice? L'expérience indochinoise (1860–1945)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), 40; ANOM, GGI, file 23758, *Au sujet du boursier de la Cochinchine Nguyễn Khắc Cấn à l'école de médecine d'Alger, 1888–1889*.

Indochina in the interwar years, slowly extending the educational supply. In 1925 an art school was established, followed by a law school six years later.<sup>24</sup> In India, a 1904 report on technical education regretted the lack of practical teaching in the colony.<sup>25</sup> Some specific educational opportunities remained only available outside of the colonial land. In the early 1900s, Rathindranath Tagore's travel to America was motivated by his will to take agricultural courses, since no course on this topic existed in Bengal at that time.<sup>26</sup> In Japan, most of the Vietnamese students enrolled in military courses, which were not available in French Indochina.<sup>27</sup>

This lack of educational facilities at home contributed to the tendency of Indians and Indochinese to seek their opportunities at foreign institutions outside their respective empires. Additionally, going abroad became a way to bypass the limits of metropolitan training, especially for Indians. In 1921, the Indian Students' Department in London underscored the tendency of Indian students to go to Japan and the US, exposing that "the American manufacturers and business men are more generous in their provision of facilities for Indian students than are English manufacturers and business men."<sup>28</sup> This statement referred to difficulties encountered by Indian students to find apprenticeships in the UK to complete their technical training. According to reports and testimonies on that matter, they suffered from racial prejudice and fear of industrial espionage and competition. The educational trajectory of Keshav Malhar Bhat illustrates these difficulties. Born in 1855 in Poona, he decided to pursue his studies abroad in the early 1880s. He first went to England but was unable to secure a position as an apprentice in a manufacturing firm in the colonial metropolis, despite reference letters from some Bombay merchants. British manufacturers feared that he was "spy prying into the secrets of industries."<sup>29</sup> He consequently left England for the US, arrived in Boston in July 1882 and became the first Indian student enrolling at the MIT.

International mobility was therefore necessary to reach specific careers. Studies abroad had to secure a professional position that could have an impact on the student's future social and economic status. The Indian experiences clearly reveal that these individual motives existed. This was not as clear in the case of the Vietnamese.

<sup>24</sup> For a global description of higher education in Indochina, see: Hoàng Văn Tuấn, "L'enseignement supérieur en Indochine, 1902–1945" (Ph.D. diss., Université de Versailles Saint Quentin-en-Yvelines, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> BL, IOR, file V/27/865/1, *Technical Education in India, 1886–1904*.

<sup>26</sup> Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1958), 75.

<sup>27</sup> Phan Bội Châu, *Overtaken Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan-Bội-Châu*, trans. Vinh Sinh and Nicolas Wickenden (Honolulu: SHAPS Library of Translations, 1999), 90.

<sup>28</sup> BL, IOR, record Q/10/1/4, *Report on the Work of the Indian Students' Department, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1921*.

<sup>29</sup> Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, 38.

*Global Students, National Purposes*

Travelling abroad was not only motivated by individual purposes pertaining to professional career and social status. The development of nationalist and anti-colonial movements in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries also influenced student circulation. The Indian case highlights the connection between the mobility of students and the economic as well as industrial development of their homelands when a more aggressive and radical anticolonialism motivated some Vietnamese to study abroad.

