The Regional Discourse of French Geography in the Context of Indochina: The Theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou

Dany Bréelle

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The Regional Discourse of French Geography in the Context of Indochina: The Theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou

By
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PhD Thesis
Flinders University of South Australia
School of Geography, Population and Environmental Management

September 2002

Table of Contents

Abstract ..... **vi**

Thesis Declaration ..... **vii**

Acknowledgments ..... **viii**

Foreword ..... **ix**

Table of Figures ..... **x**

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION **1**
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Background – The Authors and Their Geography 3
1.2.1 Two authors influenced by Vidalian scholarship 4
1.2.1.1 Charles Robequain 4
1.2.1.2 Pierre Gourou 7
1.2.2 Two pioneer discourses on the Far Eastern regions of the French empire 10
1.3 Objectives of this Thesis 12
1.3.1 General aim 12
1.3.2 Specific questions 12

CHAPTER 2

THE LANGUAGE OF GEOGRAPHERS: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESEARCH ORIENTATIONS **16**
2.1 Introduction 16
2.2 A Contextual Approach 17
2.2.1 Societal environment and geographical issues 18
2.2.2 The epistemological backgrounds of the geographical works during the 1920s-1930s 18
2.3 The Concept of Discourse and Geography 21
2.3.1 Philosophical/geographical definitions 21
2.3.2 Culture, writings and discourses 23
2.3.3 Discourse and power 28
2.3.4 Creativity of discourse 33
2.4 The Geographical Discourse and Semiology 38
2.4.1 Landscape, geographical interpretation and semiology 38
2.4.2 Translation of the signs and symbols of another culture 42
2.4.3 The landscape as a text 42
2.5 The Geographical Discourse and the Use of Metaphor/Analogy 44
2.6 Conclusion 45

CHAPTER 3

VIDALIAN GEOGRAPHY AND THE DISCOURSES OF CHARLES ROBEQUAIN AND PIERRE GOUROU **47**
3.1 Introduction 47
3.2 The Regional Framework and Rural Orientation of Vidalian Theses 49
3.2.1 The concept of milieu 49
3.2.1.1 The concept of milieu and its naturalist orientation 49
3.2.1.1 The Vidalian themes of adaptation and harmony 51

3.2.1.2 Vidalian "possibilism" 53
3.2.2 The concept of *genre de vie* and the notion of civilization 57
3.2.3 The region and its various interpretations 59
3.2.3.1 The region according to Vidal de la Blache 59
3.2.3.2 The regional frame of the disciples of Vidal de la Blache 63
3.2.4 The rural orientation of regional analysis 66
3.2.4.1 The rural population 67
3.2.4.2 The descriptive and functional approach to the rural habitat 70
3.2.4.3 The economic significance of land ownership 71
3.2.4.4 Non-rural activities considered as complementary occupations 73
3.3 The Rhetorical Practice of Reasoned Description 74
3.3.1 Vidalian descriptive practice 74
3.3.2 The method of "reasoned description" 77
3.3.3 The descriptive practices of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou 80
3.4 The Introduction of New Techniques and Problematics 85
3.4.1 The advances of Vidalian geographers: modern techniques and methods 85
3.4.2 Territorial organization and development 86
3.5 Conclusion 89

CHAPTER 4

THE CONSTRUCTION OF REGION IN THE THESES OF ROBEQUAIN AND GOUROU 90
4.1 Introduction 90
4.2 Charles Robequain –Naturalist Conceptions of Regional Space 90
4.2.1 A region defined with physical boundaries 90
4.2.2 The naturalist conception of the regional environment shaded with social factors and colonialism 94
4.2.3 An anthropomorphic interpretation of the physical environment 98
4.3 Pierre Gourou's Regional Framework 99
4.3.1 A human geography 101
4.3.2 A study of physical environment through its human ramifications 101
4.3.3 Climate and rivers as major components of the peasant life. 104
4.3.4 The regional significance of the high density of population 106
4.4 Discussion – The Two Approaches Compared 108

CHAPTER 5

THE DIALECTICAL RELATION BETWEEN THE GEOGRAPHY OF INDOCHINA AND FRENCH COLONIAL IDEOLOGY 111
5.1 Introduction 111
5.2 Recent Reinterpretations of the Relationship between Geography and Empire 112
5.2.1 "The histories of geography and empire are inextricably entwined" 112
5.2.2 Colonial geography as "blind spot of modernity" (after Soubeyran, 1994, p.264) 113
5.3 French Geographers and Colonial Theories 114
5.3.1 Marcel Dubois and the preparation of the ground for colonial geography 115
5.3.2 George Hardy and "the geography of the colonies" 117
5.3.3 Albert Demangeon's socio-political approach to colonial geography 122
5.4 The Founding Concepts of Colonial Thought and the Geographical Discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou 123
5.4.1 The myth of progress and its presence in geographical discourse 123
5.4.1.1 Progress as human improvement and its European appropriation 123
5.4.1.2 The assimilation of progress with the notion of superior civilization 124
5.4.2 Progress as a universal condition and the duty of colonialism 127
5.4.3 Questioning the civilizing mission of the Occident 134
5.5 Conclusion: Charles Robequain's Colonialist Discourse and Pierre Gourou's Colonial Humanism 148

CHAPTER 6

INDOCHINESE REGIONS, THE COLONIAL CONTEXT AND MODERNITY....154
6.1 Introduction....154
6.2 The Colonies and French Modernization....158
6.2.1 Cartographic and aerial reconnaissance work....158
6.2.2 A strategy of development sustained scientifically by census data, and statistical and economic investigations....159
6.2.3 Pacification and political order....162
6.3 Robequain's Colonial Geography and Modernity....165
6.3.1 The connection between geography, data and cartography....165
6.3.2 A materialist approach to the problem of colonial development....166
6.3.3 Charles Robequain and the Thanh Hoá region as a "laboratory of modernity" (after Rabinow, 1989, p.9, p.289)....168
6.4 Pierre Gourou's Discourse: A Modern Methodology Incorporating A Humanist and Classical Thought....175
6.4.1 Pierre Gourou's geography as a human science of space....176
6.4.2 The extension of Albert Demangeon's method of geographical survey by questionnaire....179
6.4.3 Colonial development and Pierre Gourou's concern towards the Annamite entity....181
6.5 Conclusion....187

CHAPTER 7

INDOCHINA AND THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF DISCOURSES....189
7.1 Introduction....189
7.2 Colonial Institutions and the Promotion of Cultural Research....190
7.2.1 The multidisciplinary emphasis of the E.F.E.O....193
7.2.2 The novelty of Léopold Cadière's discourse....195
7.2.3 The contribution of Vietnamese writings to Pierre Gourou' s thesis....198
7.3 Charles Robequain's Cultural Discourse and its Ethnographic 'Order'....201
7.3.1 The formulation of Indochinese society in terms of "ethnic groups"....201
7.3.1.1 A comparative approach to ethnic groups....202
7.3.1.2 A socio-historical approach to ethnic communities....203
7.3.2 A folkloristic interpretation....206
7.3.2.1 Clothing as an essential factor of ethnic identification....207
7.3.2.2 Social practices and the organization of the household.....207
7.3.3 Charles Robequain 's evolutionist conception of civilization....211
7.3.3.1 The Evolutionist influence....211
7.3.3.2 Agricultural techniques and the evolutionist perspective....215
7.4 The Socio-Cultural Argumentation of Pierre Gourou....219
7.4.1 The cultural significance of the rice techniques....220
7.4.2 The focus on the villages....223
7.4.2.1 Pierre Gourou's cultural interpretation of the village space and its limits....224
7.4.2.2 The importance of village social life....229
7.4.2.3 Buildings, houses and their socio-cultural interpretation....232
7.5 Conclusion....234

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION....239
8.1 Introduction....239
8.2 The Impact of French Assumptions on the Two Indochinese Discourses....240
8.2.1 Charles Robequain's discourse and the colonial appropriation of Thanh Hoá....241
8.2.2 Pierre Gourou's humanistic discourse....243
8.3 The Contextual Limits of the Discourse of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou and the Cultural Challenge of Geographical Discourse....245
8.3.1 The question of geographical ethics in regard to foreign societies....245
8.3.2 The relevance of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourse....248

REFERENCES 254

APPENDIX A

INDOCHINA, THE TONKIN DELTA AND THE THANH HOÀ PROVINCE 270
Appendix A.1: Map of "Eastern Indochina" 270
Appendix A.2: Political events and significant publications of the 1920s-1930s. 272

APPENDIX B

CHARLES ROBEQUAIN AND PIERRE GOUROU 275
Appendix B.1.Pierre Gourou photographed in India in 1950 275
Appendix B.2 Charles Robequain during the International Congress of Geography held in Paris in 1931 276
Appendix B.3 extract from Pierre Gourou's letter, 27 November 1994, where he exposes his conception of regional geography 277

APPENDIX C

TABLE OF CONTENTS IN CHARLES ROBEQUAIN AND PIERRE GOUROU'S THESES 278
Appendix C.1: Reduced structure of Charles Robequain's thesis 278
Appendix C.2: Reduced structure of Pierre Gourou's thesis 279

APPENDIX D

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS UNION WITH HUMAN GEOGRAPHY 280
Appendix D.1: the four first slides presented by Pierre Gourou in the *Peasants of the Tonkin Delta*, (prints n.1 p.26; n.2 and n.3 p.34; n.4 p.42) 280
Appendix D.2: Photographs and figures presented by Pierre Gourou concerning the Tonkin hydrographical network and Annamite irrigation techniques 285
Appendix D.3: Photograph extracted from Charles Robequain's thesis concerning Annamite irrigation techniques 287

APPENDIX E

COLONIAL IDEOLOGY AND ITS INTERTEXTUAL VERSIONS 288
Appendix E.1: The Duplication of Angkor Wat Temple (Cambodia) 288
Appendix E.2: Ballenger: "République française" 1931 and Desmeures: "Le Tour du monde en un jour" (1931) 289
Appendix E.3: Three extracts from Paul Reynaud's speech at the Vincennes international colonial exhibition 290
Appendix E.4: French intellectuals and their picturesque perception of Indochina 292

APPENDIX F

"THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FRANCE" AND ITS COLONIAL STATEMENT 297
Appendix F.1 Charles Robequain's and Albert Sarraut's imperialist perceptions of the "achievement of France" in Indochina 297
Appendix F.2: Maps and the Spatial Representations of Demographic Statistics or Trading Activities 300
Appendix F.3: Modernity and Indochinese Landscapes 304
Appendix F.4: The construction of dams and irrigation networks as a symbol of French achievement in Indochina 305

APPENDIX G

CHARLES ROBEQUAIN'S COLONIAL AND PIERRE GOUROU'S SOCIAL ETHNOGEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS 309
Appendix G.1 "The distribution of food supplies to the disaster victims of the flooded districts, in the Royal Pagoda of the citadel of the country town" 309
Appendix G.2: Representations of women in Charles Robequain's thesis 310
Appendix G.3 Representations of Women in Pierre Gourou's thesis 316
Appendix G.4: Dwelling Representations in Pierre Gourou's thesis 321
Appendix G.5: Representation of an "Annamite hut" in Charles Robequain's thesis 327

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE GOUROU, BRUXELLES 29 AUGUST 1995 328
English translation 328
Original interview, in French 340

Abstract

This thesis investigates the regional discourse of two theses of the classical French School of Geography, *le Thanh Hoá: étude géographique d' une province annamite,* by Charles Robequain and *Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois: étude de géographie humaine,* by Pierre Gourou. They were composed between World Wars I and II, at the pinnacle of the French Empire. They were the first substantial geographical French theses pertaining to an Asian and colonial environment.

The geographical discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou are analyzed through a contextual approach related to three major conditions: the context of the French school of geography, the colonial context and the Far Eastern context. The general aim is to examine the way in which these different contexts contribute to the production of the geographical discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. Together with the personality of the authors these contextual issues either brought new or specific approaches and conceptions to their analyses of Vietnam or, conversely, restricted them. More specific questions related to the way the two geographers constructed their Indochinese regions, the kind of portrait they painted of Far Eastern colonized regions and the relevance of their work are also taken into account.

Two methodological approaches are utilized. First, the two works are located in the societal environment and with regard to the epistemological background of their authors. Second, the works are analyzed as discourses, which construct two distinct interpretations of Indochinese regions.

A theoretical and epistemological reflection on Vidalian geography is developed, in order to understand the theories, methods and concepts which were used by French geographers to analyse a region. The thesis examines also how Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourses were influenced by French colonial ideology and how new techniques of investigation are applied in their works. Further, the thesis considers that, because they studied non-European societies, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou introduced a cultural dimension to the regional discourse of French geography.

The thesis concludes that French geographical, colonial and cultural conceptions generated many arguments in Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou' theses. Consequently, the discourse of geography has not a universal but a relative and introversive value, which requires a reflection on the ethics of the discipline and on the relevance of French regional discourse in the understanding of foreign society. However, compared to previous works dealing with colonial countries, Pierre Gourou's discourse in regard to the Tonkin peasantry is constructed differently and provided new orientation to French geography where overseas regions are identified more through their socio-cultural structures and functioning than through their socio-economic relationships.

Thesis Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Dany Bréelle

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge, first, my gratitude to Professor Pierre Gourou (deceased, 1999) who answered systematically with enthusiasm and warmth my questions about his life and work and maintained an interest in my work. Also to his daughter, Mme Gilberte Bray who provided me with some information about her father.

I thank my supervisors Professor Dean Forbes who has provided extensive assistance to complete the work and Associate Professor Alaric Maude for his comments and editing suggestions.

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I thank the French geographers who helped me as this work progressed, in particular Professor Paul Claval and Marie-Claire Robic for their suggestions when I met them at the beginning of this work. In addition I thank Michel Bruneau, Madame Thanh Tâm Langlet and the historian Pierre Brocheux who accepted generously to read some of my drafts. I thank also the Vietnamese Professors Lê Bá Tháo (deceaded, 2000) and Đam Truong Phuong for their open-minded discussion in the early part of this work. I thank Dr Laurent Dartigues who transmitted to me relevant information for my research. Finally my colleague Denis Wolff who kept me aware of current work in France and always was willing to gather and send me information for my work.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor George Grelou who first stimulated my interest in Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's writings and my father, Yves Bréelle, who initiated my curiosity towards Vietnam.

I thank the French Government and Flinders University for providing me a scholarship for this work.

I thank my husband, Terry Williamson, who has been purposefully supporting and encouraging me as this work progressed, and my children, Anna and Elisabeth whose patience has been put to the test in order to allow me to complete my PhD.

Foreword

The author of this thesis has chosen to put in footnotes (in italics) the French extracts that are translated into English in the main text. It was often very challenging to translate French sentences into another language with different grammar, tenses, syntax and roots. It was even more difficult to reproduce in English a French discourse of the 1920s or the 1930s with all its contextual connotations of the historical, political and cultural environment.

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1: Map of Indochina 2
Figure 1.2: Geological map of Thanh Hoá 6
Figure 1.3: Map of the Tonkin delta 9

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates two significant works of the classical French school of geography written by Charles Robequain (Robequain, 1929) and Pierre Gourou (Gourou, 1936), whose constructions are based on the use of concepts initiated by Paul Vidal de la Blache. The two works are theses called *thèse d' Etat*[1]. They concern two Indochinese regions, Thanh Hoá province (within the protectorate of Annam) and the Tonkin delta (also called the Red River Delta, within the protectorate of Tonkin).

[1] After the highly competitive examination of the *Agregation*, the *thèse d' Etat* is the other important achievement in the training of the French geographer. According to Numa Broc, "it is this handiwork type of 'masterpiece' which gives to the French school its colour, its structure and the major part of its unity ... The preparation of the thesis is a work of depth and breadth which requires on average about ten years" (Broc, 1993, p.236). She mentions (p.239) how geographers such as Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou had "to surmount not only the linguistic, but also the cultural differences" to study the human aspects of a region.

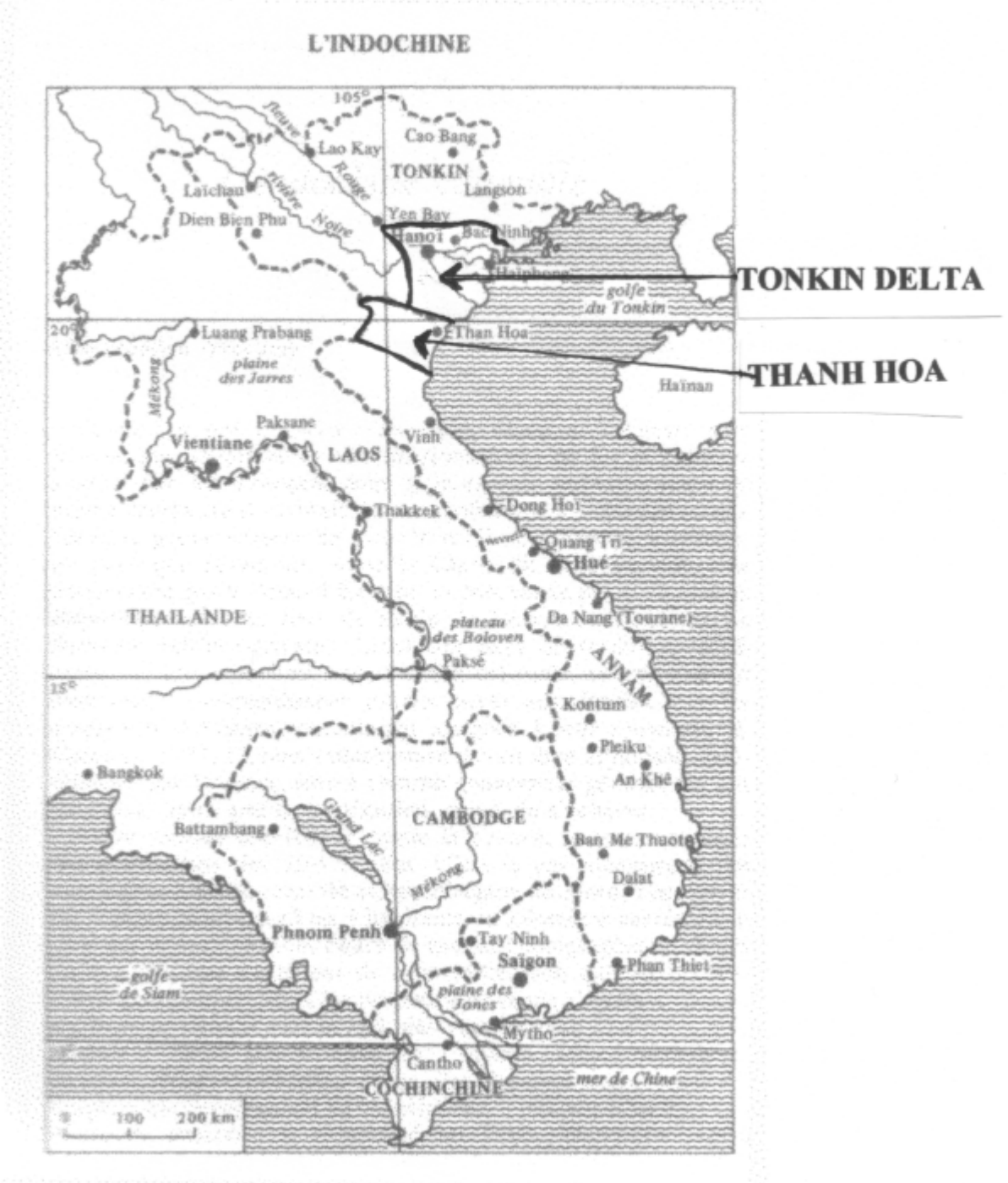

Figure 1.1: Map of Indochina

Source: Original map in (Dalloz, 1987, p.7)

Note: This map entitled "Indochine"[2] represents French Indochina and its colonial divisions, with the Tonkin, Annam, Laos and Cambodia protectorates, and the Cochinchina colony. (The Tonkin delta and the Thanh Hoá regions covered by the two theses have been delimited by this author)

[2] Another map traced by Pierre Gourou and entitled "Indochine orientale" is presented in Appendix A1. It differentiates the highlands from the lowlands and the deltaic plains (such as the Tonkin and the Thanh Hoá deltas)

These geographical discourses were composed between World Wars I and II, at the pinnacle of the French Empire, and contributed to making known these colonial regions. Consequently, they opened up new horizons to French geography and were the first substantial geographical theses to be written about a non-European and colonial environment[3]. In addition, they were the first studies to introduce Vidalian geographical conceptions to portray the colonial regions of French Indochina, and both of them constitute points of reference for studies connected with colonial Vietnam.

Although published just seven years apart and influenced by Vidalian geography, the works revolve around two contrasting discourses with regard to Indochinese regions that need to be related to distinct political and economic contexts - those of the 1920s and those of the 1930s - involving mutations within the colonial thought of the time.

The analysis of the two theses is based on three issues. Firstly, Vidalian geography was very influential in French geography during most of the twentieth century. What happened when the Vidalian approach was applied to French colonial regions with Far Eastern cultures and people? Secondly, despite their similar geographical education, Charles Roquebain and Pierre Gourou wrote rather differently. How can these differences be explained? Thirdly, discourse analysis shows us how a piece of writing is influenced by the various contexts (social, cultural, political and so on) that surround the author. Can we use this method of analysis to examine the strengths and weaknesses of these two key pieces of French geographical writing?

This preliminary chapter will present the two authors and their doctoral theses (in sections 1.1 and 1.2) and introduce the purpose of this thesis (in section 1.3), which involves an examination of the multiple reasoning processes contained in Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's geographical discourses.

1.2 Background – The Authors and Their Geography

This work concerns two theses by French geographers formed by the Vidalian school which investigate Oriental and French colonial regions. The authors and this background are described briefly below and more fully in later Chapters.

[3] As Jean Suret-Canale in (Bruneau and Dory, 1994, p.157) notes, the only thesis about a colonial region published before these of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou was by J. Machat, "Guinée française: les rivières du Sud et le Fouta-Djalon", in 1906. In fact, in the late 19th century, Henri Schirmer (1893) and Augustin Bernard (1895) also did their theses on two non-western and colonial regions, the Sahara and the archipelago of New Caledonia. Neither Henri Schirmer nor Augustin Bernard

1.2.1 Two authors influenced by Vidalian scholarship

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourses were the first to apply the concepts and methods of the French school of geography, also called Vidalian geography, to overseas regions within the Asian monsoon area. Inspired by the Vidalian geographical conception, their rhetoric is based on a "reasoned description" of the physical and human aspects of two Indochinese regions, through the description of the study of the relationships between societies and their environments (Chapter 3, section 3.1). Their methods consisted of substantial fieldwork together with considerable investigation using diverse sources such as library reference material and archives (concentrating on geological information) and interviews with villagers.

1.2.1.1 Charles Robequain

After he passed his History and Geography Agrégation[4] in July 1922, Charles Robequain (1897-1963) made his debut as a geographer with Raoul Blanchard, in Grenoble (French Alps)[5]. Raoul Blanchard's approach was affiliated with Vidalian geography, but with a predominant chorological and physical orientation. In Raoul Blanchard's geography the development of the different rural *genres de vie* in the French Alps was induced by the physical environment and the climatic differences between the North and South Alps (Blanchard, 1925).