Members of nationalist movements in India started to urge for the industrialization of their country from the last third of the nineteenth century. Besides promoting the opening of Indian firms, they used speeches and newspapers to advocate the development of industrial and technical training. In 1884, an editorial entitled “the need of an industrial school” was published to that end in *Kesari*, a Marathi newspaper created by one of the Indian Independence Movement leaders, Tilak.<sup>30</sup> In addition to local training, the Indian nationalists also examined training opportunities offered by foreign institutions. In the late 1870s, the nationalist institution *Poona Sawajanik Sabha* organized a campaign to send some Indian volunteers abroad to get technical training but failed to gather enough funding.<sup>31</sup> About 25 years later, the Association for the Advancement of Scientific and Industrial Education of Indians (AASIEI), created in Calcutta, shared similar objectives. It was planning to create scholarships “to enable properly qualified students to visit Europe, America, Japan, or other foreign countries for studying arts and industries.”<sup>32</sup> The AASIEI opened laboratories in India and supported the creation of industrial firms. Here, mobile students took part in a national plan to measure India up to industrialized countries. They also embodied concrete connections between India and foreign territories by going abroad and their exchange with non-Indian populations. During an introduction meeting of the association in May 1904, the Indian nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal summed up the students’ role by exposing the association’s will to send six students to New York for a year. There, “they would learn all the industries of the place and then return to teach the people the same.”<sup>33</sup> There were eventually seventeen students to leave India in 1905 and ninety in 1907,<sup>34</sup> joining different territories around the globe, even though precise figures about their destinations are lacking.

This national, even nationalist, dimension of international mobility did not disappear in the following years. The historian Ross Bassett has recently studied the

<sup>30</sup> Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> W. Reginald Wheeler, Henry H. King, Alexander B. Davidson (ed.), *The Foreign Student in America: A Study by the Commission of Survey of Foreign Students in the USA, Under the Auspices of the Friendly Relations Committees of the YMCA and the YWCA* (New York: Association Press, 1925), 108.

<sup>33</sup> Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, 66.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

use of student mobility by nationalists related to Gandhi.<sup>35</sup> The Indian diaspora later got involved in this phenomenon, especially in the US. Established in 1942 by Gobindram J. Watumull, a Sindhi merchant residing in Los Angeles, the Watumull Foundation aimed “to promote cultural and economic cooperation between India and the United States” and “to aid in the cause of increasing India’s national efficiency.”<sup>36</sup> Some scholarships were consequently created for Indian students “to enable them to prosecute higher studies in America and thereafter to return to India to do constructive work for the country.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Anticolonial Identities*

Emerging under British rule, these nationalist tendencies were influenced by anticolonialism. Promoters of industrial training took part in the Swadeshi movement, based on the revival of local production and the boycott of British goods. In addition, studying outside of the British Empire can be considered as a way to boycott British education and so, to escape from British subjugation. Some Indian leaders underscored this anticolonial dimension in the early 1900s, when international departures started to grow. In 1907, Harnam Singh Chima published a paper entitled “Why India Sends Students to America?” describing the anticolonial role of this journey: “We came here to imbibe free thoughts from free people and teach the same when we go back to our country and to get rid of the tyranny of the rule of the universal oppressor (the British).”<sup>38</sup>

However, in the case of the Vietnamese, this anticolonial mobility was based on the acquisition of military skills. Indeed, the dawn of Vietnamese student mobility at a global scale matched the launch of *Đông Du*, the “Going East” movement, led by the Vietnamese nationalist Phan Bội Châu. Advised by Japanese politicians and Chinese reformists during a trip to Japan, Phan believed that a modern training different from colonial education was useful to learn how to get rid of the French in Indochina. He organized a network connecting the three provinces of Vietnam—Cochinchina, Tonkin, and Annam—with Japan, using Hong Kong as a stopover. After a slow start, with only three students leaving Vietnam in Winter 1905–1906, *Đông Du* arrivals reached their apex in 1908 with 200 students, according to Phan’s memoirs.<sup>39</sup> Figures remain controversial amongst historians as no official student list is available. After having learnt Japanese in special schools, most of the *Đông Du* members enrolled at military schools but also in industrial and medical classes. Colonial authorities in Indochina were concerned about this

<sup>35</sup> Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, 79–105.

<sup>36</sup> National Archives of India (NAI), Proceedings of the Home Department for the Year 1945, file n°3-11-FE/45, *Note from the Intelligence Bureau: The Watumull Foundation*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 22.

<sup>39</sup> Phan, *Overtaken Chariot*, 92.

openly anti-French movement. They negotiated with the Japanese government and implemented repressive measures from 1906 that eventually forced Phan to dissolve its organization in September 1908. Going abroad was synonym to rejecting colonial subjugation and the students taking part in Đông Du therefore defined themselves as anti-colonialists.

This political use of mobility lasted for at least three decades. A limited but still non-neglectable number of former Đông Du members did not come back to Indochina. Some fled to China after the 1908 dissolution, pursuing their studies there, while others stayed in Japan.<sup>40</sup> Chinese military academies and universities progressively replaced training in Japan. Once again, no precise figures are available, but the development of nationalist schools by the Kuomintang in the interwar years is quite well documented in French sources. In 1926, French officials estimated that about a hundred Vietnamese students enrolled at the Whampoa military academy, located on an island ten kilometres away from Canton.<sup>41</sup> They received a practical military training, becoming cadets of the Whampoa army. Even if they aimed to learn how to struggle against colonial powers, their enrolment at Chinese schools exceeded their own national purposes. Vietnamese cadets participated in Chinese conflicts, fighting local warlords and their cliques trying to increase their political domination within the Beiyang government in the 1920s.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, they did not completely integrate with Chinese students, being grouped in a Vietnamese section and benefiting from “Indochinese teachers.”<sup>43</sup>

Anticolonialism and nationalism directed Vietnamese students towards foreign lands. Their choices were rooted in their sense of belonging to a national community that had to be freed from colonial subjugation. It also included them in a wider community, sharing the same political ideals. In the interwar years, communism fostered similar flows, both from Indochina and India. Communist schools in Moscow admitted foreign students. The Moscow University of the Toilers of the East was inaugurated in 1921. Its classes were first reserved for ethnic minorities from the USSR but started to admit foreign students from Asia and Africa as early as 1922.<sup>44</sup> The school’s aim was to train communist activists to act as representatives in their homelands. In most cases, the students’ nationalist feelings did not simply give way to internationalism during their time at communist cadre schools. For them internationalism and anticolonial nationalism were rather two sides of the same coin.

<sup>40</sup> Phan, *Overtured Chariot*, 97–108.

<sup>41</sup> ANOM, Service de liaison avec les origines des territoires de la France d’outre-mer (SLOT-FOM), record III, file 10, *École spéciale internationale de Canton*.

<sup>42</sup> Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 82.

<sup>43</sup> ANOM, SLOTFOM, record III, file 10, *École spéciale internationale de Canton*.

<sup>44</sup> Céline Marangé, *Le communisme vietnamien* (Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2012).

*Students on a Mission*

Migration experiences helped to define and develop the students' political identities. Taking courses imbued with ideology, some of them were integrated into political communities transcending colonial and imperial borders. But these new belongings did not erase their connections with their homeland. Living under colonial rule influenced their decision to sign up for political training and many students who wanted to escape from the colonial stranglehold saw their relief in some anticolonial and anti-imperial ideologies, especially communism, as a way to get rid of the colonizers. Moreover, once graduated, some of them became representatives of this internationalist community and began to spread their ideas amongst their communities of origin. In early 1933, a former Vietnamese student at the Stalin school, Trần Văn Giàu, was sent to Cochinchina to rebuild the Indo-chinese Communist Party after having helped in drafting a new action programme in 1932.<sup>45</sup>

In India, religious goals also fostered international mobility, due to the influence of Christian missions in the colony. Christian higher education developed during the nineteenth century and colleges supervised by missionaries were affiliated with Indian universities as early as their establishment in 1857.<sup>46</sup> Thus, being a student in India could be associated with a confessional identity, even though these colleges generally admitted non-Christian students too. Societies, including the Young Men and Young Women Christian Association (YMCA/YWCA), were involved in “student work”,<sup>47</sup> i.e. activities related to education and youth through the establishment of colleges and student hostels for instance. They used contacts with these students in turn to expand their international networks. Stefan Hübner has studied the role of the YMCA training college in Springfield, Massachusetts. The institution was created to train foreign students to hold leadership positions in their homeland's missions. In 1924, two Indian students joined it and the admission of an additional one was decided.<sup>48</sup> The students' faith could alter their international academic curricula. Religious belongings also drove some Cambodian students abroad, on a smaller scale. Ann-Ruth Hansen thereby examined the trajectories of monk-students completing their Buddhist training in Siam.<sup>49</sup>

Multiple factors and motives fostered international student mobility from India and Indochina. They were connected with and challenged different aspects of the

<sup>45</sup> Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, 198.