Charles Robequain's first geographical research (1922) covered a region of the Alps called *le Trièves*, where he described the multiple characteristics of this area using the same nomenclature as Raoul Blanchard. When the cultural institution of the *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient* (E.F.E.O.) afforded him the opportunity of a two-year contract (1924-1925) to

visited their regions, and their works do not create an original understanding of non-western societies (see chapter 5, section 5.3.2).

[4] After he was mobilized during World War I, Charles Robequain, thanks to a scholarship, did his University studies in Grenoble and Lyon from 1919 to 1922 (as did Pierre Gourou). He passed the History and Geography Agregation in 1922 and was placed first in the year. In France, training in history and geography at university are closely associated and at secondary school the same teachers teache a subject called "history-geography", which is a compulsory subject in the French Educational system, until year 12. As Marie-Vic Ozouf-Marignier notices (1992, p.93) "Certainly, geography, in its French tradition, is so much closer to history than to any other science that it constitutes a national characteristic…This is simply a reflection of the close relationship between the two disciplines." (*Sans doute plus qu'à aucune science, la géographie, dans sa tradition française, est liée à l'histoire, au point que cela constitue une spécificité nationale de la discipline…Ces dispositions institutionnelles ne sont que le reflet des rapports étroits entretenus au niveau scientifique.*". Even if Paul Vidal de la Blache and his students such as Albert Demangeon (Wolff, 1998) refused to subordinate themselves to history, but incorporated history in their geographical approaches.

[5] In 1913 Raoul Blanchard created a review, the *Recueil des travaux de l' Institut de Géographie alpine*, in which was published the research work of his students concerning the Alps. In 1920 the review was renamed the *Revue de Géographie alpine*, and is still in publication.

carry out geographical research in French Indochina[6], Charles Robequain's methods were thought compatible within the Far East context (in particular, because of the existence of mountainous terrain and rural communities). Thus, he devoted his energy to composing his doctoral thesis on Thanh Hoá, which was a northern province of the French Protectorate of Annam. It was bounded in the north by the French Protectorate of Tonkin[7]. This province was surrounded by highlands and traversed by the Song Ma and Song Chu Rivers to form a deltaic plain (refer Jacob and Dussault's geologic outline of the Thanh Hoá province, figure 1.2).

[6] His appointment at the *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient* (E.F.E.O.) was announced in the *Bulletin de l' Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient* (B.E.F.E.O.) of 1924 pp.310: "2 March, 1924 By decree Mr.Charles Robequain, agrégé in history, appointed temporary member of the *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient* (J.O., 5 March 1924, p.473)", p.310. His arrival in Hanoi was also notified later in the review p.615: "Mr Charles Robequain … arrived in Hanoi on May the 12th. After bringing himself up to date with the local publications and the state of studies on the geography of Indochina, he undertook a short trip to Hoà-Bình and Cho-bò to make contact with the Muong …".

[7] Today, Thanh Hoá is a northern province of "Central Vietnam" ("Trung Bô"). It constitutes with the Nghê An and Hà Tinh provinces of the North Trung Bô region.

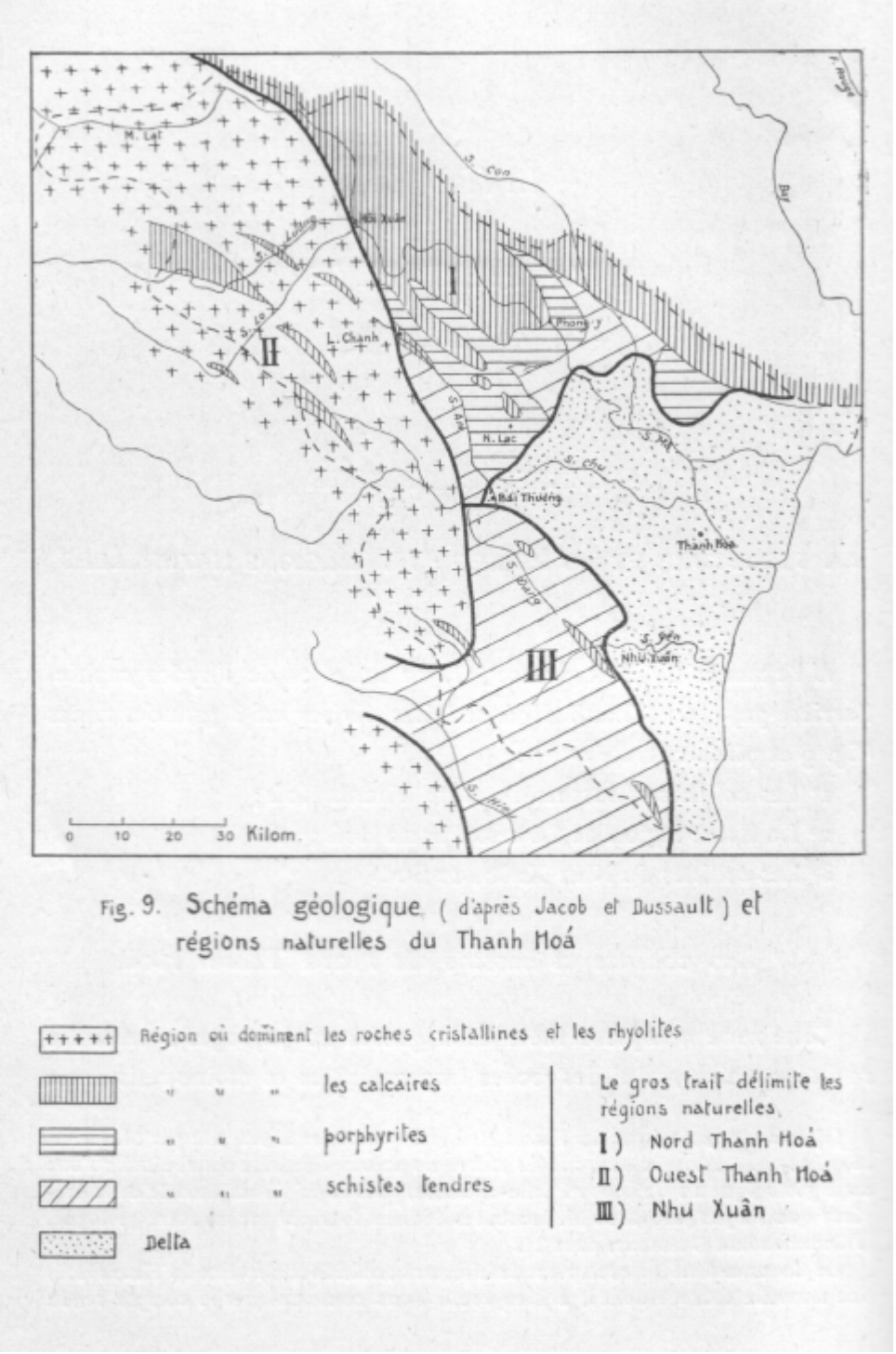

Figure 1.2: Geological map of Thanh Hoá

Source: Robequain, C. (1929). ***Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite*** *(Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate.XVIII, p.54*
Note: This geologic map underlines the different "natural regions" of Thanh Hoá on which Charles Robequain constructed his argument.

Charles Robequain's choice may have been influenced by the belief that the Thanh Hoá region was thought to have undeveloped potential because of the archaeological discoveries in

the region[8] and its agricultural and mining possibilities[9]. But the determinant factor would appear to be that he considered Thanh Hoá provided "a gripping outline of the whole of Indochina"[10]. Charles Robequain's thesis, *Le Thanh Hoá: Etude géographique d'une province annamite*, published in 1929, is a voluminous monograph in two parts, totalling 632 pages. It is concerned with an analysis of geographical space comprising various and dissimilar natural regions, corresponding to diverse and contrasting *genres de vie.* Charles Robequain concentrated particularly on the major contrast between the ethnic groups of the highlands and the Annamites[11] living on the deltaic plain. His thesis concludes with a chapter on "the work of France", where the author presents a salutary account of the French politics of colonialization and regional development (the politics of *mise en valeur des colonies*[12]*).*

1.2.1.2 Pierre Gourou

Pierre Gourou (1900-1999) was born in Tunis and received his primary and high school education in the French Protectorate of Tunisia. Like Charles Robequain, he attended Lyon University in France, where Maurice Zimmerman was teaching Vidalian geography[13], and passed his Agregation in 1923. The Chamber of Commerce in Lyon, the [then] major textile

---

[8] For example, when Charles Robequain began his research, the Bulletin de l' *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient* signalled that most of a collection of Song ceramics were discovered "in the rich subterranean of Thanh Hoá", p.616. Additional archeological sites were found in Thanh Hoá by Henri Maspéro (see chapter 7).

[9] Charles Robequain wrote about Thanh Hoá in his thesis: "The hinterland, such as the High Tonkin, appears full of potential" (p.605), and concluded his thesis by evoking with confidence the "belt of concessions" (p.613), that is to say pieces of land distributed by colonial authorities to French settlers in order to develop modern agriculture (see footnote 31 in Chapter 6). Today, the North Trung Bô region is still considered "a transitional region with potentialities not yet completely exploited" (Lê Bá Tháo, 1997, p.423).

[10] In the Bulletin de l' *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient* of 1924, p.650, we read: "Mr Charles Robequain, temporary member, went on 20 July 1924 for a quick survey of French Indochina…He has compiled detailed notes on the geography of the areas covered, physical as well as human. After this trip, he could choose, with full knowledge of the facts, the country whose geography he would like to study in depth. He has chosen the Thanh Hoá province, which presents an undeniable unity and which with its natural regions occupied by such diverse races, offers a gripping outline of the whole of Indochina".

[11] Since the collapse of French Indochina, Annamites have become known as the Viêt or Kinh ethnicity, which is the core of the Vietnamese people. The word Annamite was used from the 19th century, with French expeditions confronting the Emperor, in Hué. It is customary to consider the Tonkin delta as the birthplace of the Annamite people.

[12] This expression was used in the 1920's and 1930's to designate the French policy of colonial development and exploitation (see Chapter 5).

[13] Maurice Zimmermann taught colonial geography at the *Chambre de commerce De Lyon*, published articles regarding colonial countries, and demonstrated that he was particularly aware of the specific nature of each society. At times, he was critical of the French cultural ethic of righteousness, uniformity, and universality (Zimmermann, 1900). Maurice Zimmermann had been selected as one of the authors competent to work on the *Géographie Universelle* by Paul Vidal de la Blache. The *Géographie Universelle* (1927-1948) was conceived by Vidal de la Blache and his colleague Lucien Gallois before 1914, to update the *Erdkhunde* produced by Karl Ritter (1822-1859) and the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* of Elisé Reclus (1877). Vidal de la Blache chose his collaborators mainly from among his previous students. The volume concerning the Asian monsoon areas, published in 1929, was written by Jules Sion (1929a). Pierre Gourou does not mention this in his bibliography, only referring to the thesis of Sion (1909) dealing, as did his own thesis, with the peasants, *les paysans de la Normandie orientale* (see Chapter 3, section 3.2.3).

manufacturing city in France because of the silk trade, was particularly interested in the Far East. The deltaic plains of South China and Indo-China were seen and understood to be densely populated by "a refined, industrial and peaceful race while the highlands maintain a sparse population incurably indolent and the Annam mountainous area a number of still wild tribes" (Zimmermann, 1900, p.78). Moreover, in a general interpretation, Indochina was considered by France to be the "Pearl of the French Empire".

The above, if only indirectly, may have encouraged Pierre Gourou[14] to investigate a Far Eastern colony and to "study in depth a delta with Chinese characteristics, highly populated and with an advanced civilization[15] - the Chinese civilization" (quoted from Pierre Gourou in an interview with Hugues Tertrais, 1993, p.7 [16]). Pierre Gourou applied to be officially nominated as a teacher in Hanoi (Lycée Albert Sarraut)[17] and remained there from 1927 until 1935. During this time, he also taught at the University of Hanoi. It was mainly during the school holidays that he was able to work full-time on his thesis[18], *Les paysans du Delta tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine,* a considerable work of 666 pages. It analyses the large Annamite peasant population (6.5 million) of the alluvial plain of the Red River delta (15,000km2) through the key notion of population density.

[14] As well as Charles Robequain who studied also in Lyon, as we mentionned it above.

[15] The French term 'civilization', which embodies all the religious, moral, aesthetic, scientific and technical characteristics common to a prominent society or a group of societies (such as the Asian civilizations) and the english term 'culture', which includes all capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society, are almost synonyms. The term 'civilization' began to be used in the French language, as well as in English, in the middle of the 18th century. French intellectuals used it to express an idea of progress and social improvement. But in the 19th century, 'civilization' became connected to the notion of national identity and social life, with the idea of superiority, such as in the expressions "French civilization" or "British civilization" (Chapter 5). Hence, depending of the context of its utilization, the term can acquire a value judgment connotation.

[16] This article can be read also in http://www.ambafrance-vn.org, accesgau/atudesvn/annexes/gourou.htm. See also chapter 2, section 2.3.4.

[17] During Pierre Gourou's first years of teaching, he was nominated in Tunis (Tunisia) and then, in 1926, in the lycée Chasseloup-Laubat in Saïgon. Eventually, due to his persistence, he was nominated in 1927 for the position in Hanoi, in the Tonkin Delta. Pierre Gourou said "I have done [in Tunis] all my high school studies, taken - it is stupid - a rather moderate interest in Tunisia, even if I know it pretty well. My dreams were definitely oriented toward the Far East" (Tertrais, 1993, p.7).

[18] Numa Broc (1993, p.238) quotes Pierre Gourou saying "I did in parallel my teaching duty and my research work, because I did not obtain the benefit of a scholarship. All my free time during my stay in the Tonkin was dedicated to the information gathering work" ("*J' ai mené parallèlement ma tâche d' enseignement et ma recherche, n' ayant pas bénéficié d' une bourse d' études. Tous mes moments de liberté pendant mon séjour au Tonkin furent consacrés au travail d' enquête*"), see also footnote 36 in Chapter 3.

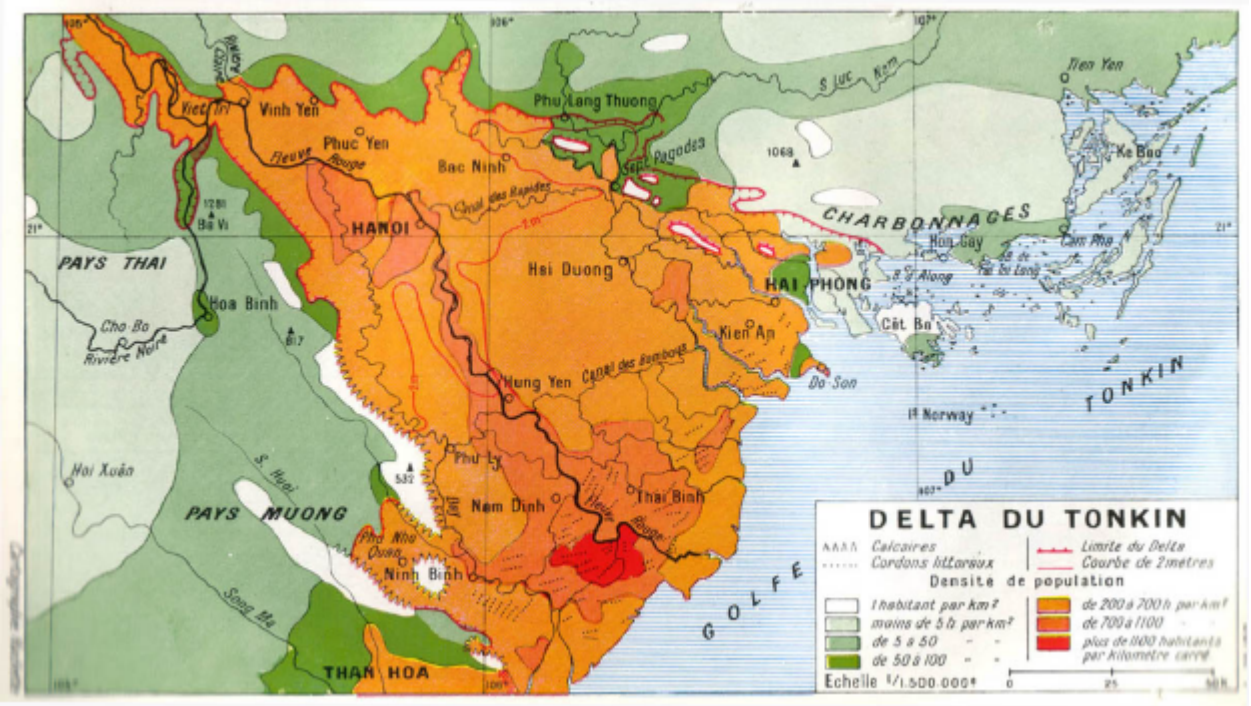

Figure 1.3: Map of the Tonkin delta

Source: Gourou, P. (1953). ***L'Asie.*** *Paris: Hachette, p.283, map 4.*

Note: This synthetic map of the Tonkin delta, although is not part of Pierre Gourou's thesis[19]*, is interesting because it integrates the major criteria (and, mainly, the population density) which fix the limits of the Tonkin delta in his thesis discourse.*

[19] It was not possible to insert the 1/250,000 or 1/500,000 scale maps of the Delta that Pierre Gourou placed in an appendix of his thesis because their formats are larger than the standard ones.

This concept of density is particularly developed in Paul Vidal de la Blache's last book *Principes de géographie humaine*, published posthumously in 1922 (Vidal de la Blache, 1922), the year before Pierre Gourou passed his university teaching competition, the Agrégation of History and Geography. Like Paul Vidal de la Blache, Pierre Gourou conceives Man[20] as the creator of the local environment by transforming it in order to take advantage of it (Chapter 2). Unlike Charles Robequain, he chose an "homogenous region" for his fieldwork, characterised by "its natural uniformity and human unity" (p.14)[21]. His discourse also reflects, but with a more systematic human orientation underlined by the subtitle of the thesis (Etude *de géographie humaine),* the geographical practice of his supervisor, Albert Demangeon. Albert Demangeon had drawn upon his own experience as a Vidalian researcher to indicate how the use of archives, historical sources, and questionnaires could scientifically establish a regional analysis. To understand the high rural population density of the delta, Pierre Gourou (p.19) begins by establishing the "frame of human activity", with a relatively abbreviated presentation of the relief, climate and water regime (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.2). Then he investigates the history and demographic evolution of the peasant population and its distribution. His lengthy human analysis of the parcelling of the agricultural land, the agricultural methods and cyclic calendar, the social life and craft-industries, relates to the problematic of the high population density (see Appendix C2, "Reduced structure of pierre Gourou's thesis"). His conclusion raises grave problems of development paralleling those the French colonial authorities were discussing in the 1930s.

1.2.2 Two pioneer discourses on the Far Eastern regions of the French empire

On matters of fact, the contents of the theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou have never been challenged. Present researchers and experts have never seriously questioned Charles Robequain's regional monograph, despite the fact that his discourse is tinged with colonialist ideology and beliefs. Pierre Gourou's work, considered as one of the best French theses, is perhaps the most cited document by Vietnamese researchers and French geographers

[20] The term 'Man' is a direct translation of the French collective *l' homme* meaning 'Humanity', 'society', within a social and ethnographic understanding which does not appear in the English word, more related to "human being". I will use it in this thesis in the way that Pierre Gourou and Charles Robequain did.

[21] However, if Pierre Gourou recalled on several occasions (mainly in his footnotes) Charles Robequain's work on Thanh Hoá in his own thesis about the peasants of the Tonkin delta, he has stated that he was not influenced in the decision about his research work by the choice of Charles Robequain. He wrote: "I have esteemed ever since its publication the thesis of my friend Robequain. But my research choice was defined before the publication of Robequain's thesis", letter to D.B., 5 May 1995. He said in 1995: "I found that his thesis was excellent, it was very good. But, finally, it is certain that I wanted to go much further by limiting my study spatially." (See in Appendix H interview with Pierre Gourou, 29-8-1995).

working on Vietnam[22]. The conflicts of the Vietnam wars, from the end of French colonialism until recently, prevented detailed fieldwork in the classical tradition. However, the issues identified by Charles Robequain in the late 1920s and by Pierre Gourou in the 1930s appear partly to persist, even if the times are very different and Vietnamese society has been transformed.

Pierre Gourou's thesis was not his first work on Indochina. He wrote other essays or articles on the country and its inhabitants[23], principally two earlier studies of French Indochina and the Tonkin which were published in 1929 and 1931 respectively. Unlike his thesis, these two works were commissioned by French colonial institutions or authorities, the *Conseil de Recherches Scientifiques de l' Indochine* for the 4th *Congrès du Pacifique*, held in Java in May-June 1929 (Gourou, 1929), and the *Exposition coloniale de Vincennes*, in May 1931 (Gourou, 1931a). All these works allowed Pierre Gourou to build a preliminary contextual framework in which to place his study.

Although the theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou appear not to have been directly utilized by the French administration and the colonial government, their arguments were set within the colonial context of the French Empire and their material employed the resources and services of the colonial institutions and administrations. Their work can be seen as inclining towards a colonial geography and influenced by colonial ideology, which deeply impregnated the French mode of thought and culture of the 1920s and 1930s. More significantly, the examiners of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou awarded to their theses the highest possible grade. Hence, the logic of their discourse and their conceptions of the Indochinese world were unambiguously accepted. For his thesis and other Indochinese works, Pierre Gourou received, in 1937, the medal Henri d' Orléans awarded by the *Société de géographie commerciale et d' études coloniales de Paris.* He was nominated Chevalier de la Légion d' Honneur in 1937. A few months before, Charles Robequain was nominated *Maître de conférences de Géographie*

[22] In his thesis relating to "main French scientific papers written between 1860 and 1940" in regard to Vietnam, Laurent Dartigues (2001, pp.55-56). sent to the most eminent contemporary vietnamologues a questionnaire in which they were asked to "identify the three important French researchers of the colonial period who, in the human sciences, marked the best the knowledge of Vietnam" (p.55) in order to determine who were the most dominant figures of French Asian history. Pierre Gourou with his "Peasants of the Tonkin Delta" was one of the three most nominated researchers, with Paul Mus and Léopold Cadière (see Chapter 7, section 7.1, section 7.2.1 and 7.2.2). Laurent Dartigues also investigates the main French referees used in the works and cited in the bibliographies of dominant Vietnamese intellectuals such as the ethnologist Nguyên Van Huyên, the historian Lê Thanh Khoi and the researcher Dinh Van Trung. Besides Pierre Gourou, Charles Robequain is also always cited (pp.57-59)

[23] A bibliography of the works of Pierre Gourou was published in 1998 by Henri Nicola?. This lists more than 370 books, articles and reviews written between 1927 and 1998 (Nicolai, 1998).

coloniale at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) (see Appendix A.2, "political events and significant publications of the 1920s-1930s"). If French authorities were so ready to acknowledge the work of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, it is because their discourses unequivocally conformed to the expectations and assumptions of French elite thought about Indochina during the Inter-War period.