<sup>46</sup> Commission on Christian Higher Education in India, *Report of the Commission on Christian Higher Education in India: An Enquiry into the Place of the Christian College in Modern India* (London: Oxford University Press–Humphrey Milford, 1931), 62–65.

<sup>47</sup> M.D. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India: A Centenary History* (New Delhi, National Council of YMCAs of India–Bharat Yuvak Bhavan, 1922), 63–85, 174.

<sup>48</sup> Stefan Hübner, “Muscular Christian Exchanges: Asian Sport Experts and the International YMCA Training School (1910s–1930s),” in *Global Exchanges: Scholarships and Transnational Circulations in the Modern World*, ed. Ludovic Tournès and Giles Scott-Smith (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 102.

<sup>49</sup> Hansen, *How to Behave*, 83–87.

students' identity, whether it was professional, national, political, or religious. These different motives could intertwine. If some Indian students following a practical training in the US were willing to participate in the development of India, their academic sojourns were also a way to secure a professional position in their homeland through specific degrees. Here, their national identity intertwined with their individual status. The trajectory of Nguyễn Thế Vinh, a Vietnamese student, also underscores a similar entanglement. In 1925, he left France where he had obtained a business degree to enroll at Moscow Stalin School. He then aimed to learn more about communist theory and practice by moving to the USSR. However, once back in Indochina, he stressed his business skills and tended to minimize his links with communist activists in order to avoid colonial repression.<sup>50</sup> Nguyễn Thế Vinh is a good example of how mobility produced complex and negotiated identities that consisted of multiple layers.

If their departures did not completely disconnect them from their homeland, going abroad still implied a physical separation. Thus, identities were questioned during the stay abroad, charting the complexity of the students' belongings.

### *Negotiating Identities Abroad*

Studies abroad disrupted the students' ways of life as the population of their host countries had different manners and customs compared to their homelands. Adapting themselves to a new environment, students on the move also had to negotiate their status and place amongst the academic community. Student unions consequently became another main locus for the (re)definition of identities. However, their existing identities could hamper integration and global contacts.

### *Threatened Identities?*

Mobile students discovered new worlds outside of the colonial land. As they entered a new academic environment, they also needed to adapt their new everyday lives. In the late nineteenth century, this change was feared by specific groups. In India, members of the Hindu community sometimes contested student mobility. Their opposition was linked to their belonging to a specific caste, the Brahmin, and based on sea-travelling restrictions according to the Dharma Sutra.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, prejudices concerning the impossibility to respect religious duties also stimulated hostility towards academic migration. Some Hindu students, including Gandhi in the 1880s, were expelled from their castes before their departures to England.<sup>52</sup> However, these restrictions softened at the turn of the twentieth century and no similar example was found concerning international mobility. In the

<sup>50</sup> ANOM, SLOTFOM, record III, file 44, *Déclarations de Nguyễn Thế Vinh recueillies par la Direction de la Sûreté générale indochinoise*.

<sup>51</sup> Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals, 1870–1915*, 36–41.