1.3 Objectives of this Thesis

This thesis situates the geographical discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou through a contextual approach related to three major contexts. Firstly, the context of the French school of geography: Vidalian geographers formed Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's outlook, both of them having followed the same kind of university training in Lyon at the beginning of the 1920s. Secondly, the Far Eastern context: Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were the first geographers able to carry out, thanks to their prolonged stay in the country, extensive fieldwork in two regions of Indochina. Therefore, there was a constant dialectic between the field and their conceptual thought. Thirdly, the colonial context: both Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou can be seen as part of the colonial state itself. Charles Robequain was enrolled by the French colonial institution of the E.F.E.O. and then, for one year (in order to complete his thesis), was engaged as a history and geography teacher in the French lycee Albert Sarraut of Hanoi. On his return to France in 1927, Pierre Gourou replaced him in this position.

1.3.1 General aim

The general aim of this thesis is to examine the way in which these different contexts (the disciplinary context of Vidalian geography, the Asian context, and the French colonial one) contribute to the production of the geographical discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. Together with the personality of the authors these contextual issues may have brought new or specific approaches and conceptions to the analysis of Vietnam or, conversely, restricted their analyses.

1.3.2 Specific questions

In order to undertake a close evaluation of the information produced and the techniques employed by Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou in their writings, the general problematic undertaken in this thesis is divided into a number of specific questions. These questions are:

1) What methodology and which concepts did Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou use to construct their Indochinese regions? What were the aspects that they tried particularly to develop and how did they set them up?

2) What kind of portrait did these French geographers paint of Far Eastern colonized regions?

3) Why did the theses of Charles Robequain and, particularly, that of Pierre Gourou become as well known as they did[24]?

The structure designed to undertake the progression of this problematic and of these questions is outlined below:

The second Chapter will submit a preliminary definition of the notion of discourse, as well as a more philosophical reflection concerning general notions of critical literature and approaches to the writing of authors in general, and geographical writing and discourse in particular.

In the third Chapter, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourses will be put into the context of French geographers of this time. The similarities between their discourses and those of other famous French classical and frequently cited regional theses will be appraised. This investigation will necessitate a general theoretical and epistemological reflection on French

[24] Pierre Gourou's thesis was reprinted in 1965 by *La Maison des Sciences de l' Homme*, Mouton. It was also translated illegally for the Japanese, American, Chinese and Russian secret services during the Vietnam wars. Pierre Gourou pointed out in his foreword of the reprint of his thesis that: "an English translation of my book was published by 'Human Relations Areas Files' (New Haven, 1955), in two duplicated volumes. It is an illegal translation done without the author's permission and, even more surprisingly, with a deliberate aim of concealing its existence from the author. This disrupting conduct has had exactly the results one would expect: the translation is studded with misinterpretation and mistranslation. It is my duty to warn readers that they cannot rely on this English translation. A Japanese translation, apparently an abridged one, was published in Tokyo in 1943. It too appeared without my permission. Because I do not know Japanese I cannot judge its accuracy. The only comment I can make is that the Japanese translators took more care in the reproduction of my maps than the Americans did. It is rather surprising to find the Americans repeating in 1955 the infringement of my rights (to use a neutral term) perpetrated by the Japanese in 1943." (*Une traduction anglaise de mon livre a été publiée par les 'Human Relations Areas Files' (New Haven, 1955), sous formes de deux volumes miméographiés. Il s'agit d'une traduction clandestine, faite sans l' autorisation de l'auteur, et chose plus étonnante, avec le souci délibéré de cacher à l'auteur qu'on la faisait. Ce fâcheux procédé a eu des conséquences logiques: la traduction est émaillée de contresens et de faux-sens; c'est un devoir d'honnêteté de mettre les lecteurs en garde et de leur dire qu'ils ne sauraient accorder confiance à la traduction anglaise des paysans du Delta tonkinois par les 'Human Relations Areas Files'. Une traduction qui semble abrégée a été donnée en japonais à Tokyo en 1943; elle a également été publiée sans mon autorisation; ignorant le japonais, je ne puis dire ce qu' elle vaut. La seule remarque à faire est que les traducteurs japonais ont mis plus de soin que les américains à reproduire mes cartes. Il est surprenant de constater que l'abus (pour employer un mot neutre) commis en 1943 par les Japonais a été imité en 1955 par les Américains*". (Gourou, 1965, p.2)

The number of copies of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses that have been published is unknown. Both of the theses are now out of print, but photocopies of *The peasants of the Tonkin Delta* are available in some streets in Hanoi, except that the maps found in the Appendices do not conform to the ones compiled in the Appendices of Pierre Gourou's thesis (we did not find photocopies of Charles Robequain's thesis).

geography, in order to understand the theories, methods and concepts which were used by geographers to analyse a region.

In the fourth Chapter, we shall show how Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's writings, although they belong to the Vidalian model, provide two contrasting regional perceptions, related to their choice of two distinctive regional frameworks.

The fifth Chapter will establish the ways in which Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's discourses were influenced by French colonial ideology[25].

The sixth Chapter investigates the modern techniques applied via the colonial field in their works. These latest tools allow the introduction of a new structure of discourse, built with data, maps, and iconographic documentation.

The seventh Chapter offers an appreciation of how Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, because their field work investigated non-European societies, introduced a cultural dimension to the classical Vidalian discourse.

The concluding Chapter synthesizes the ideas of the discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. It assesses how they are modelled and how their new aspects have been accepted (or refuted) and perpetuated in the next generations of geographers, and discusses which remnants of these geographical ideas and practices are still relevant in present day discourses. It attempts to establish what, in their discourses, is the source of their significance.

Appreciating the various contextual issues is essential to the understanding of the construction of their discourses and their established or newly-developed creative aspects, but the unavoidable separate analyses of the influence of the different contexts, presented chapter by chapter, represent something artificial, in the way that they separate the various contexts which, in reality, all react conjointly and synthetically. However, the focal points of these chapters are intended to provide an understanding of how Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou promote the

[25] While Charles Robequain's arguments exposed in this fifth chapter appear nowadays often arrogant (or occasionally irritating) in their attitude towards Vietnamese people, the reader must read his work in the context of the time. It would be unfair and quite arbitrary to ignore that, during the first part of the 20th century, all French citizens were brought up in the spirit of French colonialism and that what Charles Robequain expresses is the reflection of what was thought of as right and objective in the 1920s in France. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to condemn or to approve Charles Robequain's or Pierre Gourou's opinions in regard to Indochinese people, but to see and understand their two works within their context.

'region' they chose to study, and an appreciation of how the various contexts influence their geographical comprehension or allow the introduction of a new model of discourse.[26].

[26] A note is necessary regarding the written forms used in the thesis, particularly the geographical and Vietnamese terms. For the most part, we find in English works the Vietnamese words without the accents, which occur when writing in French, for example 'Vietnam' instead of "Viêt Nam". In their theses, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou preferred, where possible, to use Vietnamese geographical terms, place names and technical terms with their Vietnamese spelling. Therefore, when quoting them, I shall respect their choice and, with regard to the Vietnamese culture, I shall use the diacritical accents in my dissertation as far as the computer facilities allow them.

CHAPTER 2

THE LANGUAGE OF GEOGRAPHERS: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESEARCH ORIENTATIONS

2.1 Introduction

Research on the writings of geographers is a topic of increasing interest to social science at the present time. To date, only a small body of geographers have worked on the texts of well-known geographers and probed the philosophy of their geographical thought. Most of this work is being undertaken in the English-speaking world. Recently, this research has begun to analyse and explore the contexts of the writings in order to comprehend the logic of geographical discourse.

To study the works of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, who were regarded as leading geographical authorities in France, could seem arrogant. This particularly applies to studying the work of Pierre Gourou. His judicious and discerning geographical thought, his extreme open-mindedness, his exceptional personality[1], his exceptional knowledge and the relevance of his writings allowed him to dominate the contemporary field of French tropical geography until recently. Even at the present time, Pierre Gourou's consideration in regard to civilizations' organization of their space is still relevant where a geography of the developing countries is constructed around the concepts of models of development, the insertion of the tropical countries in the "world-system" or the opposition between the "North" and the "South". His views counterbalance worldwide political and economic ideologies. Pierre Gourou[2] said of his own work (Appendix B.3, "extract from Pierre Gourou's letter, 27 November 1994"),

[1] Gourou was extremely helpful and encouraging to my work, and he conversed with warmth on his geography and on his thesis. Saddly he died the 13th of May 1999 before I could show him the results of this labour.

[2] Personal communication, Appendix B.3, extract from Pierre Gourou's letter, 27 November 1994

> My position in geography is clear: the regionalist geographer must possess a good knowledge of the natural conditions of the region being studied, but not lose sight of the fact that marks of man in the landscape are conditioned above all by the 'civilization' (that is to say the whole of the production techniques and the management techniques which are components of that civilization).

It is more difficult to appreciate the personality and influence of Charles Robequain, who died "prematurely" in 1963 [Appendix B.2: photo of Charles Robequain, taken during the 1931 International Congress of Geography]. However, we may quote Pierre Gourou who wrote Robequain's obituary (Gourou, 1964),

> The premature death of Charles Robequain is a grievous blow for all French geographers. He was a tireless scholar who until the final stages of his illness continued to devote himself to his research, which was throughout his career noted for its precision. … The geographers of the tropical regions owe him a great debt; everyone who turned to him for help remembers his intelligent and practical guidance. The *Annales de geographie* regret the loss of a thoughtful and informed writer[3] (p.1).

The purpose of this chapter is to present concepts that are relevant for analysing Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses. Two main approaches can be identified and utilised: a contextual one and a discursive one. The first approach intends to relocate the works in the societal environment and the epistemological background of the authors, investigating the context of the time as well as the methods and principles of the French geographical discourse (section 2.2). The second approach is based on the analysis of works as discourses (section 2.3). It considers discourses in their rhetoric investigating the power relationships, as well as the signs (section 2.4) and metaphors (section 2.5) on which they are built, along with the potential to innovate (section 2.3.4).

2.2 A Contextual Approach

To understand the significance of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses, would it not be sufficient to study them simply in the light of what they claim for their works? Essentially, this is possible only in a limited way, because the discourses, the rhetoric and the issues themselves are embedded in the societal, cultural and historical contexts of their works together with the French geographical theories and practices of the 1920s and 1930s. An in depth

[3] "*La fin prématurée de Charles Robequain est durement ressentie par ses amis et par l' ensemble des géographes français. Chercheur infatiguable, il avait poursuivi, jusqu' aux dernières et irrémédiables atteintes de son mal, une carrière scientifique marquée par le goût de l' exactitude … les géographes du monde tropical lui ont une grande dette; tous ceux qui ont eu recours à lui gardent le souvenir d' un accueil intelligent et efficace. Les Annales de géographie savent qu' elles perdent un auteur attentif et averti.*"

study must take these contexts into account and consider the affinity between the social environment and the geographical discourse.

2.2.1 Societal environment and geographical issues

There is a view that considers geographical works as part of a context which colours, instigates or determines issues of geographical description that contribute to the identity of places and societies. This view is particularly relevant to the study of the theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou considering the fact that the authors belonged to a European culture and described non-European cultures. This kind of concern has been analysed recently by Anglo-Saxon geographers such as Trevor Barnes and James Duncan (Barnes and Duncan, 1992), and Derek Gregory (Gregory, 1994). Apart from the work of Vincent Berdoulay, it has not really been a major topic of study by French geographers. Vincent Berdoulay's work (Berdoulay, 1981) examines the cultural and ideological values of a society and its intellectual elite within a specific period of history and according to the specific environment, as the essential circumstances and contingencies for the creativity of a discourse. However, he considers at the same time that any discourse also involves the author's individual effectiveness and autonomy. His interests also go to:

> …the influences provided at any time by the intellectual environment, and the discursive logic which structures geographical thought[4]. (Berdoulay, 1988, back cover)

The geographers mentioned above are relevant to the study of the concept of the discourse, which they understand as a set of socially defined rules governing and defining the activity. Their approaches are based on the location of geography in its community context, and according to their 'contextual approach' the content of the discipline partly reflects the demands made upon it by the society that nurtures it.

2.2.2 The epistemological backgrounds of the geographical works during the 1920s-1930s

According to Vincent Berdoulay's approach, the context of the two theses cannot be separated from the theoretical and epistemological reflections of French geography and its history. Thus, without disregarding the personality and liberty of the writers, the work of Charles

[4] "les influences qu' exerce à tout moment le milieu intellectuel, et la logique des discours selon lesquels s' ordonne la pensée géographique."

Robequain and Pierre Gourou produced during the inter-war period must be placed within the context of the history of geography during the late 1920s and the 1930s. They must be seen in the context of the changing systems of thought and social ideology and the functional importance of specific geographical ideas in specific places at specific times. Work concerning the epistemology and the philosophy of French geography is a recent field of research. The works of Paul Claval are well known in English-speaking countries (Claval 1969; 1980; 1993a; 1993b; Claval and Sanguin, 1996, pp.157-184; Johnston and Claval, 1984), but other researchers, principally Marie-Claire Robic (1992; 1996a; 1996b), Philippe Pinchemel (1984, 1988, pp.15-29), and Antoine Bailly (1991, pp.17-22, 161-168) have also produced works in this area. Vincent Berdoulay (1981) has written about the Vidalian epistemology. He demonstrates that a contextual approach guides the characteristics of the epistemological basis of the French school of geography. Vincent Berdoulay (1981) suggests that the emergence of the Vidalian discourse, in accordance with the French republican context of the time, appeared to be a way to help the French recover after the loss of prestige when the Alsace-Lorraine was annexed by the German Empire in 1871, and that "geographical instruction and research were considered as useful to the conquest and the developing of the (French) colonies" (p.28).

The theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were written some decades after the beginning of the formation of the French school of geography, at a time when the Empire was at its pinnacle. To what extent can we see these works as contributing to French colonial enterprise?

Vincent Berdoulay is also concerned with the analysis of ideologies as geographical phenomena, and he attempts to find the relationships between the formation of the French school of geography and the progressive installation of ideological adjustments in French social life during the time of the Third Republic. He tries to detect how the French geographers were influenced by the different streams of thought which were developing, giving the examples of positivism in science, neo-Kantism, the development of the sociological schools (for example, the sociology of Frédéric Le Play (1855), (Savoye, 1984))[5], the social morphology of Emile

[5] Compared to Frédéric Le Play, Vidalian geographers developed a monographic method, and their discourses display concern for harmony in human societies, in respect to conservative and traditional tendencies (see Chapter 3).

Durkheim[6] (1982, 1983) and the anarchist position of Elisée Reclus[7] (1866). He argues that these ideological frameworks combined with the historical and political events of the time. He indicates that a spirit of revenge against Germany after the defeat of 1870 may be related to the development of nationalism and the rise of patriotism. As well, the expansion of colonialism may be seen, in part, as a kind of psychological compensation in the face of the victory and scientific growth of Germany.

If, then, the combination of cultural practices and ideologies are an integral part of the social life of societies and of their geographers, and these produce meanings that are essential to the understanding and interpretation of geographical works, what level of analysis must we undertake to assess their worth?

If the aim is to come to a better understanding of geographical language, its production process and the problems with meaning, then in the words of Michel Foucault (1992), we must:

> ...reveal, in its specificity, the level of "things said": the condition of their emergence, the form of their accumulation and connection, the rules of their transformation, the discontinuity that articulate them. (Cover page)

The works of geographers must be subjected to criticism, not as an examination of their imperfections, but to uncover the essence of the cultural construction of their works. Or as Barbara Johnston suggests in her introduction to the translated edition of Jacques Derrida's work *Dissemination* (Derrida, 1972):

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[6] Emile Durkheim is considered a founding father of modern sociology, and of its establishment as an academic discipline. According to his conceptions, tribal or traditional societies were held together by ‘mechanical solidarity’, with segmental social structures, low population density, repressive law, and an intense “collective conscience”. By contrast, modern societies revolve around the division of labour, with organized social structures, fused markets and the growth of cities, high density of population and high value placed on the individual, encouraging equality of opportunity, social justice and the work ethic. We find an influence of Emile Durkheim’s thought in Robequain. It drives Charles Robequain (p.461) to question the irrational division of labour he discovers among the traditional Annamite communities of Thanh Hoá, and to cite pessimistic reasons such as “routine”, “poverty”, “lack of foresight” (p.462) which contribute to build a negative image of the Annamites. On the contrary, Pierre Gourou counterbalances these French notions through a Humanist philosophy representative of Montaigne, with a sceptical critique of French established institutions, ethics and superiority, building a positive image of the Annamite people (see Chapter 5).

[7] However, French geographers, and more especially during the twenties and the thirties with the growth of totalitarian and imperialist regimes in Europe (principally pangermanism, which is a political system where any population with some German origins must be assembled into a unique State, and Hitlerism), were quite reluctant to introduce in their discourse the geopolitical and geostrategical dimensions that Reclus analysed in his treatises (imperialist rivalries, methods of conquests, the balance of power between countries). It would have been hazardous to quote Reclus, libertarian geographer, in academic works such as theses.

> The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself. (p xv)

Recent geographical writers make similar points. For example, Trevor Barnes and James Duncan in the introduction to *Writing Worlds* (Barnes & Duncan, 1992) emphasise that no writing reflects a bedrock reality, but only an interpretation (dependent on powerful institutions, collective culture and personal childhood) among other possible interpretations. Or, as they say:

> To understand critically our own representations and also those of others, we must therefore know the kinds of factors bearing upon an author that makes an account come out the way it does...the social context ...the institutional setting...the genre in which it is a part...the political position that sustains the authority of the author...and, finally, the historical context that makes all the above factors contingent on particular times and places …. (p.3)

2.3 The Concept of Discourse and Geography

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses are investigated in this research as 'discourses' representative of French geography and bearing witness to the trend of thoughts that prevailed in France during the first part of the 20th century. Thus, this research will investigate, following the approach of Barnes and Duncan and Gregory, how the two discourses embody a set of French beliefs and thoughts, which for the authors circumscribed and conceptualized the world in the 1920s and 1930s. Further, in accordance with Vincent Berdoulay's suggestion, it will also examine in which way Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourses are uniquely creative.

2.3.1 Philosophical/geographical definitions

According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Little Fowler and Coulson, 1972), 'discourse', as a noun, can mean "communication of thought by speech" (or writing). Thus, a discourse is a faculty of "reasoning", to demonstrate or to explain a topic or a problem. Referring to Michel Foucault and the work of Michail Bakhin, Jeremy Hawthorn (1992) observes in his *Concise glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* that "ideology, variously defined, is a near neighbour to discourse" (p.48) and he quotes Roger Fowler who "mentions ideology directly":

> ‘Discourse’ is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies; these beliefs (etc.) constitute a way of looking at the world, an organization or representation of experience – ‘ideology’ in neutral, non-pejorative sense. Different modes of discourse encode different representations of experience; and the source of these representations is the communicative context within which discourse is embedded. (p.48)

Vincent Berdoulay (1988) observes that “geographical discourse and practice are in a symbiosis” because the discourse “is producing knowledge, but constitutes also a discourse on the mode of producing and using it” (p.9). He considers that discourse makes use of techniques of speech and rhetoric to convince its audience.

With regard to this practical aspect of discourse, Trevor Barnes and James Duncan (1992) denote how discourses present or explain the world in a structured way:

> … discourses are practices of signification, thereby providing a framework for understanding the world. As such, discourses are both enabling as well as constraining: they determine answers to questions, as well as the question that can be asked (p.8).

In their attempt to draw attention to grasping a discourse and its framework in the place and time out of which it emerges or, in other terms, the context of the writing, Trevor Barnes and James Duncan (1992) give the following definition to the term discourse:

> ….. [discourses are] frameworks that embrace particular combinations of narratives, concepts, ideologies and signifying practices, each relevant to a particular realm of social action (p.8).

Following the approach of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, they attempt to deconstruct geographical discourse in order “to explore the dynamics of power in the representation of landscape”. Michel Foucault develops the idea that the evolution of knowledge is marked by several stratifications, where each constitutes a different epistemological field, where the discursive formations are organized around specific methods and objectives. His

enterprise of "archaeology" concerns the study of the conditions of the emergence of the historical forces leading to the choices and transformations of discourse[8].

2.3.2 Culture, writings and discourses

Some of the philosophical concepts attributable to Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and also Roland Barthes are of particular interest in the way that they reveal that discourse and habitual language or words are not neutral and bear within them cultural presuppositions and assumptions. These three French intellectuals wrote many of their best-known books in the 1960s and 1970s, which were periods characterised by opposition to the excess of occidental rationalism, and their works questioned the legitimacy and relativity of cultural ideas, practices,

[8] Until now, the works of Michel Foucault have been adopted more by English-speaking researchers in social sciences than by French researchers. Anglo and American geographers used his interpretation of "discourse" or "discursive formations" (see Michel Foucault's inaugural lecture to the College de France in Sheridan, 1980, pp.120-31) to analyse diverse geographical writings in a critical way in order to identify their authors' appreciations of space and societies. Like Michel Foucault, they consider the discourses of geographers as areas within specific ideological, political economic, social and cultural contexts, which create and restrict the geographical scope and activities of the authors. This leads them to use Foucault's concept of "power", while from the mid 1980s, the French philosophers Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut developed criticisms towards this concept (see in this Chapter footnote 18) and some French geographers avoid it because of its vagueness, or to differentiate themselves from relativist theories and postmodern thought, or from the other social sciences. In the case of this research work, some geographers consider that the exceptional personalities and the personal lives of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou are sufficient to explain the differences between their theses. However, others capture the geographical relevance of Foucault's idées-forces. Paul Claval (1980) writes: "Foucault's analysis invites one to go beyond the history of geographical thought, far beyond the academic spheres of economists, historians or ethnologists: it leads one to evaluate the spatial practices of Europeans societies, to determine the way in which statesmen, soldiers, financiers and tradesmen think about space, use it and transform it: such is the stuff of geography." (p.382). In another geographical field of thought, to inaugurate the first volume of his review of geopolitics, Yves Lacoste (1976) interviewed Michel Foucault and challenged him for largely ignoring the discipline of geography while his work "confirms (and sustains) largely the reflexion we [Lacoste and his team] have started in geography" (Lacoste, 1976, p.71). At the conclusion of the interview, Michel Foucault acknowledged " I appreciated this interview because I have changed my mind between its start and its end. Geography figures among the connections I made between things because it was the basis, the condition for progress from one thing to the other … There is a theme I would like to study in the following years: the army as a matrix which organizes and judges – the necessity to study the fortress, campaign, strategic movement, colony, territory. Geography must be at the core of what I am studying." "*J'ai bien aimé cet entretien avec vous, parce que j'ai changé d'avis entre le début et la fin…Entre un certain nombre de choses que j'ai mises en rapport, il y avait la géographie, qui était le support, la condition de la possibilité du passage de l'un à l'autre…Il y a un thème que je voudrais étudier dans les années qui viennent: l'armée comme matrice d'organisation et de savoir - la nécessité d' étudier la forteresse, la "campagne", le "mouvement", la colonie, le territoire. La géographie doit être bien au cœur de ce dont je m'occupe.*" (Lacoste, 1976, pp.84-85)

Despite her French academic background, the author of this thesis found Foucault's discursive theory useful to re-think her French geographical evaluation of Vietnamese regions and to comprehend the geographical practices of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. Conscious that a limited reading of philosophical works runs the risk of misinterpretation, she used only some of Michel Foucault's concepts such as "discourse" and "episteme" (with a meaning relatively similar to paradigm) and his theory of the "archaeology of knowledge" to establish the regional discourse of French geography as a space where the French opinions or interests, within a definite period, are gathered and exemplified. She is aware that her work is part of a context in the same way that Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's theses must be read in their contexts. Her approach would have been definitively different if her thesis was prepared in France. Face with a cultural environment quite different from her French viewpoint, she was led to reevaluate her understanding of places and people. Her "discourse" is influenced by the growing emphasis on issues of ethical and critical analysis in Social Sciences in English speaking countries. This orders (and in some manner ideologically limits) her argumentation.

She is also aware of the risk of imprisoning the thought of geographers into contextual determinations. But she hopes that, at the conclusion of her work, she will have demonstrated that despite these contextual boundaries, geographers such as Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou can nevertheless be creative and challenging.

and knowledge. Foucault (1992) presented himself as an "archaeologist" of French culture and sets out to analyse the "orders" which codify the different components of this culture. Jacques Derrida is well known for his philosophical strategy of "deconstruction", in which he explores the terms and the language of a discourse, or a text, in the hope of showing what it conceals or excludes (Derrida, 1972). Barthes (1953) distinguishes in his work "writings" from "language" and "style" and his thought leads him to the study of the signs of a culture (Barthes, 1970; 1986)[9].

Other researchers from the social sciences have used these approaches for studying the way "western"[10] writers understood the "Orient". For instance, Edward Said considers that the "Orient[11] was almost a European invention" (Said, 1978, p.1) and interrogates western "orientalism"[12]. Further, Edward Said (1978) has:

> ... found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault' s notion of a discourse, as described by him in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish,* to identify Orientalism. (p.3)

and he conceives that:

> In brief, because of Orientalism, the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question (p.3).

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[9] Roland Barthes died in 1980, and Michel Foucault in 1984. Jacques Derrida, born in 1930, is still publishing and lecturing. From his two best known books where he revealed his theory of "deconstruction", *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference* (both first published in 1967), we recognised that writing is a virtual approach shaped with cultural and subconscious structures which make the written output possible and are worthy of being deconstructed for a better understanding of the logic and rhetoric of discourses.

[10] Essentially cultures of European origin.

[11] The Orient considered by Edward Said is mainly centred on Egypt and the Middle East. In "*Orientalism*" (Said, 1978) (translated into French (Said, 1980)), Edward Said showed that the concept "Orient" is an invention created by western "orientalists". In a later book, "*Culture and Imperialism*" (Said, 1993) (translated into French (Said, 2000)), Edward Said revealed the colonial subconscious which shaped western literary and scholarly thought. He shows how major writers or musicians, such as Albert Camus, Giuseppe Verdi, Charles Dickens, Honoré de Balzac, were part of this western enterprise of domination. French geographers, because of their culture and despite their humanist thought, were also inevitably part of this enterprise.

[12] In an early edition of the French Encyclopedia *Larousse*, published at the end of the 19th century, orientalism is defined as "a science of the history, languages, literature and religion of the people of the Orient". At the time of this publication, it was considered as an "entirely new science", that "has received a scientific methodology only in the 19th century" (p.541).

David Spurr (1996) helps reveal the rhetoric of the colonial discourse that has defined Western[13] thinking about the non-Western world. He identifies various rhetorical and oratorical strategies in journalism and travel writings introduced in order to legitimate the colonial enterprise and the civilizing mission. Other treatises (Williams and Chrisman, 1993; Barker, Hulme and Iversen, 1994) investigate colonial discourses through a postmodern approach with a critique based on the idea of 'postcolonialism'. A similar approach is seen in the field of art; Thomas McEvilley (McEvilley, 1999) investigates the arguments on which views of the cultural superiority of the Western world are based. In his introduction, he indicates that western people take as models of objective merit and importance only what is related to the norms traditionally adopted and taken into account by Western culture. We may go further and say that any country takes as models only what is related to its traditional norms. For example, in respect to French culinary preoccupation and sporting conceptions, Pierre Gourou's supervisor wrote in his work about the British Empire (Demangeon, 1923):

> Although the English eat a lot, it is impossible to say that they eat well. For some peoples, good cooking is highly esteemed as an art requiring care and taste. In Britain, one way of preparing soup, or roast meat, or vegetables, is found with virtually no variations from one end of the country to the other: cooks are no more likely to stray from their one recipe than the factory worker strays from the exact pattern of the article that he manufactures (p.142).

> This effort to enrich their lifestyle and take care of their bodies is related to the taste of the English for purely physical activity and to their conviction that exercising the muscles improves both health and willpower, and moreover helps them get through their day's work. This need to exercise the body is a sort of national therapy to which all classes of society subscribe, according to their differing tastes and means; it is summed up in the very British word "sport", which is applied to tiger-hunt and angling, to the most violent exercises and the most gentle games. This passion for physical effort is an aspect of the satisfaction they feel in overcoming difficulties and their pursuit of danger for danger's sake: everyone knows the part the English played in conquering the mountains of Europe and Asia, and the energy they displayed in polar expeditions (p.145)[14].

[13] However, as with the concept of "Orient", the term "Western" is probably a generalizing construction, which may sometimes associate distinct realities, according to countries and time.

[14] Si les Anglais mangent beaucoup, il est impossible de dire qu' ils mangent bien. Pour certains autres peuples, la bonne cuisine a du prix; c' est un art qui exige du soin et du goût. En Grande-Bretagne, il n' existe guère qu' un seul type de potage, de rôti, de légumes, répandu d' un bout à l' autre du pays, dont les cuisinières ne s' écartent pas, pas plus que l' ouvrier de manufacture ne s' écarte du type d' article qu' il fabrique".

All of these previous works use notions and concepts such as language, discourse, writing or metaphors that are relevant to the study of the discursive level of the language of French geographers, in order to analyse their geographical process and constructions. Some geographers whose aim is to enlarge the notion of geographical imagination have adopted these philosophical concepts, and explored the sensitivity of individuals towards place and space using contextual theoretical approaches. These geographers have employed a variety of notions derived from the philosophical studies of the relationships between geographical knowledge, discourse, representation and power. Often, these geographers are also concerned with a humanistic approach to human geography and have become aware of the implicit ontological and epistemological approaches to geographical works. For example, Derek Gregory (1978, 1994) discusses what the creations of geographers might testify. Over and above these debates and considerations appears another fundamental ethical issue: how do, or could, European or American geographers understand a 'non-Western' society with different values? This question begins to emerge in the late 1960s and the 1970s with geographers open to humanist values and idealism. Ann Buttimer in her article "Grasping the dynamism of lifeworld" (Buttimer, 1976), tries to bring intellectual knowledge closer to lived experience, blending phenomenology with existentialism and then finding lessons from both for the practice of geography. Commenting on the values we inherit, she notes that:

> People are born into an intersubjective world, i.e., we learn language and styles of social behaviour which enable us to engage in the everyday world. Our natural interest in day-to-day activities is pragmatic, not theoretical …ways of relating to it have been transmitted through our sociocultural heritage, which provides guidelines and schemata for actions and interactions. This intersubjective heritage does not normally have to be questioned unless we move to a different cultural setting. (p.285)

And, in order to understand foreign countries with people of different cultures, she expresses the view that:

A cet effort pour embellir leur vie et soigner leur corps, se rattache dans la vie britannique le goût des anglais pour l' activité physique désintéressée, la conviction que l' exercice des muscles donne à la fois de la santé et de la volonté, et qu' il aide à l' accomplissement de l' effort journalier. Ce besoin d' exercer son corps fait partie d' une sorte d' hygiène nationale à laquelle se soumettent toutes les classes de la société et qu' elles observent chacune selon ses goûts et ses moyens; il s' exprime par le mot bien britannique de 'sport' qui s' applique aussi bien à la chasse à tigre qu' à la pêche à la ligne, aux exercices les plus violents qu' aux jeux les plus paisibles. A cette passion pour l' effort physique s' associe l' amour des difficultés vaincues et la recherche du danger pour le danger: on sait quelle part les Anglais ont prise à l' ascension des hautes montagnes d' Europe et d' Asie, et quelle énergie ils ont déployée dans les expéditions polaires".

> Consider what happens when one first encounters a foreign culture … To gain a foothold, or basis for dialogue, one needs to grasp the inner subjective meanings common to that other group, its socio-cultural heritage, and its 'stream of consciousness'. One needs not only to recognize, but to translate, the signs and the symbols of other groups, and to grasp empathically the motivational meanings of their actions. To imagine oneself as a stranger may illustrate the fact that intersubjective communication between groups involves similar but much more complex procedures and considerations than interpersonal dialogue. It demands more than empathy (which, after all, diminishes the 'subjectivity' of the other): it requires a recognition of the alter ego, conscious subject of its own lifeworld experience. (p.286)

To what extent do Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's interpretations of Indochinese societies attest to this difficulty for any writer to "translate the signs and the symbols of other groups, and to grasp empathically the motivational meanings of their actions", or to surpass (at least for Pierre Gourou[15]) the empathy towards the other and substitute for it "a recognition of the alter ego, conscious subject of its own lifeworld experience"?

Nowadays, this problematic of the relativity of cultural conceptions and of the reading of geography as a discourse located within various theories and ideologies has become of particular interest among geographers who are concerned with questions of colonialism and the cultural ideology which may be embedded in texts. Of interest are the interpretations of the social facts, which are variously planted in place, time, space, and landscape.

Furthermore, new approaches present the colonial discourse as a joint production between colonizers, researchers and indigenous scholars. This perspective restrains Edward Said's statement that the Orientalist discourse emanates from Western conceptions up to the point that the knowledge of the Orient has been constituted with the collaboration of native informants and intellectuals. With regard to Vietnam, Laurent Dartigues (2001) wrote chapter 4 of his thesis (pp.282-349) around the perspective that the discourse of French intellectuals during the colonial time cannot be exclusively restricted to a French conception:

[15] Pierre Gourou revealed his "empathy" toward the Annamite peasantry through his writings, and concluded his thesis with this assertion (p.578).

> We shall see that "indigenous theories", of which the educated section of Vietnamese society has the monopoly, may have "tinted" the orientalist images, that is to say, the point of view propounded by the majority of works in the field. Beyond this, however, it is essential to present the arguments for the hypothesis that ethnological knowledge (in its broad meaning of science of "foreign" cultures) is necessarily a shared work of creation, based on constant exchanges between the French "school" and the Vietnamese "school"[16] (p.281).

This seems particularly the case when French authors such as Pierre Gourou quoted in their research works Vietnamese scholars and, vice versa, when Vietnamese scholars mention French works in their papers[17].

2.3.3 Discourse and power

In Michel Foucault's philosophy (Foucault, 1980), a discourse is not objective knowledge, but is rooted in what he calls "power/knowledge". He conceives that (p.131):

> Truth is a thing of the world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces the regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true…

Thus, Michel Foucault saw "power" as permeating all social relationships and discourse as providing support to and legitimizing certain perspectives and interpretations in a particular society[18]. According to Michel Foucault's concept, archaeology is defined by what it makes

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[16] "*Nous verrons que les « théories indigènes » dont la fraction lettrée de la société viêtnamienne a le monopole de la production, ont pu « teinter » les représentations orientalistes, ce qui est la perspective développée par la plupart des travaux qui traitent ce sujet. Au-delà de ce point de vue, il s'agit aussi de défendre l'hypothèse que le savoir ethnologique (dans un sens large de science des cultures « étrangères ») est forcément un travail en commun de création, basé sur des échanges constants entre la « partie » française et la « partie » viêtnamienne*".

[17] For instance, Nguyen Van Khoan, who was assistant at the E.F.E.O., refers in his articles in regard to religious beliefs and practices to French authors (Khoan, 1930; 1933). Eventually he moderated the discourse of these authors in guarded terms (for example in his footnotes (Khoan, 1930, pp.115, 119)).

[18] From the mid 1980s, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut (1994a, pp.54-61) have criticized Michel Foucault's concept of power, arguing that, with Foucault, an unjust exercise of power cannot be criticized or resisted because the notions of human right, law and justice are taken to be mere manifestations of power (p.56). By contrast, they advocate the idea of the responsibility and autonomy of individuals, and criticized Foucault's "antijuridism" (p.54) and "antihumanism" (where ethical or moral judgments have been shelved). Their critiques apply also to the other French philosophers of the "critical generation" (Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Bourdieu). According to Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut (1994b, p.153), Michel Foucault and the "critical generation" fail to incorporate references to values and to the idea of "man". For this reason, the two philosophers advocate Kant's criticism critique of reason as a critical study compatible with a philosophy of human rights and as "a possible foundation for modern ethics and politics" (as opposed to Hegelian historicism). However, recently, Alain Renaut (2000, p.14) noted that "we must not undermine the pertinence of some of their [Foucault especially] analyses or debates…". Within the framework of this thesis, we find it relevant to use the concept of power with a similar meaning to influence (in its general meaning), to question what might have influenced French geographical thought in the 1920s and 1930s.

Both Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut support the renewal of political philosophy where governments have the responsibility and legitimacy to protect and support the human rights of the populations they represent.

objective; that is to say the sense and the subject as principles of historical explanation. The purpose of archaeology is to analyse the *a priori* preconceptions of the production of knowledge inside a precise period of historical time. In his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault (1992) gives a concrete example of his views to illustrate this notion in regard to the political behaviour of a society, a group, or a class dealing with revolution. He considers that:

> The question, for example, would not determine from what moment a revolutionary consciousness appears, nor the respective roles of economic conditions and theoretical elucidation in the genesis of this consciousness; it would not attempt to retrace the general, and exemplary, biography of a revolutionary man, or to find the origins of his project; but it would try to explain the formation of a discursive practice and a body of revolutionary knowledge that are expressed in behaviour and strategies, which give rise to a theory of society, and which operate the interference and mutual transformation of that behaviour and those strategies (p.195).

For Michel Foucault, at a given moment in history, there will be a particular discourse, with a set of rules and conventions and systems of mediation and transposition which govern the way a particular problem or topic is talked about, when, where and by whom. All societies have this set of procedures whereby the creation and diffusion of discourses is controlled in order to prevent "power and dangers". He gives the example of the discourse about medicine, illness and treatment, but we can attempt a similar view about the geographical discourse during the time of the French Empire. He observes discursive regularities within circumscribed periods and

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In May 2002, Luc Ferry was appointed Minister of Youth, Education and Research ("Ministre de la jeunesse, de l' Education nationale et de la recherche") in the French government, and has proposed to develop in French universities general cultural education ("un enseignement de culture générale") to overcome the increasing lack of the scientific, literacy and historical knowledge of students which is essential to a humanistic education. This new quest is also present in the recent philosophical view of Michel Serres. Michel Serres (2002, p.7) notices that "traditional humanism has become unreadable and outdated, even hated by the ones who associate it – sometimes understandably so – with imperialism and the process of colonization". He investigates the changes in its significance and announces "I recognize the beginning of new humanities … " and "the humanism we now want to study will not be rooted in a definite region of the terrestrial globe. On the contrary, all humanity will be able to access and communicate it …The present division into two parts - sciences and social sciences – does not allow us to understand the world or to anticipate the destiny of humanity, and even less to act on it. It will not bring the supreme claim: peace. This shared program of shared knowledge (Michel Serres suggests that the first university year for all students of every country consist of a joint scientific and cultural program)] … contributes to create what we could at last call contemporary culture, that is to say a humanism which came from human kind and which is adapted to his needs". ("*J'ai constaté pendant ma vie de solitaire à quel point l'humanisme traditionnel devenait peu à peu illisible et désuet, détesté même par ceux qui l'associent – parfois à juste titre – à l'impérialisme et au processus de colonisation…L'humanisme que nous voulons désormais enseigner ne sera plus enraciné dans une région déterminée du globe, mais au contraire, valable à partir de l'humanité toute entière, désormais accessible et communicante…Le partage des études en deux parties – sciences dures et sciences sociales – ne permet ni de comprendre le monde ni d'anticiper sur le destin des hommes, encore moins à ceux-ci d'agir sur celui-là. Il n'apporte donc pas le bien suprême: la paix. Ce programme commun de connaissance commune – et commune trois fois, du côté des hommes, du monde et du savoir – contribue à créer ce que l'on pourrait enfin appeler la culture contemporaine, c'est à dire un humanisme venu du genre humain et adapté à ses besoins*".

This claim for transdisciplinary knowledge and understanding may renew and enhance geography's humanist potential.

conceptualizes the totality of the relations that can be discovered in discursive levels as ‘episteme’. He writes (Foucault, 1992):

> By ‘episteme’, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems (p.191).

Following these concepts of power and episteme, and of Ann Buttimer’s “intersubjective” (Buttimer, 1976, p.279) concern in regard to the understanding of other people with different values and cultures, we can investigate from a current perspective the trajectories which delimit and construct the patterns of possible knowledge and understanding of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. That means, for example, we can explore the connections between our two geographical discourses and the other discourses produced in the same period in other disciplines or areas (French geographical, orientalist, political, ethnographical, historical discourses) relating “to French sociocultural heritage, which provides guidelines and schemata for actions and interactions” (see the Buttimer quotation above).

Applying Michel Foucault’s notion of power, Trévor Barnes and James Duncan (1992) position their conception of geographical discourse in the stream of the postmodernist movement and the post-structuralist and ‘de-constructionist’ criticisms of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida:

> For power relations within a social formation are communicated, and sometimes resisted, precisely through the medium of particular discourses ... In addition, the production and reproduction of discourses are also linked with institutions. Within this context, discourses shape the positioning of individuals in an institution, and the discourses so adopted, in turn depend upon an individual's position there. (p.8)

They continue:

> Post-structural discourse theory, however, sees discourses as conventional and historical. It assumes that discourse, and the "truths" that they construct, vary among cultural groups and among classes, races, gender-based or other groups whose interests may clash. (p.8)

Following this idea, each geographer can exercise some power through the position he/she adopts in his/her geographical discourse particularly if, like Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, they have a broad classical knowledge and a distinctive topic. What did Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou intend to advance through their discourses on human geography in regard to two Indochinese regions?

Derek Gregory (1994, pp.28-29, 33) also uses the arguments of Michel Foucault concerning the notion of power/knowledge, but in relationship to the problem of "the incorporation of European 'man' within the grid of human sciences". He extends the reflection on power/knowledge and discourse to the problematic of the incorporation of the non-European world into the 'modern' European discourse that appeared towards the end of the 18th century. On the one hand, he notices how the notion of power/knowledge rooted in this discourse was used "to administer, study, and reconstruct, and then to occupy, rule, and exploit almost the whole of the non-European world", but, on the other hand, he questions and explores the difficulty of the European misconception that fails to situate the non-European man in the discourses of the European human sciences. His opinion is that European "modern" geography, as David Stoddart conceives it in his work *On Geography and its History* (Stoddart, 1986), is an "objective" but also "Eurocentric" science, where:

> Non-European traditions of geography are disallowed and even dispossessed of their own 'intellectual structure' in a way that strikingly confirms Said's view of one of the essential motifs of European imaginative geography: 'A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant'. And yet, as the previous paragraphs have shown, the trajectory of this 'modern' geography, this 'European science', cannot be separated from those other societies and the 'people without history'. But this requires a way of remapping those spaces of power-knowledge or, better, of exploring the interconnections between power, knowledge, and spatiality. (p.33)

The Indochinese context about which Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou wrote is however rather different. The Annamite people claim a long history with successive kingdoms and conquests, and a civilization using ingenious and clever techniques of rice cultivation capable of supporting high densities of population. They embodied all the characteristics, according to the French values and spirit of the time, of what was considered a venerable established culture and of what was conceived as a balanced and meritorious civilization. In this case, using Edward Said's words (1978, p.1), is it possible to consider it as defeated and distant, and as a "European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate"? In what form do the various expressions of the French representations regarding Asian civilization appear in their discourse? What are their limits and to what extent was Indochina not so much an "European" representation as a joint and ambivalent outcome of French and Annamite scholars? These are the questions that will be explored in the next chapters regarding the work of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou.

Edward Said analyses the way in which the stereotypes of "Orientalism" were formed, and the kind of knowledge and power which created and established Western attitudes towards the East. He writes in regard to his methodology:

> My principal methodological devices for studying authority here are what can be called strategic location, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the oriental material he writes about, and strategic formation, which is a way of analysing the relationships between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts and even textual genres, acquire mass, density and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large. I use the notion of strategy simply to identify the problem that every writer on the Orient has faced: how to get hold of it, how to approach it, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimensions. Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the Orient (Said, 1978, p.20).

Thus, to analyse the historical authority in, and the personal authorities of, Orientalism, Edward Said analyses how to locate the "author's position" vis-a-vis the 'Orient':

> Translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the types of structure he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that articulate in his text - all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally representing it or speaking on its behalf. None of this takes place in the abstract, however. Every writer on the Orient assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies. (Said, 1978, p.20)

It would be interesting and of value to follow this kind of approach with the works of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou in Indochina, trying to find the ideas, images and stereotypes given to the Far East by institutions with authority, like the *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient*[19] (E.F.E.O.) which published their two theses. The issues that will be raised by this approach include the role of the colonial movement within the French school of geography, the colonial representations conveyed by French institutions and the extent to which Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's Indochinese discourses refer to, and rely on, the theories and knowledge delivered by these French institutions and also indigenous scholars working in association with French cultural authorities.

[19] The mission of the *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient*, promoted by the "gouverneur général" M. Doumer, was "to work to the archaeological and philological exploration of the Indochinese Peninsula, to sponsor knowledge of its history, of its monuments, of its idiom" - second clause of its decree 15 December 1898 (Finot, 1921, p.4). ("*Art 2 Elle [the E.F.E.O] a pour objet de travailler à l' exploration archéologique et philologique de la presqu' île indochinoise, de favoriser par tous les moyens la connaissance de son histoire, de ses monuments, de ses idiomes*".

2.3.4 Creativity of discourse

Vincent Berdoulay's conceptions of discourse (1988) open the epistemology of geographical thought to the discursive level of the discipline. He investigates several ways to organise the geographical discourse and explores the rhetoric of geographical discourses, considering their own specific logic. This approach brings him close to the contemporary French philosopher Michel Serres (1980), who is preoccupied with coincidence in knowledge and experience within distinct fields such as the sciences, literature and aesthetics and, therefore, advocates a multiform epistemology. Vincent Berdoulay (1988) writes:

> ... thought can take numerous and unusual directions, which are not structured or hierarchies at the hand of rigid and pre-established schemes, and which put in relationships concepts, objects or methods not often considered as familiar to each other.
>
> The point of view is no more to look into the direct connection between the ideas. It is more to look at the analogies in the procedures of the thought or the processing methods. Their position does not mean that there is necessarily a direct association or a superior method[20] (p.10)

In this view, Vincent Berdoulay analyses the structure of geographical discourse investigating which themes, concepts, and expressions it assembles and juxtaposes. In so doing, he shows that this discourse is creative, through its logic and its rhetoric. With respect to its creativity, Vincent Berdoulay (1988) quotes Arthur Koestler's observation that "All the decisive progressions in the history of scientific thought present themselves as intersections of different disciplines" (p.14).