<sup>52</sup> Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities*, 30.

interwar years, when Devchand Parekh asked his son-in-law studying at MIT to send weekly health reports, he was worried about his welfare rather than about his religious identity.<sup>53</sup> Focusing on students in Boston, Bassett details how Indian students in the US attempted to adapt their habits to a new environment, shopping at grocery stores selling spices and organizing Indian dinners.<sup>54</sup>

### *Complex Unions*

Although Indian experiences in the US underscore daily life negotiations, students abroad also integrated into new academic worlds. Indians and Vietnamese took part in student life, joining and, sometimes, creating student unions. These organizations could thereby be reserved for specific groups of students, whether it be colonial or regional, or based on a general and more cosmopolitan definition of the student community. Examining student unions highlights the complexity of students' identities during their foreign sojourns. They were used by external actors, generally the union's founders and leadership, to build or strengthen a nationalistic, regional or international community. These different layers of belonging were especially noticeable on the Indian side when nationalistic purposes continued to be prioritised by Vietnamese.

Indian arrivals to the US increased during the first decade of the twentieth century and the first Indian student union, the Hindustanee Association of America, was formed in Chicago circa 1912. At first glance, this association, reserved for Indians, aimed to separate them from other communities in the US:

The objects of the Hindusthan Association of America are as follows:

- (a) Solely to further the educational interests of the Hindusthanee students, present or prospective.
- (b) To seek help and co-operation from people at home and abroad.
- (c) To extend similar scope of work, if possible, to other people of Hindusthan.<sup>55</sup>

Facilitating the students' stay abroad, the association also aimed to expand its goals to the wider diaspora. It transcended regional and religious differences amongst the Indian population to cultivate a collective sense of Hindusthanee identity. In his presidential speech at the second annual convention in December 1913, Sudhindra Bhowe highlighted this common belonging, stating that members "all worked through the year, each at his post, not as Hindus and Mohamedans or as Parsis and Maharattas, but as—what is their greatest privilege to be—sons

<sup>53</sup> Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, 112.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> "Our Objects," *The Hindustanee Student: A Quarterly Review of Education* (January 1914): 1.

and daughters of our mother Hindusthan.”<sup>56</sup> He also emphasized the shaping of a global Indian student community:

The third object of this society, it seems to me, is to promote mutual interest and cultivate mutual friendship by extending our activities among the Hindusthanees students in this country and elsewhere... We are hopefully looking forward to the day when all the organizations of the Hindusthanees Student Union the world over will be united in one grand federation, probably to be known as the World's Hindusthanees Student Union. With that object in mind, your president [of the Hindusthanees Association] carried on considerable correspondence with the various Indian students' organizations in England, Europe, and Japan.<sup>57</sup>

However, a closer look into the association's activities reveals that this focus on national identity did not mean that Indians were isolated. Bhow stressed the necessity of “close and intimate relations between the United States and Hindusthan”<sup>58</sup> and support also came from non-Indian members. Honorary membership included American personalities, mostly from the academic world. In 1914, G. Stanley Hall, president of Clark University, praised the Hindusthanees Association of America as “the union of the East and the West”<sup>59</sup> in a note published in the association's journal, *The Hindusthanees student*. This quarterly review included a great variety of articles and news dealing with India and Indian students in the US and elsewhere but also with more global information about the US or other communities. In 1914, the “News Notes” section consequently included a few lines on Chinese engineers.<sup>60</sup>

This fashioning of a common Indian identity did not prevent the students to join non-Indian unions. In 1915, four Indians spoke during a Californian meeting of the Asiatic Students' Alliance, “organized for the promotion of friendly feelings amongst the students of Asia to this country,”<sup>61</sup> alongside two Japanese, one Chinese, one Persian and one Filipino. This continental sense of belonging was sometimes reinforced by the bestowing of scholarships upon Asian students, including Indians. In 1931, some of them enrolled at the University of Michigan as owners of a Barbour fellowship.<sup>62</sup> The fellows were designated as “Oriental students,”<sup>63</sup> also coming from Korea, Japan, China, and the Philippines. They were all women “preparing for medical service among their people”<sup>64</sup> once back in their homeland.

<sup>56</sup> “The Second Annual Convention News,” *The Hindusthanees Student* (January 1914): 22.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> “Note to the General Secretary, Hindusthanees Association,” *The Hindusthanees Student* (January 1914): front cover.