Vincent Berdoulay (1988) also cites the geographer Jean Bruhnes, a contemporary of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, who observed that "geography is progressing 'from its margins' " (p.14). This notion of the creativity of discourse is particularly relevant to the study of

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[20] *"C' est que la pensée peut emprunter des chemins multiples, insolites, qui ne se structurent ou hiérarchisent pas selon des schémas rigides préétablis, et qui mettent en communication concepts, objets ou méthodes trop souvent tenus pour étrangers les uns aux autres*."

"*Le point de vue n' est pas non plus de se pencher sur la filiation des idées. Il vise plutôt à rechercher au sein du discours géographique des analogies dans les procédures de pensée ou les méthodes d' approche. Leur repérage n' implique pas qu' il puisse nécessairement y avoir filiation ou bien exister une méthode supérieure*".

Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's theses. Roger Gallais[21] (1981), in an article about the tropical geography of Pierre Gourou, finds in Gourou's works the preoccupations of the time being introduced in geography and also more specifically new approaches, at the intersection of different disciplines. These include the use and critical analysis of statistics, the opening towards scientific studies concerning agricultural practices (agronomic, biological, physical problems) and the broad-mindedness towards other social sciences like sociology, ethnology, demography and the economic sciences. The relevance of these considerations is discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

While Vincent Berdoulay emphasises the importance of the societal context in the process of discourse, he also indicates (Berdoulay, 1988, pp.14-15) the prevalent dispositions shared by most geographers such as "the affection for exploration and the discovering mind, the adherence to myths about the nature of the object being analysed, and aesthetic motivation ..." He takes into consideration the personal experiences and general motivations which are common to geographers and which influence geographical discourse. Certainly, it is important to point out the individual histories and the specificity of the backgrounds of Pierre Gourou and Charles Robequain. For example, Pierre Gourou, who was born and brought up in Tunis, stated in an interview (Tertrais, 1993) that:

> I have always been in geography. Geography, seen by a child, first, it is the picturesqueness of the landscapes; and, very early, I had the inclination to be interested more specially in the Far-East. There is no reasonable explanation for that. It is a kind of tendency, probably due to some readings - of very bad quality - that I must have done[22]. (p.7)

In France, the picturesque images and myths concerning the Far East were often associated with the exotic environment described by popular novelists Pierre Loti or Roland

[21] Roger Gallais, a student of Pierre Gourou, was himself a sort of pioneer in the field of the geography of non-western countries such as in Africa. In his thesis on the Interior Delta of Niger (Gallais, 1967), he shows that the French concept of 'natural region' (such as the Interior Delta of Niger) does not correspond to the way the different ethnic groups living in the delta perceive and territorialize this area. These societies delimit the Niger delta according to one specific element of the landscape (stagnant water, river … etc) with a societal meaning, while the "natural region" (such as the Interior delta) defined by French geographers corresponds to an association of physical criteria. In this case, the French concept of "natural region" was not sufficient, or appropriate to, the understanding of this African region.

[22] "*De très bonne heure, j' ai eu tendance à m' intéresser plus spécialement à l' Extrême-Orient. Il n' y a aucune raison raisonnable à cela. C' est une sorte de penchant, probablement dû à des lectures –de très basse qualité –que j' avais pu faire*". In a personal communication (August 1994), Pierre Gourou mentioned this fascination, as a child, for children's books and picture books about the Far East.

Dorgelès (see Chapter 5, footnote 76)[23]. But Pierre Gourou expressed his lack of regard towards "this exotic literature without interest", because it arouses in the reader more affective or imaginative consonances than cultural understanding (personal communication, August 1994).

In fact, other French writers were nurturing a cultural consciousness or scholarly interest towards Asian countries rather than this exotic one, and caught Pierre Gourou's fascination for the Far East countries. For instance, Pierre Gourou (1990) mentioned (p.111) novels which "gave me a veneer of culture and a just opinion of my ignorance". Among these novels, Pierre Gourou enjoyed particularly the work of Victor Ségalen, *René Leys,* because it was at the same time literature and a reflective work, with a querying analysis of Chinese culture (personal communication, August 1994). The novel emulated a French introspective approach common to erudite humanist researchers aware of theories of knowledge. Victor Segalen had learned the Chinese language, culture and art in order to comprehend China. Pierre Gourou quotes as well some English novelists such as Forster and his best-seller *A Passage to India* [24,] and Joseph Conrad and his short stories *Typhoon* and *Heart of Darkness* and his novel *Lord Jim*[25] (p.111). Edward Forster's and Joseph Conrad's writings were different from other classical novels because they testify to an accurate investigation of geographical colonial facts, which the authors personally experienced, and manifest scepticism in regard to the British colonial enterprise. But besides their distrust of colonial exploitation, the authors insist as well on the strangeness of India, Africa or the Malayan archipelago, a strangeness which contributes to construct an exotic or dark representation of the colonies. Besides this literature, Pierre Gourou quoted books of methodology which "focused" his "attention" such as those of a new generation of historians who opened French historical discourse to social sciences and disciplines such as geography,

[23] French lovers of the Orient also appreciated other writers such as Jules Boissière. Jules Boissière (1993) who spent his career in Tonkin in the colonial administration, offered an original and personal literature, often based on his experience of opium (Boissière, 1993).

[24] Edward Forster confronts the English as well as the Hindu and Muslim points of view in this novel (Forster, 1924), which was inspired by his trip to India in 1912. But, according to Edward Said (1993), if the novel "expresses the author's affection (sometimes petulant and mystified) for the place" (p.243), because of his Western culture and Christianized mind, "his final lack of sympathy [for Islam and Hinduism] is obvious" (p.244). Furthermore, Edward Said considers that the fact that Forster wrote, "nothing in India is identifiable" suggests the gap that separates the British and Indian cultures.

[25] *Lord Jim* and *Typhoon* were set in the Malayan archipelago, where Joseph Conrad sailed as first mate in 1887 (Conrad, 1900). The stories are about the sea, circumstances and feelings on board a ship, or insecurity that reinforces isolation in a jungle village (the last part of Lord Jim). *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1950), entitled in French *Au cœur des ténèbres*, is set in Congo, where Joseph Conrad went in 1889 and is negative towards colonialization, its atrocities and the "darkness" of Africa. Correspondingly, when Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were in Vietnam, the French novelist André Gide wrote *Voyage au Congo* where he described colonial atrocities (Gide, 1927). In the Thirties some books, such as *Indochine SOS* written by the journalist Andrée Viollis (1935), went even further in their colonial criticism, with strong anti-colonial positions. If Pierre Gourou was critical towards some colonial projects and political decisions, he never addressed anti-colonial opinion (see Chapter 5, footnote 97 and Chapter 6, section 6.1).

economy or sociology, *La Terre et l' Evolution humaine* (Febvre, 1922)[26], and *Les caractères originaux de l' histoire rurale française* (Bloch, 1931)[27]. He also cited John Buck (1930), whose work on the Chinese farm economy rests essentially on statistics and their commentary (about harvests, yield, output and profitability, distribution of salary). Consequently, Pierre Gourou's Asian knowledge and curiosity were in part stimulated by both French and Anglo-Saxon literature and research works.

All these elements contribute to a certain extent to the composition of Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's geographical discourse and their discursive ability and methods.

To analyse geographical discourse and what can influence its ability, Vincent Berdoulay considers its discursive methods through their relationship with geographical progress and practices and the epistemology of the discipline, because they are linked together. Across the history of geographical thought, he notices several recurrences in the geographical discourse such as the regional, general, prescriptive, enumerative ones, and the travellers' accounts of their journeys (récit *de voyage).* He shows that their functions were different according to the historical period in which they were developed, including, for example, the position of geography within other fields of knowledge and science, and the societal solicitation *(la demande sociétale)* of the time. He gives the example of the function of the regional geography of Strabo[28], whose aim was to provide a better knowledge of the Roman Empire to improve its government, and the function of the regional geography of Paul Vidal de la Blache "whose expectation was to serve the establishment of the moral and economic order of the Third Republic" (Berdoulay, 1988, p.17). Thus, the aim of Strabo's geography was administrative, and the geography of Vidal educative in a civic way.

The theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou are about regional geography, and therefore belong to the regional discourse that was established in French classical geography. Their works also present some of the preoccupations and functions of other types of discourses at

[26] In this work, the French historian Lucien Febvre considered that the individuality of Geography relies on its analysis of the relationships between Man and environment at a regional scale.

[27] In this work, the French historian Marc Bloch analysed French rural landscapes and economy in their societal dimensions and as quite structured social systems. He developed as well a comparative approach to European societies (between French, English and German societies).

[28] Strabo was a Greek geographer during the first century BC. His *Geography* was reedited during the Renaissance. Strabo puts in question the origins of ethnic groups and people, of their migrations and the foundation of empires, by studying the relationships between people and their natural environment.

the time of the pinnacle of the French Empire. Their regional discourses attempt to be objective and enlightened, following the general aims of French scientific and academic discourses. There is, however, still a civic inspiration in both works. For Charles Robequain, it appears in the conclusion of his thesis, entitled "The Work of France", and in the very last sentence where Charles Robequain presents 'his' region as "the solid overcast-stitch of French colonialization" (p.613). By comparison, if French colonisation is never directly called into question in Pierre Gourou's discourse, his interpretation of the work of France in Indochina is less unconditional and categorical (see Chapters 5, 6) and does not seem to follow a definite political project. Pierre Gourou's cautiousness in regard to politics characterises his academic geographical works[29]. In an interview with Hugues Tertrais (1993), Pierre Gourou was asked (p.13):

> ...how can we appreciate your responsibility as geographer? Your work on the Red River Delta was a scientific, but also a useful, or, utilized[30] [work]...
>
> Pierre Gourou's answer was:
>
> It is above all a work of synthesis, which ultimately demonstrates the importance of civilization in the landscape. I think it is useful, but, in fact, I don't know ... I believe that geography, as I conceive it, is indispensable. When people ask of themselves: why are things I see as I see them? Then, all the geographical connections appear[31].

The purpose now is to approach the logic of the discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou with these philosophical and geographical considerations in mind. This means that the background and historical contexts of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, as well as the

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[29] This is not the case in his applied works on Indochina ordered by French committees or authorities. For example, in his work entitled *L'avenir de l'Indochine* and published in 1947 by the Comité d' Etudes des Problèmes du Pacifique for the conference of the Institute of Pacific relations, Pierre Gourou exposed clearly his political conviction in regard to the role of France in Indochina. In this work, he concluded quite equivocally by stating: "France must undertake its federative task without colonialist ulterior motive. But she must enjoy a freedom which must be equitably accredited, for her nationals, her cultural achievements and her economic enterprises". ("*La France doit assurer son rôle fédérateur sans arrière-pensée colonialiste; mais elle doit bénéficier, pour ses nationaux, son œuvre culturelle, ses entreprises économiques d'une liberté loyalement consentie. Hors de ces principes, nous ne voyons que désordres et ruines dont personne ne tirera profit*", p.57). This has to be put in the context of the time of the French Empire. Recently, to the question "what could represent in this (Vietnamese) thousand-year-old civilization the work of France", Pierre Gourou answer was "In my opinion, the work of France is null" (Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou).

[30] Hugues Tertrais was probably referring to the American utilization of Pierre Gourou's thesis during the Vietnam war (see footnote 21, in chapter 8).

[31] *"… comment peut-on apprécier votre responsabilité de géographe. Votre travail sur le delta du Fleuve rouge a été un travail scientifique, mais il a été aussi un travail utile, ou utilisé …"*

"C' est surtout un travail de synthèse aboutissant à démontrer l' importance de la civilization dans les paysages. Je pense qu' il est utile mais, en fait, je n' en sais rien. ... Je crois que la géographie telle que je la conçois est indispensable. Que les gens se disent: pourquoi les choses que je vois sont comme je les vois? Alors, tout l' enchaînement de la géographie apparaît".

characteristics of the language in which they express their discourse, must be taken into account, for a better perception of the logic of their work and of their aims.

2.4 The Geographical Discourse and Semiology

Semiology is the study of the development and role of cultural signs in the life of human groups. The semiologic reflection extends the philosophy of the language and the symbol to all forms of communication. In the geographic field, because the description and explanation of the landscape is a central issue, and because the landscape reflects the forms and the state of a culture connected with a society, its analysis was opened recently to the semiolinguistic problematic in order to grasp its meanings and its related values. This has occurred since the 1970s, if we exclude rare precursors like Eric Dardel (1952b) who wrote at the beginning of the 1950s that, "The earth is a signature of societies", "a writing to decipher" and considered that:

> Thus, the geographical language conveys the amazements, deprivations, the suffering or the happiness, which are attached to regions. North means not only a direction like the others, it is a region of our imagination or our memorizing, it is the north wind, the cold, the frost, the hostile seas, the indigent soils. South means sun, intense sky, stony guarrigues or huertas fertilized by water[32]. Affective colorations tint words which should be noted but nothing more … (Dardel, 1952a, pp.229-230).

However, now several geographers have interrogated the theories and the ability of this discipline and approach to understand and interpret the symbolism of the landscape.

2.4.1 Landscape, geographical interpretation and semiology

In general, geographers are interested in, but circumspect towards, the use of semiological tools in human geography. Several French geographers interested in semiological approaches, and aware of the importance of the underlying structure within French geography, have embraced the intellectual potential of the use of semiology in the analysis of landscape components. A debate was organized by Roger Brunet[33] to discuss this issue. This discussion was published in 1974 in the journal edited by Brunet, *L' Espace Géographique* (Claval et al., 1974). Within this debate, Roger Brunet claims that "the landscape is made of signs without being a system of signs" (Brunet, 1974, p.125). He notices as well that "an analysis of the

[32] 'North' and "South" from the Northern Hemisphere and French point of view!

[33] Brunet and his team of geographers, the R.E.C.L.U.S. group, aim to reconstruct French geography through present day concepts, queries and computing tools.

perceptions of a landscape can appear as a subject of study by itself … and provides more information on the receptor than the transmitter …agreeing that there are all sorts of receptors, individuals or groups" (Brunet, 1974, p.126). For our purpose, we will regard Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's perception of Indochinese landscape as a reflection of their French cultural background and personalities. André Fel, a student of Pierre Gourou, introduced another thread in this debate. Following Brunet, but in a more traditional way, André Fel (1974, p.149) quotes Pierre Gourou according to whom "physical and human elements do not form a structured whole...that to find a structured system, we must come back to civilization"[34]. It is precisely through this notion of civilization that French geographers, following the example of the historians of the *Ecole des Annales,* have investigated the cultural dimension of their discipline, where the landscape has a human significance.

More recently, Paul Claval, in an article dealing with the languages of geography (Claval, 1984) interrogates the primordial place attributed to the geographical descriptions of the landscape by the geography of Paul Vidal de la Blache and his disciples. Like Roger Brunet, Paul Claval takes some precautions and is prudent with the use of semiologic science in the interpretation of the landscape. He writes in this article that the elements of the landscape have "a signification... which is functional", and that the interpretations of "the utilisation of the space only takes on a meaning if I locate them in the whole of the life of the group which geographers have always done when they study the *genres de vie"* geography (Claval, 1984, p.411). Further, he makes explicit these views by writing about the possible relationships between geography and semiology, that "most of the elements of the landscape have been created for something else than for the symbolic communication", thus that "the game of the structural linguistic could not be applied without arbitration in a field [geography] which is not the field of signs", geography (Claval, 1984, p.413).

However, Paul Claval relativizes this functional statement and speaks, in a similar way to Foucault, of a "stratigraphic reading" of the landscape. He asserts as well the "imperfect connection between forms and functions" when the landscape "can also take a symbolic value" and notes:

[34] This quotation from Pierre Gourou is extracted from his treatise on Human Geography (Gourou, 1973, p.362). It was published in 1973 long after the publication of Pierre Gourou's Indochinese works. But, as Pierre Gourou noted (personal communication, August 1994), the conceptions that it submits were already contained in his thesis.

> The functional analysis displaces itself in time: to understand the present forms, it is necessary to reconstitute what was the society of yesterday and what were its needs, its social structure, its mode of division of labour and properties (p.412).

> What men inscribe on the surface of the earth is functional, but could also take on a symbolic value. The landscape becomes a carrier of signs[35] (p.412).

With regard to geographical language, Paul Claval considers also graphic documents, such as photographs and maps, as language with symbols and codes in their legends which structure perception. He concludes that classical geographical description is, in fact "a witness of an imaginative effort to understand reality, and creates, through the networks of the language, a series of references to places which are a justification of the territorial ascendancy of groups: the political signification is intimately linked to scientific ambition, which it increases more than it limits"[36] (Claval, 1984, p.422).

Claude Raffestin (1976) and Maurice Ronai (1976) delve further, and in a more critical way, into the field of semiology. In an early article, Claude Raffestin asks the question: "Can one speak of codes in the social sciences, and in geography in particular?" In another article entitled. "From the Landscape to the Space or the Signs of Geography" (Raffestin, 1978), he shows how French geographers have perfected "geogrammes" instituting restrictive models "composed from a selection of geographers' perceptions" through a morpho-functional language allowing only one type of description of the "geostructure" of the landscape. In an incisive way, Maurice Ronai (1976, p.125) refers to "the mystifying function of the landscape" in the description of "the beauties of the Delta" on pages 554-556 of Pierre Gourou's thesis.

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35 *"L' analyse fonctionnaliste se déplace dans le temps: pour comprendre les formes actuelles, il est nécessaire de reconstituer ce qu' était la société d' hier et ce qu' étaient ses besoins, sa structure sociale, ses modes de division du travail et de propriété. Le principe d' imparfaite connexion des formes et des fonctions qui explique la profondeur archéologique des paysages, fait aussi lire, à travers eux, autre chose que l' agencement des hommes et de leurs ressources en vue de la production et de la satisfaction des besoins. Ce que les hommes inscrivent à la surface de la terre est fonctionnel, mais peut également prendre une valeur symbolique. Le paysage devient porteur de signes".*

36 *"elle témoigne d' un effort imaginatif pour comprendre le réel. Elle crée, à travers les réseaux du langage, une série de références aux lieux qui sont autant de légitimations de l' emprise territoriale des groupes: la signification politique est intimement liée à l' ambition scientifique, qu' elle accroît bien plus qu' elle ne limite".*

> Gourou's text and its imaginary derivatives bare the mystifying function of landscape in geographical discourse, the dramatic function of landscape in the romanesque writing. The cultural practices that institute the landscape are revealed: viewing exercise, bringing into play knowledge, the reading of the landscape as research of immanent significance. The landscape apprehended as a section of nature confesses to be object of culture. Object of cult also, because these three practices, *géoscopie*, the view, geography, the discourse, *géosémie*, the system of signification, crossing each other make possible *géophilie*, the passion or love for landscape[37] (Ronai, 1976, p.125).

Is it appropriate to speak of the landscape as a system of codes? Following Roger Brunet's (1974) and Paul Claval's (1984) position, we might consider that it is a misuse of the language. An alternative to the study of the signs of a landscape is proposed by Augustin Berque (1985; 1990; 1995, pp.35-36), who originated the expression "mediance" (from the Latin root "med") to translate the Japanese term *fudosei* in order to study the relationships between a society and its environment. He calls this social science *mésologie* and analyses the representations that a social group makes of its environment.

At this stage, we can extract from the writings of these former French geographers three ideas. First, the geographical discourse and its language are influenced by the cultural codes of the society to which its author belongs. Second, as Paul Claval describes, "what men inscribe on the surface of the earth is functional, but could also take on a symbolic value. The landscape becomes a carrier of signs". Third, these signs could be examined as indications for the understanding of a society.

But how are these ideas relevant for the purpose of this thesis? The singularity of the works of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, like the works of other French geographers about non-European countries, is that they are geographers shaped by the cultural signs of French civilization, giving an explanation of regions and societies belonging to a system of Asian cultural signs. According to the standard geomorphological and functional French categories of representation of the rural landscapes, what kind of cultural signs do they see and use in their description of the Indochinese landscapes and villages? How do they signify the relationship between the Indochinese ethnic groups or the Annamite society and their surrounding natural environment?

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[37] "*Le texte de Gourou et ses dérivés imaginaires mettent à nu la fonction mystifiante du paysage dans le discours géographique, la fonction dramatique du paysage dans l' écriture romanesque. S' y révèlent les pratiques culturelles qui instaurent le paysage: l' exercice d' un regard, la mise en jeu d' un savoir, la lecture du paysage comme recherche d' un sens immanent. Le paysage appréhendé comme tranche de nature s' y avoue comme objet de culture. Objet d' un culte aussi, puisque ces trois*

2.4.2 Translation of the signs and symbols of another culture

In section 2.2 it was shown how Ann Buttimer has questioned the way people understand themselves and others. In a later work, Ann Buttimer (1993) analyses the earth as our home in a metaphoric way, using the symbol of the Phoenix which is the symbol of the mystery of human creativity and its quest for emancipation and exploration, contrasted with the ideas of Faust, who represents the planning rationale and imperialist structures of Western thought. From the tensions between this spirit of emancipation and these constraining structures appears Narcissus with his critical and new perceptions of the relationships between humans and the environment.

As in the writings of Ann Buttimer, the geographical discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou are permeated with references to classical culture and myths, ancient Mediterranean civilizations and traditional European history, which do not belong to either the Annamite or other Asian societies or traditions. The mythological symbols and cultural references and beliefs behind European societies contribute to building their way of thinking and comprehending societies. For example, Charles Robequain compared the distribution of the Annamite villages encircling ricefield basins to “frogs around a pond” (p.478) which is a transposition of Plato’s maxim in regard to the Greek settlements which spread and developed around the Mediterranean basin with which they lived in symbiosis. This image contributes to the idea of interdependence between society and their environment. More fundamentally, concepts constitutive of French discourses of the 1920s and 1930s such as ‘democracy’, ‘progress of humanity”, the belief in the ‘superiority of French civilization’, and the French Cartesian and systematic conception of the world development (see Chapters 5 and 6), are not of Asian origin. How have Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou integrated and synthesed the mythology and history of Far Eastern societies in order to understand and describe these Asian peoples? Considering that much of the information about the structure of a society is not apparent, to what degree was it possible to conduct a geographical discourse on the Indochinese countries in a totally objective and exhaustive way, taking into account that modern geography was considered an “objective science” based on the method of the “reasoned description”?

2.4.3 The landscape as a text

Other Anglo-Saxon geographers interrogate the concept of landscape. James and Nancy Duncan (1992) interpret the landscape as a text that is to be read in relationship to a context

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pratiques, géoscopie, le regard, géographie, le discours, géosémie, le système de signification, en se croisant rendent possible une géophilie, la passion ou l’ amour des paysages”.

made by other texts and mediums. These are integrated into the culture that is considered as a system of significations that participates in the reproduction or contestation of social or political relationships. They explore the work of Roland Barthes who attempts to decode the effects and the role of myths in our society, with the moral values that emerge through daily gestures and facts. He applies his theory in his book *Mythologies* where he observes the myths in contemporary society and the ideology that they depict: myth of purification, myth of efficiency, myth of the heroes through the figure of famous personalities. Thus, all objects of a discourse can receive, apart from its basic meaning, enough connotations to go into the field of signification, and the field of the values. In the first essay of *Writing Worlds* (Duncan and Duncan, 1992), James and Nancy Duncan select Roland Barthes's example of the " Blue Guide ...about the widely used Hachette World Travel Guides":

> which provides an early example of Barthes's landscape interpretation in which he analyses both the mythology surrounding travel and the claim of the travel guide to be a primary tool of landscape appreciation and an essential bourgeois educational aid to vision and cultural awareness (Duncan and Duncan, 1992, p.20)

James and Nancy Duncan conclude:

> For example, one might wish to look at tourist guides, travel advertising, Western novels, ethnographies and histories of the "exotic" parts of the world as "agents of blindness". As Westerners we are burdened with layers of orientalist discourse which blind us to non-Western realities ... This literature effectively empties signifiers of all "historical" (in Barthes's realist sense of true) meaning and refills them with Western constructions. The idea of utter difference as Barthes presents it in "empire of signs" may be of use in undermining our own taken-for-granted cultural categories through which we view landscapes. What Barthes wishes to avoid above all is the recuperation of all the categories of the utterly different Other (fictional or otherwise) into our own (Duncan and Duncan, 1992, p.36).

Along similar lines, we can ask: To what extent did the French geographers "refill" Indochinese culture and civilization "with western constructions" and "categories"? Because their work was "burdened with layers" of colonial discourse, did this "blind" them (and their readers) to Indochinese realities? In other words, can we perceive the world only according to the values of our own culture? We will question this unilateral viewpoint, and consider that French representations of Annamite landscape and society are the result of a necessary consultation between French researchers and that part of the Vietnamese elite which is also francophone. According to this hypothesis, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's geographical discourses would be related to both French and Indochinese (mainly Annamite) myths and

cultural values that are compatible with or do not contradict French colonial ideology. In this case, which standard cultural themes are privileged?

We may also ask: Is it possible to integrate a theory of signification in an analysis of the Indochinese writings of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou? If so, which one? How far is it possible to apply contemporary approaches to analyse geographical works written before the Second World War? The works of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were written when geography was considered a science that described objective reality using a visual approach. Geography was read as a discipline and not as a discourse within the fabric of the theories dealing with interpretations of social facts. It focused on the understanding of the way in which social life was variously embedded in place, space, and landscape, but the French concepts and thought were taken for granted and geographers were unaware of the current use of the concepts of discourse, language or semiology.

2.5 The Geographical Discourse and the Use of Metaphor/Analogy

Metaphor, from the Greek *metaphora* (transfer), is a symbolic expression used to convey the sense of an object by an image. According to the established conception of Pierre Fontanier (1968, p.99) it is a “trope by similarity, with no other link than that of a certain conformity or analogy.” More specifically, Vincent Berdoulay (1982) analyses metaphor as a language and a discursive method, and establishes a difference between similarity and metaphor, quoting Maurice Le Guern (cited in Berdoulay, 1982, p.576): "the similarity appeals to the imagination by the intermediary of the intellect, while the metaphor sets out to raise the sensitivity”. He also quotes Pierre Ricœur[38] who explains that "the metaphor is the rhetorical process by which the discourse liberates the power that certain functions have to redescribe the reality”. Pierre Ricœur conceives the metaphor as a major “reference” acting as “a strategy of discourse” which has the “power to redescribe the reality” (Ricoeur, 1975, p.10).

One of the major metaphors “redescribing” physical environment and regions in the French geographical discourse was the “reference” to the human body (see Chapter 4). Vincent Berdoulay investigates this use of the organism metaphor in geography and concludes, “it had the tendency to be generalized as a logic, as an implicit model of the understanding thought” (Berdoulay, 1982, p.584). Like most Vidalian geographers, Charles Robequain and Pierre

[38] Pierre Ricœur is a French contemporary philosopher. In his work (Ricoeur, 1975), he underlines the relationship between metaphor and model or archetype (especially in his first chapter).

Gourou used metaphors, by which the natural or material forms and societies are compared to life and human feelings (see the examples in sections 4.2 and 7.3.1.3). Using Pierre Ricœur's terminology, we could consider whether the metaphors used by our two geographers contribute to an iconic or even a poetic[39] representation of the Thanh Hoá or the Tonkin regions. To what end do the metaphors they use refer to French culture and contribute to construct a geographical discourse, which sets Indochinese regions within French thought (chapter 5, section 5.4.3.2)?

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have underlined the discursive approach of some Anglo-Saxon geographers who consider geographical texts as subjective, "imaginative", rhetorical and cultural constructions. In the next chapters, we will use their approach to deconstruct French geographical writings in order to explore the environmental and influential factors that impregnate French interpretations of landscapes and countries.

As well, we will follow Vincent Berdoulay's contextual approach by analysing Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's discourses within the "contexts" where they were produced. In doing so, we will "recontextualize" Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's discourses, and attempt, in a similar approach to Barthes, to "decode" the French "myths" which emerge through the metaphors they used and the interpretation of Indochinese landscapes and societies they brought forward. As Vincent Berdoulay suggests, we will also identify how Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou establish new geographical ground by opening their discourse to other disciplines at the "margin" of geography.

However, while we investigate the relationships between the political, cultural and societal environment of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou and the "order" of their discourses, we are ourselves immersed in the same way in the environment to which we belong. This is the problem of double reflection where the geographical thought of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou as well as the author of this research are circumscribed in their cultural and epistemological environment. As Ann Buttimer suggests, this reflective image, within its limits, and combined with the necessity of the French geographers to give an account of a society which belonged to a quite distinctive Vietnamese environment, is not unavoidably reductionist. It invites us to investigate the relevance of the geographical discourse in the understanding of

[39] Pierre Ricœur presents the metaphor as a "poem in miniature" in the context of a discourse (pp.168-190).

societies. It is towards that goal that the following chapters are developed, starting with the Vidalian discourse of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou.

CHAPTER 3

VIDALIAN GEOGRAPHY AND THE DISCOURSES OF CHARLES ROBEQUAIN AND PIERRE GOUROU

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the French school of geography was to describe and explain the ways of life (genres de vie) in a particular area, the means of livelihood of societies and their imposed constraints. French geographers analysed in their discourses the deep-rooted connections, woven slowly over long periods, between Man[1] and his environment, by looking at the various relationships between natural milieu[2] and life styles within individual regions. The roots of this French human and regional geography can be traced through the writings of Paul Vidal de la Blache, his students and his successors (referred to in Chapter I) and, more specifically, Jean Brunhes, Lucien Gallois and Albert Demangeon, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Vidalian geographical thought became the dominant methodology, due to the prestige of the institutions in which it was adopted and practised: the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* where the élite of the professors were (and still are) educated, the Sorbonne and other French universities. It also became strong because it conveyed western conceptual thoughts of the natural and human sciences as well as the desire to discover and understand regions and countries inherent to any geographer. Thus, the geographical discourse of Paul Vidal de la Blache and his disciples set the tone for geographical theses and works from the end of the 19th century to the inter-war period, and became established as the French 'classical' methodology. The methodology inherent in the French classical geographical discourse has acquired a legitimacy that has allowed it to continue over several generations.

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[1] See footnote 20 in chapter 1.

[2] The *milieu* is one of the essential elements of Vidal's thought. Its study together with the one of the *genres de vie* are the cardinal themes of the Vidalian discourse. The English equivalent term for *milieu* is, according to Vidal, 'environment' (Vidal de la Blache, 1922, p.7). In fact, Vidal provides the French term *milieu* with a distinct and biological meaning, associated with the idea of adaptation and harmony, where the milieu and its inhabitants are in interaction (See section 3.1.1). That is semantically different from the current and common notion of environment, where the ideas of adaptation and harmony are not substantial components.

The discourses of Robequain and Gourou were in the mainstream of this influential Vidalian discourse of regional geography. In this chapter, the classical components of the Vidalian epistemology used by French geographers, including Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, will be examined. The specific concepts, terminology and themes are developed in the first part of the chapter. The second part discusses the rhetoric of the Vidalian discourse. The third part examines the way in which the Vidalian discourse in general, and the two theses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou in particular, have promoted new geographical techniques and embraced contemporary questions. Our reflection in regard to the epistemological backgrounds of the geographical discourse (Chapter 2, section 2.2.2) is particularly applicable to this analysis. In the following chapter (Chapter 4), Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's variance from the core of Vidalian geography will be examined.

Charles Robequain's work was the first thesis of French regional geography on Indochina. He chose to study a province composed of two fundamental geographical regions: a mountainous one, occupied by different ethnic groups practicing often an itinerant agriculture based on rice cultivation, and a deltaic one, inhabited by the Annamite people, practicing an intensive irrigated rice cultivation. These two parts constitute respectively the two major sections of his thesis, *l' Arrière-pays* (pages 53 to 254), and *le Delta* (pages 255 to 584) (see Appendix C.1, "reduced structure of Charles Robequain's thesis"). Charles Robequain's methodology is based on a detailed investigation of the physical and human components of the country where each ethnic group is associated with a "natural region". His exhaustive investigation is sustained by information concerning physical, ethnological and economic aspects of Thanh Hoá available in the colonial institutions. Robequain's approach is also a dynamic one, where commodity flows and the transformations of the province were described.

In comparison with Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou chose to study a homogeneous region, and provides a circumscribed human orientation to his analysis, as the title of his thesis suggests, *The paysans of the Tonkin delta, étude de géographie humaine* (Appendix C.2, "Reduced structure of Pierre Gourou's thesis"). Pierre Gourou describes, more than the physical environment, the "landscape" which is "moulded" by the Annamite society. His methodology embraces Vidalian conceptions where societies are associated with specific environments, but through a more demographic and socio-cultural approach, and the use of new cartographic and statistical tools to understand the high densities of the population of the Tonkin delta. Pierre Gourou describes the agricultural methods, the village life and its handicraft and market

activities in a sympathetic and appreciative way (pp.349-553), and begins to look also at the region in terms of "problems" (pp.569-574). For Pierre Gourou, the major issue for a geographer who investigates a region involves the grasping of its "civilization" (*La civilisation paysanne*, pp.575-578 of his thesis).

3.2 The Regional Framework and Rural Orientation of Vidalian Theses

The problematic of the Vidalian approach is established through the basic concepts of *milieu* (environment), and *genre de vie* [3](way of life), together with the notion of *adaptation* (of human groups to the *milieu* through *genre de vie*). It is at a scale of some thousand square kilometers, corresponding to a *region*, that these interrelationships and these concepts are studied. For Vidal de la Blache and his disciples and successors, there exists a relationship between this system of thought and geographical concepts.

3.2.1 The concept of milieu

This notion of milieu is approached by French geographers through the problematic of the relationships between societies and their natural environment. It privileges a "possibilist" approach where the study focuses on the interaction between Man and Nature, avoiding a unilateral determinism of Nature on Man or Man on Nature.

3.2.1.1 The concept of milieu and its naturalist orientation

It was at an early stage that the physical environment was addressed by philosophers when considering the relationship of societies to their environment. For example, in Ancient Greece, Hippocras conceived the idea that the elements of the milieu in which people live, such as the winds, the nature of the waters, the seasons, and more generally the climate, influenced their physical and moral characteristics (Hippocrate de Cos, 1967) and differentiated them from other societies. As well, the Greek philosopher Aristotle brought to his discourse the problem of the determinism of the climate on societies. In an article which interrogates the Greek origin of the concept of climate, Jean François Staszak (1992) writes:

> Thus the Aristotle discourse is interested in the distribution of the warm and the cold, of the dry and the wet on the earth, in order to determine the influence on men and their societies. (p.115).

[3] Actually, Paul Vidal de la Blache borrowed the expression from the philosopher of the *Lumières*, Montesquieu, who in his treatise on the spirit of the laws (*De l ' Esprit des Lois*) written in the 18th century, sought to demonstrate that the laws were relative to the way of life of the people (Montesquieu, 1973), see below section 3.2.1.1.

In the 18th century, the Baron de Montesquieu (1973) brought forward these ideas when arguing that the climate and the nature of the soil determine the laws of societies and influence human social behaviour[4]. He gave the example of people in cold countries who appear, according to his information, to be more courageous and self confident but less emotional than those in hot countries[5].

In the 19th century, Jean Baptiste de Lamark's ideas on adaptation and Charles Darwin's views on evolution took over from these classical theories in underlining the influence of the environment on Man. The study of the relationships between nature and societies was also of great significance in French academic geography from the late 19th century and constituted the main problematic and the departure point for regional research (Berdoulay and Soubeyran, 1991). Thus the concept of "natural region" emerged, initially developed by a colleague of Vidal de la Blache, Lucien Gallois, who, with Vidal de la Blache, coedited the *Annales de Géographie*. In his major work, entitled *Natural regions and countries' names*, Lucien Gallois (1908) defined the "natural region" by its physical elements such as its relief, climate and soil and, more fundamentally, by its geological conditions. Further, he believed that "it is in nature that the principle of any geographical division must be found"[6] (Gallois, 1908, p.222). Thus, French geographers fixed the limits of, and structured their regional geography through, the physical sub-divisions of a country, which corresponded to a distinct natural region and a homogenous *milieu*. Charles Robequain's conception of the Thanh Hoá region is derived from this naturalist approach and Lucien Gallois' geomorphological conceptualization of regional space[7]. Chapter 1 volume I "The Structure and the Relief: the Natural Regions"; and Chapter 1 volume II "The Formation and the Natural Regions of the Delta" of Charles Robequain's thesis attest to its foundations.

Consequently, at the time when Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou wrote their theses, the abstract idea of *milieu* (environment) reflected the naturalist vision that French scientific

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[4] In an article written in 1963 and published by the *Revue Belge de Géographie* (Gourou, 1970, pp.27-34), Pierre Gourou expressed his criticism towards Montesquieu's physical determinism and qualified his 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th chapters as "thoughtless and presumptuous" (p.27). Pierre Gourou was also aware of the fact that Montesquieu added up all the "prejudices" that temperate countries had and still have in regard to the more southern countries (p.33).

[5] By extension, European inhabitants contemplated their European climates as belonging to the "temperate area" with "average" or "moderate" climatic conditions quite favorable to human activities and development while the Polar and Intertropical areas were perceived as too cold or too hot for humans (see Chapter 5, section 5.2.2).

[6] "*Je crois en effet que c' est dans la nature qu' il faut chercher le principe de toute division géographique*".

[7] See in Chapter 4, section 4.2.

researchers and geographers at the time had of the Earth. These naturalist principles and the wish to give a human signification to the natural region led geographers to grasp the relationship between the different elements of the natural environment and societies. This investigation is expressed in their writings by the use of terms such as “combination”, “complexities”, “totality”, “composite”, “interrelationships” or/and “adaptation”. By way of illustration, in *Principes de Géographie Humaine*, the posthumous but basic book of Paul Vidal de la Blache’s thought (1926) [8], which consists of writings published between 1912-1918, as well as unfinished articles, he notes:

> [The phenomena of human geography] are everywhere related to the environment, itself the creature of a combination of physical conditions (p.7)
>
> Botanical geography has been largely responsible for light thrown upon such a conception of environment ...(p.7)
>
> Such is the lesson of ecology, for which we are indebted to research in botanical geography ...(p.9)
>
> In conclusion, this research results in an essentially geographical concept: that of environment as composite, capable of grouping and holding together heterogeneous beings in mutual vital interrelationships...(p.10)
>
> ...every area with a given relief, location and climate, is a composite environment where groups of elements - indigenous, ephemeral, migratory or surviving from former ages - are concentrated, diverse but united by a common adaptation to the environment. (pp.10-11).

3.2.1.1 The Vidalian themes of adaptation and harmony

It is through the notion of adaptation that Paul Vidal de la Blache investigated the dialectic argument of Man/*milieu*, and this notion of adaptation constitutes one of the basic themes of regional rhetoric. In 1913, during one of his academic lectures at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, he explained (Vidal de la Blache, 1913):

[8] Or in its original version in (Vidal de la Blache 1922, pp.5-7).

> The idea of milieu, with its diverse expressions, becomes clear while correlating and synonymous with adaptation. It is manifested by a series of phenomena that are linked together and put in movement by general causes. It is by this that we are brought back to these causes of climate, structures, vital competition, which set in motion a multitude of special activities of forms and humans[9]. (p.297)

To formulate this adaptation of societies to their environment, French geographers made use of the unifying principle of "harmonization". They integrated this notion of harmony, looking at the adjustment between human and physical elements, into the totality of the environment that they constitute. This has some roots within Greek philosophy, where this notion begins to appear in the discourse of pre-Socratic philosophers (studied in Dumont, 1988, pp.502-504) and then Plato, (1991) as an order regulating the elements of a totality.

By the end of the 19th century, most French geographers used this concept to construct the region or the environment they were studying. This philosophical framework was close to the Romanticist notion of an ideal association and unity between Man and Nature (Chapter IV, 4.3.3), due to "the secret harmony which is established between the Earth and the populations that she is feeding" (Reclus, 1866). Paul Vidal de la Blache (1903) wrote:

> But the geographic individuality does not require that a land should be constructed on the same plan. Despite a lack of unity in the structure, there could be an energetic harmony; a harmony inside which real and deep contrasts within the physiognomy of France are attenuated ….[10]. (p.14)

Following Vidal de la Blache's notion of harmony, his disciples articulated their regional geography through the image of a regional unity developed from a deep "cooperation between the natural and human elements" (Demangeon, 1973, p.456). Thus, the "geographical personality" of a region with its particular physiognomy, its way of life and human practices which were adapted to its natural environment, were related to its physical conditions along with the history and techniques of the society which was residing in it (good examples are seen in the

[9] *"L' idée de milieu, dans ces expressions diverses, se précise comme corrélative et synonyme d' adaptation. Elle se manifeste par des séries de phénomènes qui s' enchaînent entre eux et sont mis en mouvement par des causes générales. C' est par elle que nous sommes incessamment ramenés à ces causes de climat, de structure, de concurrence vitale, qui donnent le branle à une foule d' activités spéciales des formes et des êtres".*

[10] *"Mais l' individualité géographique n' exige pas qu' une contrée soit construite sur le même plan. A défaut d' unité et de structure, il peut y avoir une harmonie vivante; une harmonie dans laquelle s' atténuent les contrastes réels et profonds qui entrent dans la physionomie de la France …"*

works of Jean Bruhnes[11] and Albert Demangeon). It was achieving its totality in a harmonious way, conceived through the regional diversity where different geomorphologic but interrelated areas coexist in a complementary way. In this vein, Charles Robequain (p.7) introduces his province as "an harmonious grouping ... made of varieties" (p.7, see the full quotation in Chapter 4, section 4.2.1) and concludes by demonstrating that the duty and the greatest work of French colonization is to lead and construct this regional harmony and, de facto, "unification" (p.613). As well, in his thesis, Pierre Gourou (p.575) constructs his regional landscape through "the harmonious relationships" built by the Annamite peasant "with his surrounding *milieu*"[12].

Both Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou applied this western concept of harmony when writing about the "Asian pearl". Here the concern was to transmit and reveal the French attachment to the Indochinese countries, and to introduce the reader to its traditions and culture. Mostly, these were regarded as bright and in social harmony, but belonging to the past (Chapter 5).

3.2.1.2 Vidalian "possibilism"

The epistemological debates around Vidalian possibilism are related to the question of the determinism of the *milieu*, according to which a society is shaped by the characteristics of its natural environment. Paul Vidal de la Blache was at variance with the Darwinist scheme because he considered that nature offers a definite range of possibilities from which Man can select.

[11] Jean Brunhes did his thesis not on a French region, but about the Iberian peninsula and North Africa. He focussed on the irrigation theme and Mediterranean and Arabic civilizations' ability to control irrigation techniques (Brunhes, 1902). A few years after the publication of his thesis, he became the first geographer to conceive a " human geography " and to write a book about its method, its tools, the "essential facts of human geography which have to be observed: houses and highways, cultivation and stock-raising, destructive occupation of the soil, destruction of the plants and animals, exploitation of minerals" (Brunhes, 1910). Jean Brunhes went also on missions to the Far East where he studied the new roads opened in 1923 from Annam to Laos with the same colonial convictions and confidence about modern communications as Charles Robequain. He wrote: "Spoke only of the present which constitutes now such a progress that it stresses, without exaggeration, the beginning of a new age for the Laotian countries" (Brunhes, 1923, p.426) (*Parlons seulement du présent qui constitue désormais un tel progrès qu' il marque, sans aucune exagération, le début d' une ère nouvelle pour les pays laotiens*). He also wrote more general articles on Indochina, such as the one on the "Human Geography" of Indochina in the encyclopedic book "*Un Empire Colonial Français: L' Indochine*" (Maspero, 1930, p.53, vol.I) Like Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, he ascribed a major geographical significance to photography (at this time, the autochrome technique, first colored photographs) and worked for the "*Archives de la Planète*", where photographers and cineastes were exploring the world to constitute a collection of images. In Indochina, he took numerous images mainly from Laos. Charles Robequain quotes in his bibliography his general book on human geography, but neither he nor Pierre Gourou mention Brunhes' Indochinese articles. Gourou did not meet Brunhes when he was in Indochina and said: "I had no contact with other geographers (except Robequain) who have covered Indochina", personal letter, 5 May 1995.

[12] This notion of harmony is related as well to some colonial romantic thought, investigated in chapter 5, 5.3.

Straight after Vidal de la Blache's posthumous work the *Principles of Human Geography* was published (1922), the historian Lucien Febvre[13] in his treatise *La Terre et l' évolution humaine Introduction géographique à l' histoire* (Febvre, 1922) clearly exposed the debate between "determinism" and what he defined as Vidalian "possibilism". The basis and components of Vidalian geography, along with the idea that the adaptation of societies to their natural environments is not passive but active and builds specific forms of civilisation and humanized landscapes, was accepted by geographers. Furthermore, the possibilism allowed Geography to define its originality in contrast with other social sciences such as sociology which had an emphasis on ethnology. Geographers studied in a practical way how societies develop the natural environment where they are living, stressing the characteristics of their agriculture and handicraft activities. This confirmed the boundaries between Vidalian geography and the Durkheim school of sociology; the former studying the relationship between the societies and their environments, the latter the morphology (or "anatomy") of societies that geographical factors might influence but only in a limited way. This disciplinary line of demarcation characterises partly Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's descriptive approaches to Indochinese societies (see Chapter 7).

However, the Vidalian approach was not a homogeneous one, and the nature of the relationships between societies and environment was interpreted differently according to the personality of the geographer, his understanding of Paul Vidal de la Blache's geographical conceptions and the characteristic of the region he was studying. As an example, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou construct two different discourses in regard to the relationships between Indochinese societies and the Asian natural environment. Pierre Gourou's discourse is closer to Paul Vidal de la Blache's geographical conception than Charles Robequain's, in so far as his argument was built upon the humanization of the environment and the distributions of population densities (Section 3.4). Pierre Gourou, like Paul Vidal de la Blache, emphasizes the role of Man. Vidal de la Blache (1913) had written:

[13] Lucien Febvre was the founder, with Marc Bloch, of the review *Annales d' Histoire Economique et Sociales* (called now *Annales (Economie-Sociétés-Civilisations*)), which was conceived as a link and to create a dialogue between generations of historians and researchers and to get through the established boundaries between the writings and arguments of geographers, economists, sociologists and historians. Lucien Febvre aimed to renovate the historical analysis of the economic and social structures, of the techniques and mentalities of civilizations. Similarly to Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, Charles Robequain and mainly Pierre Gourou attributed a major importance to the concept of civilization. Marc Bloch's career was terminated in 1944 when the Nazis shot him. We have mentioned already that Pierre Gourou was quite aware of the works of these two historians (see footnote 4 in Chapter 1, section 2.3.4 in Chapter 2, and footnote 93 in Chapter 7).