<sup>60</sup> “Table of Contents,” *The Hindusthanees Student* (January 1914): 5.

<sup>61</sup> “Notes,” *The Hindusthanees Student* (November 1915): 12.

<sup>62</sup> *The Unofficial Ambassadors*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Last but not least, some Indians joined cosmopolitan clubs, mixing with local and foreign students. Rathindranath Tagore's experience at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) underscores this involvement in global initiatives. He was one of the founders of the UIUC cosmopolitan club in 1906–1907. It aimed to “cultivate social and intellectual relationships between persons of different nationalities through a variety of activities and services.”<sup>65</sup> The founding committee included the three Indians enrolled at UIUC at that time, some American students and a Russian.<sup>66</sup>

The intertwining of different layers of identity characterized the involvement of Indian students in unions at the international level. In contrast, the Vietnamese experience was both more restricted and tied to nationalist issues. Only one Vietnamese student association existed in Japan during the first decade of the twentieth century. This *Việt Nam Cống Hiến Hội*—the constitutional association of Vietnam—was first and foremost political, aiming to unite young men undertaking educational training in Japan. It was not founded by the students themselves but by anticolonial leaders involved in *Đông Du*. Divided into four departments—economy, discipline, foreign relations, secretary—it was aiming to oversee every aspect of these anticolonial sojourns. It stressed political rather than academic issues, offering the students a space for political activities and discussions without French monitoring.<sup>67</sup> Although the *Việt Nam Cống Hiến Hội* fashioned a Vietnamese anticolonial community, commonalities with the Hindusthane association can still be found through the elaboration of a common identity, transcending the regional ones. The association and, more generally, *Đông Du*, brought together members of the three Vietnamese provinces, Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, when the colonial situation tended to separate them.<sup>68</sup>

A hybrid situation defined Soviet student unions admitting foreign students. A communist club was associated with the Stalin School. However, students joining it were sorted according to their nationalities.<sup>69</sup> Created by the school's administration, this union categorized the students according to their national belonging. However, in the school itself, students were also separated into specific divisions, from “A” to “D”. Division A was bringing “Indochinese, North Africans, Arabs from Syria, Chinese, Japanese, American negroes and Hindus”<sup>70</sup> together, tran-

<sup>65</sup> Breana McCracken, “Cosmopolitan Club Postcards,” Student Life and Culture Archives, University of Illinois, accessed June 27, 2018, <https://archives.library.illinois.edu/slc/cosmopolitan-club-postcards/>.

<sup>66</sup> Teresa Brawner Bevis, Christopher J. Lucas, *International Students in American Colleges and Universities: A History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 79.

<sup>67</sup> Chizuru Namba, *Français et Japonais en Indochine (1940–1945). Colonisation, propagande et rivalité culturelle* (Paris: Khartala, 2012), 18.

<sup>68</sup> Phan, *Overturned Chariot*, 140.

<sup>69</sup> ANOM, SLOTFOM, record III, file 44, *Déclarations de Nguyễn Thế Vinh recueillies par la Direction de la Sûreté générale indochinoise*.

<sup>70</sup> ANOM, SLOTFOM, record III, file 44, *École communiste en URSS*.

scending a national categorization. Here, identity was defined in multiple ways by external actors rather than the students themselves.

### *Discriminated Identities*

The study of student unions welcoming Indians and/or Indochinese emphasizes the difficulty for historians to draw a global picture of these mobile students and their senses of belonging. Even though the used material shows the great diversity of identities, it is of course difficult to tell from it how the students might have thought of themselves in reality.