> ...Man, directly or indirectly, by his presence, by his works or by the counterpoint of his works, always attracts attention. He is also one of the powerful agents who works to modify the surfaces. As such, he takes side with the first geographical factors ... We can say that on him the present equilibrium of the living world is dependent[14]. (p.298).

On the first page of the human part of his thesis (p.109), Pierre Gourou echoes this by stating that "Man is the most important geographical reality of the delta" (*L' homme est le fait géographique le plus important du Delta*). In other words, with Pierre Gourou, it is the Annamite peasant who moulds the region, and it is in regard to their life and activities that Gourou describes the reality of the Tonkin delta[15]. From this point of view, Pierre Gourou's or even Paul Vidal de la Blache's discourses move frequently away from possibilism by considering that societies are "one of the powerful agents" who work "to modify the surfaces".

In contrast, Charles Robequain's approach considers that it is the physical environment which is "one of the powerful agents which works to modify the surfaces", and Charles Robequain's discourse is often more connected to natural determinism than with possibilism (see in Chapter 4). But this has to be related to the fact that the Thanh Hoá region is more often devastated by typhoon floods or other natural misfortunes than the Tonkin delta (see below).

Furthermore, Vincent Berdoulay (1988, pp.75-87) proposes an open-minded interpretation of this possibilist discourse, which gives rise to a particular, modern theory of the man/environment relationship. It thus escapes from the current dichotomy between physical and human geography where the first entity determines unilaterally the second. The evolutionist and positivist discourses, whose problematic was based on the search for dominant linear evolutions and general laws, were consequently tinted with determinism. In contrast, the possibilist discourse is based on the search for the individual and the human-ecological systems. These relate to particular environments but are transmissible to others (through the notions of "contingency[16]", "ways of life" and the "diffusionist[17]" theory). Vincent Berdoulay (1988) sees

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[14] "*… l' homme, directement ou indirectement, par sa présence, par ses œuvres ou par le contre-coup de ses œuvres, s' impose toujours à l' attention. Lui aussi est un des agents puissants qui travaillent à modifier les surfaces. Il se range à ce titre parmi les facteurs géographiques de premier ordre … On peut dire que de lui dépend l' équilibre actuel du monde vivant.*"

[15] Furthermore, Gourou said, "The action of Man is determined by the civilization to which he belongs. Nothing can be done against this" (see Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou 29-8-95).

[16] In Vidalian geography, the contingencies are the local conditions (topography etc.) which structure the region. Contingence is also a philosophical concept, used to characterise a reality which is linked with circumstances and not necessity. The acts of a autonomous person are always contingent. This notion conterbalances excessive determinism.

[17] Diffusionism is a theory according to which characteristics of a particular society come from neighboring contacts and adoptions. With diffusionism, Vidalian geographers search for a common origin to similar social or technical facts.

in these Vidalian conceptions the philosophical influence of Emmanuel Kant's conceptions: "the central thesis of Kant according to which human thought takes an active part in knowledge" (p.78). Thus, through a neo-Kantist philosophy developed from the end of the 19th century, French geographers like Paul Vidal de la Blache, Jean Bruhnes and Albert Demangeon introduced the idea of human organizational autonomy, where societies create different forms of geographical organization by putting into relationship selected elements. This choice, however, is limited by the existence of the natural mechanisms acting in the physical environment.

Vincent Berdoulay (1988) also perceives some convergence between these Vidalian understandings and the later modernist structuralist approaches developed during the 20th century. For example Jean Piaget[18] "tries to establish the precedence of the action in the relationship organism/milieu, rejecting any determinism or mechanical adaptation of one to the other" (Piaget, 1947, pp.80-81) while Claude Levi-Strauss[19] "insists on the cultural dimension of Man" and comprehends "the systems of codes peculiar to human societies". Claude Levi-Strauss "underlines the belonging to the natural world" and identifies the social structures which are constructed through cultural and intellectual procedures. These streams of thought could also, to some extent, be found in Pierre Gourou's writings, in his descriptions of the effectiveness of peasant achievements and of the social dimension of the Annamite world (Chapter 7)[20]. Compared to Pierre Gourou, Charles Robequain's discourse has similarities with the ethnological tradition of Marcel Mauss[21], in that he evokes (p.100, and Chapters 2 and 3 in the second book of his thesis) the "social framework" of the Thanh Hoá mountain-dwelling societies. But he does not connect the economic aspects to the other aspects of the social life in the way that Marcel Mauss did to demonstrate the social reality of a society (see Chapter 7, 7.3.1.1).

In summary, Vidalian thought borrowed eclectically its geographical conceptions from diverse philosophies and doctrines. Through their influence, the geographical explanation is theoretically based on a systemic approach, where the human aspects of the regional landscape

[18] Piaget was a Swiss psychologist, who conceived that human logic is the "mirror" of human thought, and that the human intelligence has the potential to create structures (Piaget, 1986).

[19] Chaude Lévi-Srauss was a French anthropologist and ethnologist who invented structuralism by expressing the importance of the totality of systems in order to observe and understand societies (Levi-Strauss, 1958). See footnote 118 in Chapter 7.

[20] However, Pierre Gourou does not aim to analyse in depth the interdependent relationship between societies and natural environment in a structural way, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss did to express the logic of "primitive" cultures.

[21] Marcel Mauss was a French anthropologist who studied the social life of ethnic groups through their factual aspects.

are combined with the physical ones. Thus, in *Principles of Human Geography,* Paul Vidal de la Blache (1926, pp.3-4) wrote:

> Human Geography, therefore, is not to be contrasted with a geography from which human interests are excluded. Indeed such has never existed except in the minds of specialists. But our science offers a new conception of the relationships between earth and man - a conception resulting from a more synthetic knowledge of the physical laws governing our earth and of the relations between the living beings which inhabit it.

But, in practice, the discourse of Vidalian geographers such as Charles Robequain remains more analytical than systemic. However, this theoretically systemic approach was expressed through the concept of *genre de vie*.

3.2.2 The concept of *genre de vie* and the notion of civilization

The link between the natural environment and human societies was established around the key Vidalian concept of *genre de vie,* considered as the way a society responds to the constraints of the *milieu.* It is the totality of habits by which man affirms his material existence, choosing from among the natural resources those which are more convenient to his aptitudes and traditions. According to Paul Vidal de la Blache (1911, p.194),

> A mature *genre de vie* implies methodical and consistent action vis-à-vis Nature or, geographically speaking, on the physiognomy of countries. Without doubt, the action of man is felt on the environment from the day when his hand was armed with a tool ... But everything else is the result of systematically organized habits ... which are reinforced through successive generations ... which leave their mark on the spirit shaping in a particular way all progressive forces[22] (p.194).

The *genres de vie* were inscribed in the history (*les temps longs*) of the societies. They were classified according to the type of economic activity or material life which was dominant in the society such as pastoral, fishing-hunting-gathering, etc. Pierre Gourou's difference lies in the fact that he does not use the expression *genre de vie* in his writings because of the variety of the Annamite activities (refer to Appendix H, Pierre Gourou's interview). For Pierre Gourou, the Red River delta region was not circumscribed by a specific *genre de vie*, with a well-defined economic activity, but by its "peasant civilization", along with socio-cultural particularities. In

[22] "*Un genre de vie constitué implique une action méthodique et continue, partant très forte, sur sa nature, ou, pour parler en géographe, sur la physionomie des contrées. Sans doute, l' action de l' homme s' est fait sentir sur son 'environnement' dès le jour où sa main s' est armée d' un instrument (…). Mais tout autre est l' effet d' habitudes organisées et systématiques, creusant de plus en plus profondément leur ornière, s' imposant par la force acquise aux générations successives, imprimant leur marque sur les esprits, tournant dans un sens déterminé toutes les forces de progrès*".

contrast, Charles Robequain uses the concept to study the Thanh Hoá region in its diversity distinguishing, in a Vidalian way, the nomadic from the sedentary *genres de vie* of the Indochinese rice societies (Chapter 4, section 4.1.1; Chapter 7, section 7.3.1).

From this concept of *genre de vie* emerges the larger and more general notion of 'civilization', applied in French 19th century writings along with an idea of progress and evolution which were linked with Lamarckism[23] and Darwinist philosophies. In this view, world civilizations developed over time a hierarchy, and the most advanced ones had the responsibility of bringing their know-how and "superior" principles to the less advanced ones[24] (see Chapters 5 and 7). More especially for our purpose, the civilization concept is used in the discourses of French historians and Vidalian geographers. Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou employed it to distinguish the mountainous societies from the Annamite ones and more generally Indochinese societies from French society. Emerging from his thesis work, Pierre Gourou considered it crucial to the conception of human geography (Chapter 7, section 7.4.2.). Through this rather imprecise concept, the behaviour of societies are considered partly the result of systematically organized customs, traditions, images and symbols of the world[25] inherited from successive generations and partly the result of a "level" of techniques and a degree of domination of the environment. According to Paul Vidal de la Blache (1926), the level of this degree of domination leads to the idea of a hierarchy of civilizations where advanced civilizations such as "our (European) highly civilised countries" (Vidal de la Blache, 1926, p.319), and the Chinese civilization are opposed to civilizations in stagnation and isolation (Vidal de la Blache, 1926, p.325). Paul Vidal de la Blache conceived his geography of civilizations by looking at the technical elements of Man's adaptation to the environment: "Tools and Raw Materials", "Means of Sustenance", "Building Materials", "Human Establishments." He thought of the Chinese (more precisely, the Han dynasties and its descendants) as belonging to a superior civilization, able to undertake a method of "systematic colonization" (pp. 68-69), with "prestige" and "radiating attraction" (p.468). Paul Vidal de la Blache was also aware of the spread of

[23] Jean Baptiste Lamarck demonstrated in his treatise *Philosophie Zoologique* (Lamarck, 1957, Bocquet, 1984) that human life takes in and acquires morphological characteristics in conformity to its natural environment and these may become hereditary.

[24] By way of illustration, we can quote the writer François René de Chateaubriand in his major work *Mémoires d' Outre-tombe*: "The French, going across Rome, left there their principles: it is what always happens when the conquest is accomplished by a people more advanced in civilization than the people who is subjected to this conquest … ("*Les français, en traversant Rome, y ont laissé leurs principes: c' est ce qui arrive toujours quand la conquête est accomplie par un peuple plus avancé en civilisation que le peuple qui subit cette conquête*") (Chateaubriand, 1965, p.XII, vol.III).

[25] The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1979) called this "habitus" (beliefs, attitudes...) common to a social group which extends over a geographical area or domain. But French geographers do not explore sociological sciences to deliver the logic of the social practices and behaviours of individuals. Bourdieu died in January 2002.

inventions[26], such as the plough, throughout civilizations across the Old World and from Mauritania to China (Vidal de la Blache 1926, pp.68-69, 461-466, 468).

Thus, in a context where the development of modern industry, techniques and sciences was a central issue in the West, French geographical discourse focused on the technical skills of societies or civilizations.

3.2.3 The region and its various interpretations

3.2.3.1 The region according to Vidal de la Blache

Paul Claval (1992) retraces the formation and evolution of the Vidalian idea of region. He notes how Paul Vidal de la Blache, in his first geographical works about the Mediterranean world, constructed his idea of region by making an analysis of population density as the starting point of his approach. Paul Vidal de la Blache (1926) [27] emphasized the use of demographic statistics drawn from the census data and maps that cartographic and administrative offices "in almost all the principal countries of the world today" (Vidal de la Blache, 1926, p.10) have instituted and developed since the end of the 19th century for a more efficient administration of the inhabitants by the state. He considered these official demographic sources are a major tool to perceive the nature of the constraints of the *milieu* and the human adaptations to them.

> One of the most suggestive relationships is that between number of inhabitants and any given area, in other words, density of population. If detailed statistics of population are compared with equally detailed maps, such as are available in almost all the principal countries of the world today, it is possible, by analysis, to find a connection between human groups and physical conditions. Here we touch upon one of the basic problems of human occupation. For the existence of a dense population - a large group of human beings living together in the smallest space consistent with certainty of a livelihood for the entire group - means, if one stops to think of it, a victory which can only be won under rare and unusual circumstances. (Vidal de la Blache, 1926, p.10)

In their theses, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were aware of the significance Paul Vidal de la Blache placed on the density of the population, because of his view that the densities are in a systematic relationship with both the physical and economic conditions. Both of them studied carefully the unequal distribution of the population and Charles Robequain's interpretation of this inequality is similar to that asserted in Paul Vidal de la Blache's writings,

[26] See above, footnote 17

[27] Or in the original French edition (Vidal de la Blache, 1922, p.15).

where the natural conditions and the *genres de vie* or trading circumstances are considered in the explanation. For example, Charles Robequain (pp.502–503) wrote:

> *...it is the sand-bars and the northern low lands which show, in this Delta, the biggest and the most compact block of high densities. Almost everywhere, we count more than 400 habitants per km², whether because of the large area of the rice fields with two harvests and the rarity of uncultivated lands, or because of the resources supplied by the sea*[28]*.* (p.502)

> *It is immediately at the east of the country town... that the density rises the most; if we ignore the big cities, it is probably one of the highest of the whole of Indochina: 604km2 for Duong Thuy ... Thus, to the earth resources: double harvest of rice, various products of the Dâtbai, here are added the profits engendered by the developing of a modern industry at Hàm Rong and also the big expansion of the town of Thanh Hoá; this town, administrative and trade centre, needs builders, navvies, carpenters for its construction, coolies for transport, resellers for the concentration or the dispersal of goods piled up in warehouses; most of these workers live close to the town*[29]*.*

This last perspective partly corresponds to the theory of Emile Levasseur[30], where the reasons for the concentration of regional populations are linked to the proximity of active economic areas such as urban centers rather than to natural features. This refutation of rigid physical determinism has to be put in the context of the Industrial Revolution. Here nature is conceived as an instrument at the service of humans that science and human techniques are able to control, and where industrial areas began to concentrate high population densities.

Otherwise, according to Paul Vidal de la Blache, in general, territorial entities never remained isolated. The inhabitants of one region exchanged their resources and goods with those of other regions. Paul Vidal de la Blache (1873) outlines this practice in his early writings, describing the exchanges between the Mediterranean mountainous regions and those of the adjoining plains. Later, he expanded upon this notion with the idea of transportation and

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28 *... ce sont les cordons littoraux et les basses terres septentrionales qui montrent, dans ce delta, le bloc le plus gros et le plus compact de fortes densités. Presque partout, on y compte plus de 400 habitants au km2, soit à cause de la grande étendue des rizières à 2 récoltes et de la rareté des terre incultes, soit à cause des ressources dispensées par la mer*.

29 *C' est immédiatement à l' Est du chef-lieu, ... que la densité se hausse le plus; si l' on excepte les grands centres urbains, elle est sans doute l' une des plus fortes de l' Indochine entière: 604km2 pour Du'o'ng Thúy ... ; en effet, aux ressources de la terre: double moisson de riz, produits variés des dâtbai, s' ajoutent ici les profits qu' engendrent le développement d' une industrie moderne à Hàm Rong, et aussi la croissance de la ville même de Thanh Hoá; celle-ci, centre administratif et commercial, a besoin de maçons, de terrassiers, de charpentiers pour ses constructions, de coolies pour les transports, de revendeurs pour la concentration ou l' écoulement des denrées entassées dans les entrepôts; la plupart de ces travailleurs habitent les environs.*

30 At the end of the 19th century, Emile Levasseur developed "the laws of social attraction", in order to interpret the distribution of the densities of population. In his first lecture on economic history and geography at the Collège de France, he stated (Levasseur, 1984, p.69): "The last word remains to Man. It remains to him not only because he is the artisan, the active and intelligent agent of the production and that, thanks to his science, he is able to turn for his use the forces of nature that before he ignored or neglected, because he chooses to a certain extent the places where he practices his action …".

31 "*La région vidalienne est nouvelle en ce sens qu' elle ne décrit pas une mosaïque de paysages mais donne une vision des mouvements, des relations et des imbrications des êtres régionaux. Les régions d' un pays sont des pièces qui entretiennent des rapports entre elles et forment un tout comme une mécanique*".

circulation, thus allowing the regions to co-operate in larger territorial constructions. André-Louis Sanguin points out,

> The Vidalian region is new in the way that it does not describe a mosaic of landscapes but gives a view of the movement, relations and imbrications of the regional beings. The regions are compositions that entertain between them relationships and form a totality like machinery[31]. (Sanguin, 1993, p.328)

Building on this last idea, Paul Claval (1993b) notices that the regional approach implied thus a constant dialectic of spaces, (pp.55-62). He considers that Paul Vidal de la Blache investigated the regional realities in their different aspects and scales as the proper basis of the vitality and power of the nation. Paul Vidal de la Blache injected his ideas into the regional debate and planning deliberations as part of the administrative and economic reforms, which were on the political agenda of the Third Republic. According to Paul Vidal de la Blache, French diversity, through its local and regional aspects and spatial scales, has to be identified as an opposite of Parisian centralisation (Berdoulay, 1981, p.29). This dialectic of scale was, however, not particularly developed in Charles Robequain or Pierre Gourou's theses. Thus, the Thanh Hoá region and the Tonkin plain were only occasionally analysed within their location, connections and relationships with the other regions of Indochina or the Asian countries. Charles Robequain was more inquiring of the supposedly internal "harmony" or "unity" of Thanh Hoá, while Pierre Gourou ascertained that the Tonkin plain was "living within itself, and for a long time closed to any foreign ethnic addition" (p.15). We could assert that the official authoritative colonial debate on the developing of French Indochinese regions was not of the same nature as in the home country. For Indochina, the issues were intrinsically more focused on economic exploitation or colonial control. The task of geographers was, through their detailed monographs, to give accurate information on Indochinese regions in order to develop their economic resources and allocate their cultural resources, rather than to discuss Indochinese "Personality, Identity and Organization"[32]. Consequently, the motives and issues underlying the works of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were essentially different from the one of geographers writing about regions in France, even if their works refer to notions used in or derived from Vidalian geography.

More concretely, what were the available criteria to delimit a geographical region? In the introduction to the high school geography manual that Paul Vidal de la Blache published in 1903

[32] I use here Paul Claval's words (Claval, 1994), from an article he wrote in regard to French scholars, French identity and the emergence of the French school of geography.

in collaboration with Pierre Camena d' Almeira, he wrote "it would be not very wise, in a geographical matter, to adopt historical or administrative divisions as a guide", (quote in Lefort, 1992, p.175). He upholds the notion of *pays* (country) which can be applied to the soil as well as to the inhabitants[33], compared with the notion of natural region. For example, in his paper addressed to the *Société d' Economie Sociale* in 1904 (Vidal de la Blache, 1904)[34], he presents the French *pays* where the association of nature-human-society formed a particular "landscape" and "way of life", characterized by the fact that:

> ... there exists a linking, a connection, between these geographical and social facts, between the soil, the cultures, the activities, the groupings, the habitat. This connection, however, is not an absolute necessity, to which duration could not change anything. Because, on the bedrock provided by nature, is constructed a whole series of combinations in which man, according to his tastes and aptitudes, the circumstances and the social conditions, had the biggest role. A change occurring in the cultivation, in the labour force, the trade opportunities would be enough to modify, if not invert the equilibrium connected with these conditions. However, it is certain that fixed and permanent things stay and will always stay, which, despite all the modifications that the contemporary time multiplies more than ever, represent the permanence of the influences of the soil. The question is thus asked: how can we gauge what is permanent and solid, what will stay, from what is condemned to disappear or be transformed? Here is where the geographical method can bring a certain enlightenment[35] ... (quote in Sanguin 1993, p.256).

This idea of "linking" and "connection" was influenced by a positivist philosophy, which was dominant in France at the time of Paul Vidal de la Blache. According to this philosophy, traced back to Auguste Comte (1990), human thought must be aware of combining the theories

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[33] French geographers used the expression *pays*, giving it the meaning of a territory inhabited by a community and constituting with it a named entity. As the novelist and poet Paul Valéry writes (Valéry, 1947, p.117): "*Entre une terre et le peuple qui l' habite, entre l' homme et l' étendue, la figure, le relief, le régime des eaux, le climat, la faune, la flore, la substance du sol, se forment peu à peu des relations réciproques qui sont d' autant plus nombreuses et entremêlées que le peuple est fixé depuis plus longtemps dans le pays*."

[34] This paper has been reproduced in André-Louis Sanguin (1993, pp.245-257). In this work, André-Louis Sanguin republished some of Vidal's major articles.

[35] *"...il existe un enchaînement, une liaison entre ces faits géographiques et sociaux, entre le sol, les cultures, les occupations; les groupements, les habitations. Cette liaison, toutefois, n' est pas une nécessité absolue, à laquelle le temps ne saurait rien changer. Car sur le fondement fourni par la nature, s' échaffaude toute une série de combinaisons dans lesquelles l' homme, suivant ses gôuts et ses aptitudes, suivant les circonstances et les conditions sociales, a eu la plus grande part. Il suffit qu' une modification se produise dans les cultures, la main-d' oeuvre, les débouchés, pour que cet équilibre de conditions puisse être, sinon renversé, du moins modifié. Seulement il est certain qu' il reste et qu' il restera toujours quelque chose de fixe, de permanent, qui, à travers toutes les modifications que multiplie plus que jamais l' époque actuelle, représente la perpétuité et la permanence des influences du sol. La question se pose ainsi: comment peut-on dégager ce qui est permanent et solide, et ce qui restera, de ce qui est condamné à disparaître ou du moins se transformer? Voilà sur quoi la méthode géographique peut apporter une certaine lumière ... ."*

able to co-ordinate the observable facts of the world, in order to produce a general and related knowledge of its various physical and human phenomena.

Consequently, this positivist basis of Vidalian thought implicates a rational knowledge and a materialist approach, within an inductive reasoning, where the analytical description of the physical, demographic, and economic facts are first observed, located and often charted. They are then linked together to explain the distributions by direct causalities within the region. In this logic, the 'objective' knowledge and the presentation of the economic and social 'reality' of a region are based on a personal and factual contact with the field and direct inquiries in the villages. Any creditable geographer was mindful to complete long walks and spend time with the inhabitants in the region chosen for his thesis. Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were the first French regional geographers working on the Asian field in a position to spend time and visit the country and the societies they were studying[36].