Moreover, students sometimes experienced discrimination during their sojourns outside the colonies. Racial prejudice in the metropolises was often denounced by Indians, some of them living outside of the British empire. In 1914, *the Hindustanee Student* published an editorial entitled “Oxford and Cambridge bar Hindusthanee Students.”<sup>71</sup> But being a colonial student at times complicated the proceedings of the studies at the international level as well. After his return to India from MIT, Keshav Malhar Bhat explained to his compatriots that “housekeepers seemed afraid of the color of Indians.”<sup>72</sup> In the 1920s, a testimony from Mr C. for a study by the commission on foreign students in the United States alluded to racial and color prejudice.<sup>73</sup> The committee’s report also included the case of an “East-Indian woman...rejected at some twenty-odd boarding houses in one... student centers because of her color” when “another student of the same nationality when refused a lodging place among a group of white women exclaimed: ‘I do not mind living with colored girls; fortunately, I have not the Christian’s race prejudice’.”<sup>74</sup> Racial prejudices did not disappear with the crossing of imperial boundaries and had an impact on the students’ experiences away from their homelands. It draws attention to the complexity of attributions to identities, defined and used by the students themselves but also by external actors influencing their migrating trajectories.

### *Conclusion*

A great diversity of actors remained involved in the international migration process during the Second World War. Colonial governments at times encouraged the departure of students and non-governmental individuals and organisations bestowed some scholarships, including the aforementioned Watumull foundation’s grant.<sup>75</sup> While the war marked a period of decreasing university enrolments in

<sup>71</sup> “Table of Contents,” *The Hindustanee Student* (January 1914): 5.

<sup>72</sup> Bassett, *The Technological Indian*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Wheeler, King, and Davidson (ed.), *The Foreign Student in America*, 111.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIII.

<sup>75</sup> For instance, the government general for Indochina cooperated with Tokyo to organize the departure of some Vietnamese students for Japan. Namba, *Français et Japonais en Indochine*, 227.

the colonial metropolises, international mobility from India and Indochina did not vanish during the early 1940s. This continuity confirms that this mobility played a role in the shaping of higher and technical education in India and Indochina during the nineteenth and twentieth century. By studying abroad, the students first tried to secure a social and professional position and so, to shape their individual identities through educational training. These goals were not a colonial specificity but were shared with most of the students enrolled in higher or technical classes. Some countries and institutions were regionally or internationally renowned and attracted Indians and/or Vietnamese amongst other foreign scholars. This search for a fruitful future could entail complex trajectories, connecting colonial, imperial and international places. Moreover, belonging to a specific community shaped these trajectories: some Christian or Buddhist students were involved in religious training when language skills, generally related to the colonial belonging, influenced the choice of the place of study.

Furthermore, student migration was also a matter of politics with its roots in the colonial situation. Sojourns in foreign countries were a way to escape from colonial subjugation, despite some limited attempts of control by the imperial authorities and their potential collaborators, like Japan during the repression of *Đông Du*. Students on the move were able to express their political and anticolonial views more freely and through this, to develop distinct political identities. In the case of Indian and Vietnamese students, international experiences often led to the development of a national consciousness. This national sensibility was either fostered by the students themselves, for instance, through the creation of national student unions like the Hindustanee Association of America, or by external actors, including political leaders like Phan Bội Châu. Acquiring specific knowledge was sometimes part of a national strategy, shaping both individual and collective identities.

Last but not least, these patriotic—or even nationalist—feelings did not prevent the development of wider relations. Classrooms, associations, student hostels were some of the places where students of varied origins could meet one another. Students from colonial Asia sometimes laid the foundations of regional and global student communities, based on common academic, political, or religious values, bypassing, but not erasing, their colonial and national belongings.

International mobility consequently reveals multiple and often intertwined layers of identities. However, each experience of mobility differed from one another and materials used in this paper did not allow to probe the students' feelings and thoughts. A global perspective must therefore not lead to an excessive simplification but can reveal the complexity and interconnectivity of academic circulation. 'Collective' material needs to be examined alongside individual testimonies. On a similar basis, the comparison between Indian and Indochinese experiences draws attention to the diversity hidden under the idea of 'colonial student,' unveiling

multiple trajectories despite a similar development of student mobility on an international level.