3.2.3.2 The regional frame of the disciples of Vidal de la Blache

While Paul Vidal de la Blache himself reflected on the delimitation of regional boundaries, his disciples showed some flexibility in the choice and the justification of their regional frameworks. Despite the regional conception of Paul Vidal de la Blache, the regional theses which drew from his tutoring do not seem to follow an established theory about the notion of region, and try to describe the diversity of the geographical reality of their regional territory, that is to say an area of some 1000 km². It was on an elementary base rarely discussed in the dissertation that the regional theses of his disciples were presented. Paul Claval (1993a, pp.149-158), observes how Vidal de la Blache's concepts of region and *pays* were dispossessed of their substance by his students, with the result that there was not a systematic approach to the chosen

[36] Pierre Gourou reported: "I was free during the holidays, from June to September. Of the remainding days of the year, I was on Sunday in the delta. I had a car, which enabled me to go anywhere. Well, anywhere where there were roads. If not, it was necessary to leave the car and to go by foot in the paths of the delta. In the mud, it is not always funny …especially because the buffaloes are everywhere … and always put their feet in the same holes. Consequently, the paths are damaged with deep holes. It is necessary to put your foot between the holes of the buffaloes. If not, you fall, … in the mud …. I spent hours to walk in villages, to observe, to ask questions …. Actually, I spent days and days in them (in the villages of the delta). It was essential to give an account of the atmosphere of the villages." (see Appendix H, Pierre Gourou's interview, 29-8-95) Gourou wrote as well: "the only unfortunate incidents [were]: Firstly, I fell with my car in a pretty dirty pond where I was totally submerged. I got out of this awkward situation without any serious consequences. Secondly, while I was driving at 70 kilometers an hour on a very narrow dyke with four meters high, suddenly, I found myself in front of a cow. Thrown into a panic, it breaked into a gallop and crashed on my bumper. I could stop without falling down the dyke. But the cow was killed and my radiator in bad condition." "*Les seuls incidents fâcheux [furent]: premièrement, je suis tombé avec ma voiture dans une marre assez infecte où j'ai été complètement submergé. Je m'en suis sorti sans aucune conséquences fâcheuses. Deuxièmement, roulant à 70 km à l'heure sur une digue très étroite et haute de 4 mètres, je me suis brusquerment trouvé face à une vache qui, affolée, remonta au galop et se jeta sur mon pare-choc. J'ai pu m'arrêter sur place sans tomber au bas de la digue. Mais la vache était morte et mon radiateur en mauvais état*" personal letter, 9 February 1996.

region, its limits and problems. As a result, the limits of the chosen region were dependent on the predilections of the author. The general and common aim of the regional studies of France was to demonstrate the specificity and the diversities of the French areas (*pays*). The authors appeared to be more predisposed to practice the regional method than to define it. Thus, we can observe in the French theses that the notion of regional geography emerges in various styles and by various means. To illustrate this fact, we can consider three major theses that were known by Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou and that might have influenced them, at least indirectly: the theses of the supervisors of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, Raoul Blanchard and Albert Demangeon respectively, and the thesis of Jules Sion whose title is similar to that of Pierre Gourou[37]. Raoul Blanchard[38] (1906) puts forward physical as well as historical factors to justify the individuality of Flanders, and he organizes his analysis around two sub-regions: the Maritime plain and the *Houtland*. He introduces the theme of the early overpopulation to explain the intensive land development of the region. As in Raoul Blanchard's thesis, Charles Robequain divides the area into two sub-regions, the mountainous country and the deltaic plain, and the study of the 'natural region' is separated from the social regions in distinct chapters. Thus, following the conceptual and integrative imperative of the Vidalian discourse, where the relationships between the physical environment and the societies are highlighted, the structure of the discourses of Raoul Blanchard or Charles Robequain lose some logical unity and scientific bases in their general organization. There is a lack of integration between the various parts of these theses. Their presentation is disjointed, partly because, according to Vincent Berdoulay's interpretation (Berdoulay 1988, pp.83-87), a specific terminology and rhetoric able to convey Paul Vidal de la Blache's systemic idea of causal "linking" or "connections" "between geographical and social facts" had not been established.

[37] In fact, Pierre Gourou said in an interview (see Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou, 29-8-95) in regard to Albert Demangeon and Jules Sion's theses: "I looked at them. That anyway did not have any relationship with the environment that I was studying. I had a very different environment, another world". However, despite their distinct approaches, these two theses and Pierre Gourou's one embody a common rural orientation.

[38] Raoul Blanchard did his thesis on the Flanders when he was teaching in Douai (in the coal basin of the North of France). This research work took him six years. Then, Raoul Blanchard was nominated at the University of Grenoble, and generated the "School of Grenoble". The core of this was the regional monograph, dependent on four simultaneous concepts: the geological region, the historical and urban ones and the *genres de vie*.

In his thesis which is considered a prototype in French geography, Albert Demangeon[39] (1973) discusses the choice of his geographical region by comparison with, and in opposition to, the adjoining landscapes. He then studies the physical conditions, economic activities (the agricultural work being considered as the reason for the existence of this fertile country, the industries considered as a contribution to agricultural activity and the trade), the social and human phenomena (the regime of land ownership, which is considered to enable the understanding of the economic structure, and habitat with the forms of the grouping and of the houses as an element of the way of life) and the territorial divisions. The regional geography of Demangeon develops more significantly the inherent and intrinsic meaningfulness of the geographical core of *Picardie*. But the scale of his discourse remains the local one, and does not investigate strongly as Paul Vidal de la Blache suggests the position of the region compared with other closer or important regions or the place of *Picardie* in the French national territory. However, his geography stays Vidalian in the way that he shows that, in this old region occupied by human groups, the natural environment acts on man along with man acting on it. Compared to Albert Demangeon, Pierre Gourou in his discourse went further into the inherent, intrinsic and human significance of the region, and introduced a more problematic and human approach.

By comparison, the regional geography of Jules Sion[40] (1909) is more orientated towards human and social phenomena. He chose to study an area which does not correspond to a natural region, but to "an organic whole of natural regions" (Sion, 1909, p.1). After the first four chapters on physical and human generalities, his study becomes largely historical. His regional geography integrates as a major factor historical events and evolution which have an important influence on the understanding of the present and contemporary landscape (heritage aspects of the habitat, fields...). His thesis is quoted in Pierre Gourou's bibliography (p.596). We can find in Jules Sion and Pierre Gourou's theses a similar interest in regard to the peasant common sense

[39] Albert Demangeon did his thesis work at the beginning of the century in the region where he initially taught history and geography, Picardie (at the lycée of Saint Quentin and later Amiens). He spent most of his free time travelling throughout the length and breadth of Picardie with his bicycle. Thus, he became quite familiar with the villages and the villagers of his research field, and took advantage of his intimacy with his region, reinforcing his information by looking through the archives of Picardie, questioning notables, peasants, teachers and priests in the villages, and taking photographs of typical aspects of the region. It was the first Vidalian monograph of a French region, and after this research work, it was submitted in 1905. Albert Demangeon established the use of the archives (Demangeon, 1905b, 1907) and the practice of the questionnaire (Demangeon, 1909) as basic geographical methods of investigation. The work of Albert Demangeon has been thoroughly investigated by Denis Wolff in his thesis *Albert Demangeon (1872-1940), un géographe français* (Denis Wolff is finishing his thesis in Paris, University ParisI, under the direction of Marie Claire Robic).

[40] Jules Sion did his thesis a few years after Albert Demangeon and Raoul Blanchard, studying the *Normandie orientale,* where he examined the mature agricultural civilization and its evolution. Later, Jules Sion prepared a volume about the Asian monsoon areas, in the *Géographie Universelle,* as we mention it in Chapter 1, footnote 13. This work adopted a regional approach, but at different scales than the monographs of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou (Sion, 1929a).

and knowledge and both of them make use of popular dictum to describe aspects of their region (for example when Jules Sion describes the seasons (Sion, 1909, pp.34-39) or when Pierre Gourou describes dwellings pp.288, 313).

In conclusion, we can establish that, despite the dissimilarities and contrasts between the Vidalian conceptions and their application in the regional theses of his successors, the Vidalian systemic approach identifies the basic concepts of "way of life" (*genre de vie*) and "region". These became the two fundamental entities through which French geographers described, explained and synthesized, the unity and relationships between the elements. This constituted the tradition of French regional geography. The theses produced by the researchers were regional monographs, with generally a rural theme in which the "physiognomy of the countries" and the societies, characterized by their ways of life (*genres de vie*), were analyzed. Pierre Gourou made an exception to the rule by not using these concepts of "way of life" (as we saw in section 3.1.2) and "physiognomy" (as we will see below, in section 3.3.3). Indeed, Pierre Gourou renewed the Vidalian discourse[41].

3.2.4 The rural orientation of regional analysis

The rural environment provides the background of the problematic in the French regional discourses. It is presented as the location of the relationship between a society and its "milieu". It results from the action of human occupation and practices that are related to the human and cultural needs of each society, in the global context of civilization. This concept of civilization falls within the scale of a millennium or at least centuries, and the rural environment is considered as a multi-century construct. The agricultural rhythms are considered slow rhythms in the perpetual times of nature while the structure of a rural society is the product of the tradition. This is linked with the fact that France has a very long tradition of rural civilization, and the rural population was still dominant despite increasing urbanisation[42]. In a reflective article inquiring the prominence of French research works and theses in regard to French rural areas and regions, M. Berger, Ch. Gillette and M.C Robic (Berger Gillette and Robic, 1976, p.4) quote Paul Claval who notes:[43]

[41] See Chapter 7, section 7.4.

[42] It was only at the beginning of the Thirties that French rural population stopped to be numerously superior to urban population.

[43] This article analyses the French geographical perception, interpretation and analysis of the rural space and its evolution from the beginning of the century.

> Human geography has been precociously attached to the study of rural landscape. Over time, the towns seemed unfamiliar to the preoccupations of the geographer ... The countryside was offering, on the contrary, a field where the relationships between man, group and nature were tangible[44].

They also make the point that:

> Is it not that the personality of regions expresses itself better through the countryside, with the analysis of the so slightly differentiated network of French rural landscapes, it is rather that from the perspective of towns, these seem moulded in the more uniform melting pot of an industrial and technical civilization?[45]

The classical rural components studied in regional discourse are: the population, habitat, agricultural calender and production, land ownership and techniques. Other rural activities are subordinate to agriculture. Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou followed exactly this line of inquiry.

3.2.4.1 The rural population

Geographers in the French School studied the origins of the rural population, the history of its settlement, some of its cultural or folk characters, and its demographic evolution. The origin of rural occupations is seen in chronological terms and related to soil development. It takes place generally at the beginning of the human analysis and gives to the region a historical dimension: the past of the region is one of the basic elements constituting the region. We find here the influence of French geographers' education in history[46].

The analysis informed mainly the conquest of the soil by human groups, relying more on interpretations from the natural sciences than on the development of human social sciences such as discussed by Emile Durkheim[47]. Thus, it is less the functioning and the personality of the societies through the ages which are described in the early theses of Albert Demangeon, Raoul Blanchard, Jules Sion or Camille Vallaux than the fundamental facts of soil occupation and

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[44] "*La géographie humaine s' est précocement attachée à l' étude des paysages ruraux. Les villes pendant longtemps parurent étrangères aux préoccupations du géographe (…) La campagne offrait en revanche un domaine où les rapports de l' individu, du groupe et de la nature étaient directement sensibles*."

[45] "*La personnalité des régions ne s' exprime-t-elle pas mieux à travers leurs campagnes, à l' examen de la trame si nuancée des paysages ruraux français, que par le biais des villes, qui semblent moulées dans le creuset plus uniforme d' une civilisation industrielle et technicienne*?"

[46] see in Chapter 1, footnote 4

[47] Because of the links of the geography discipline with the natural sciences, Vidal insisted that geography could not be purely a social science, like the sociology of Durkheim (Durkheim, 1982, 1983), (Durkheim, 1895).

development by human groups and societies. For example, Albert Demangeon wrote about "the conquest of the soil by cultivation", "the deforestation", "the work of the monks", and then "the work of the 18th and 19th centuries", "the land improvement" (Demangeon 1973, pp211-224). Jules Sion (1909, pp.110, 115, 503) located within chronological periods the human settlement and occupation, from the archaeology of the past to the contemporary period. For each period of occupation, and particularly the 13th century (when forestland was partly cleared to be cultivated), the 18th century (with the development of rural industries) and the present, "a different adaptation of the human activity to the physical environment" was documented. We find in Charles Robequain's section on "The Processes of the Annamite Colonialization"[48] (pp.292-298) and in Pierre Gourou's chapter "History of the Population Settlement of the Tonkin Delta"[49] (pp.111-137) this kind of concern for the history of the conquest of the soil by particular human groups or by societies. Pierre Gourou also notes that, because of the distinct context of Asia and the fact that many sources were hardly accessible to French researchers, it was not possible to develop this historical analysis of human settlement and tenancy of the soil in the same way and obtain the same information as with the French regions. Thus, Pierre Gourou states that his Chapter "History of the Settlement of the Tonkin Delta" would have been better to have been titled "Of the impossibility of writing now the history of the settlement of the Tonkin delta"[50] (p.111). More specifically, because of the Asian context, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou introduce a geography not essentially naturalist or historical, and more concerned with the functioning of rural societies.

The analysis of the contemporary population was generally studied separately, often late in the thesis, (in the theses of Albert Demangeon and Jules Sion, in their penultimate Chapters; in Chapter X of *La Basse Bretagne* in Camille Vallaux (1906); in Raoul Blanchard, his final chapter). To analyze the distribution of the regional population, these geographers introduced the Vidalian notion of population density, but without instituting this concept in a systematic way. As well as the term "density", they used in their writings expressions such as the capacity, compactness of the settlement (*peuplement*), or even "*surpopulation*" (overpopulation), "*dépopulation*" (when the population is deceasing) (for example, pp.400-403 in Demangeon, 1973).

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48 "*Les procédés de la colonisation annamite*."

49 "*Histoire du peuplement de Delta tonkinois*."

50 *"Il vaudrait mieux intituler ce chapitre: "De l' impossibilité d' écrire actuellement l' histoire du peuplement du Delta tonkinois"*

The importance of the regional settlements appeared to them as the basic indication of the fertility of the soil as well as the capacity of the fundamentally rural societies to develop the resources from their natural environment. Thus, to explain the importance of the rural density of *Picardie*, Albert Demangeon (1973, pp.402-403) states that, "By itself, the exploitation of this fertile land is already enough to become abundantly populated". This fertility was the result of the qualities of the soil as well as of its human improvements. He goes on to demonstrate that "on the land, the population migrations follow the variations in the fertility" (Demangeon, 1973, p.401). He gives the examples of human improvements in the methods of cultivation and of the parceling of landowning, and of the development of rural industries which are related to the increase in population and the high densities. Albert Demangeon concludes with some emphasis in order to intensify the idea that the fertility of the soil, in conjunction with the development of rural industries, explained the "*surpopulation*":

> Nowhere else have the products of a fertile land combined with the incomes of a craft have attracted in the countryside such a human crowd[51]. (Demangeon, 1973, p.403)

Further, he wrote "… everywhere, it is the arable land that fixes the agglomerations." (Demangeon, 1973, p.379).

Therefore, according to Albert Demangeon 's logic, it is the combination of physical and human facts that provide an appreciation of the significance of the settlement/population densities. Albert Demangeon analyses the consequences and the evolution of these combinations and their resulting density by introducing the notion of overpopulation (*surpeuplement*), and of *depopulation,* correlating the contemporary decrease of the rural industries with the phenomenon of rural outmigration (*exode rural*). Camille Vallaux (1980, pp.268-269) develops even further the formalization of movements of the population, with the notion *prolificité* (prolificity) of the Armoricaine[52] population, to express the positive growth due to its 'natural increase'. But all these notions remain vague, not clearly defined, and used more in an empirical and speculative way than in a rigorous and scientific approach. The statistical insufficiencies and the infancy of demographic sciences, and of an established terminology, did not encourage geographers to adopt a systematic approach to the demographic information. This lack of an appropriate terminology weakened the rhetoric of geographical discourses, such as in the analysis of

[51] *"... nulle part les produits d' une terre plantureuse collaborant avec les revenus d' un métier n' ont attiré sur des campagnes pareille foule humaine."*

[52] The Armorique is the old name for Britany.

population densities or population migration, that Albert Demangeon (p.410) called the "human stream" (*courants humains*). These concepts began to be formalized within geographical descriptions of population in a defined area with the development of cartographic processes. Albert Demangeon, for example, presents two maps illustrating the decrease and the increase in the population of two districts in his region, where the evolution is classified through percentage classes, symbolized through different styles or colors of circles.

If Charles Robequain relied on the naturalist logic of the fertility of the soil to justify the distribution of, and differences in, population densities, the originality of Pierre Gourou's discourse is the advance of a more systematic demographical and statistical approach. The concept of density becomes formalized, and new interpretations that were less naturalist emerge in order to explain the high population densities and "overpopulation". For example, Pierre Gourou deliberates less on the role of the potency of the soil than on the effectiveness and intensiveness of Annamite agricultural techniques.

3.2.4.2 The descriptive and functional approach to the rural habitat

Albert Demangeon's description of housing is directed at the functioning aspects of the farms in relationship to the characteristics of the agriculture. He develops the idea that the situation, the distribution and forms of the habitat, inform the solutions that each rural society and particular culture has found to resolve the problems of their relationships with their immediate environment. He writes (Demangeon 1973, p.362) that:

> A farm in Picardy is remarkable by its adaptation to an exclusively cultivating function. It excludes by its disposition all species of livestock, except the animals immediately necessary for the agricultural work and for the farmer's nourishment …[53] (p.362).

It is through this description of the rural habitat, illustrated with photographs, sketches and plans of the subdivisions of the farms that the most tangible and visual aspects of the daily life of societies and of regions came into view for the reader. These graphical illustrations were used particularly in Albert Demangeon's work. In Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses they become especially potent in communicating a sense of the Asian countryside and societies (in Robequain, pp.193-237, 474-495 and in Gourou's, pp.237-262, 273-348).

[53] "*La ferme picarde est remarquable par son adaptation à une fonction exclusivement agricole. Elle exclut par sa disposition tout espèce de bétail, en dehors des bêtes immédiatement nécessaires au travail de la culture et à l' alimentation du cultivateur*".

While some geographers limited their descriptions to the functioning of the constructed facilities, Camille Vallaux included a more cultural or social orientation. In Camille Vallaux (1980, pp.123-142) the habitat and its concentration appears long before the study of the density, in Chapter IV, and he describes the specifics of the typical furnishing of the houses of Britany.

This cultural orientation of the description of rural habitat is seen especially when the French geographers, such as Jules Sion and Jean Bruhnes, begin to describe the habitat of overseas territories. For example, Jean Bruhnes in (Maspéro 1930, pp.53-61, vol.1) tried to explain the contrasts between the mountainous and the deltaic types of Indochinese houses:

> One of the facts of Human Geography most obvious in all Indochina, is for example the type of the standard house ... overall a tradition of culture, a custom of civilization, linked to a race are intervening here: the Annamite house has noticeable similarities with the Chinese house ... (Maspéro, 1930, pp.53-54).[54]

The plan and the building material of rural dwellings were carefully observed in order to relate them to the natural environment, but they were also used to explain the cultural specificities of the Asian rural societies. In their theses, Charles Robequain and more especially Pierre Gourou emphasized this cultural approach. Pierre Gourou went even further by acknowledging the aesthetic values of the houses and buildings, departing from strict positivism, in which value judgements are rejected (Chapter 5, section 5.3.3, Chapter 7, section 7.4.2.3).

3.2.4.3 The economic significance of land ownership

Paul Vidal de la Blache threw light on the socio-economic components and significance of different types of agricultural models by interpreting the modes and forms of land ownership in the Mediterranean world. He described regions with small rural properties that are intensely cultivated in contrast with regions with large land ownership where agricultural practices are "extensive" and considered in regression[55]. This correlation between small properties with "intensive" agricultural practices and large properties and their "extensive" agricultural methods becomes a major component of the regional discourse. From the earliest examples, regional theses included a chapter where the agrarian social structures, with the landownership modes, the

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[54] *"un des faits de géographie humaine les plus frappants de toute l' Indochine, c' est par exemple, le type de la maison courante ... surtout intervient ici une tradition de culture, une coutume de civilisation, liée à une race."*

[55] An extensive cultivation is characterised by its low crop yields per hectare, an intensive cultivation by its high crop yields per hectare. Paul Vidal de la Blache (Vidal de la Blache, 1926 pp.132, 138) compares, in regard to the Mediterranean area, the small holdings of the Riviera intensive type agriculture "requiring more care than muscular effort", and the system of latifundia (large estates) of the extensive type agriculture "still a burden to some of the districts which used to be prosperous".

size of properties and the parceling of the land, and wealth distribution, are analyzed systematically. This analysis is associated with the idea that "... small farmers, who are able to achieve their work by themselves or with their family, achieve better results than more substantial farmers who require additional labourers"[56] (Demangeon 1973, p.357). This interpretative scheme gives to the geographical analysis an economic basis through a perspective of the relationships between land ownership and the results of agricultural exploitation. For example, Albert Demangeon (1973, p.357) wrote:

> the two fundamental conditions of good exploitation are: first to be ourself sufficient in manpower, secondly to be the owner by ourselves of half or one third of the cultivated land[57]. (p.357)

His thesis scrutinizes the proportion and the conditions of the tenant farmer or sharecroppers and the proportion subject to, as he saw it, large, average and small exploitation. Thus, the performance of agriculture is linked in regional analysis not only to the size of the farm, but mainly to the mode of land ownership. Here the direct exploitation, when the peasant is the owner of the land and his own boss, is considered by the geographers to have the highest agricultural value[58].

Beside this juridical analysis of property and its economic consequences, the regional products and the agricultural system (the association of different cultures with their adjustment to the tools and techniques of production in a society) are linked to agronomic and mercantile investigation[59]. For example, Albert Demangeon analyses the different products in their historical evolution and in relationship with the systems of cultivation which are induced, on the one hand, by agronomic considerations concerning the soil and the plants and, on the other hand, by economic factors such as crop yield competition, output and benefits. As an illustration, he compares the remuneration from a kilogram of sugar beet with that of wheat. He demonstrates

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[56] *" ... les petits cultivateurs, qui peuvent exécuter leurs travaux eux-mêmes et avec leur famille, obtiennent des meilleurs résultats que des cultivateurs plus considérables qui font appel à une main-d' oeuvre étrangère."*

[57] He adds further "the principle for good crop yield is to have our own property and to work it by ourselves." (Demangeon, 1973, p.359).

[58] For centuries, the family unit remained the basis of French rural society, and its burden was to work hard in order to save, coin by coin, and buy farm-property and fields in order to become a landowner and eventually hand over the farm and land to the children. This was sustaining the Republican virtues of labour and saving, and set up the notion that small farm owners cultivate their own soil intensively, scrupulously, cautiously and efficiently, compared to larger landowners, where the land is cultivated more extensively by employed labourers.

[59] In the more general context of the end of the 19th century, with the Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalist and liberalist dogma, agriculture entered into the market economy. Cultural revolutions resulted from the motive to produce more with better profitability.

the capacity of sugar beet to improve agricultural soil and consequently the wheat yield (Chapters IX and X). This provides to the reader the understanding that the agricultural activity of a region corresponds to the solution applied by the societies to their geographical environment and economic realities, but is also dependent on the social distribution of land ownership.

These socio-juridical dimensions come into view in both Charles Robequain's (pp.143-151, 351-359) and Pierre Gourou's (pp.352-380) analyses. Implicit in both is the republican ideal of small landownership intensively cultivated as opposed to the large aristocratic properties where the land is rented or indirectly cultivated and exploited. Likewise, the French historical reference to the distinction between private and community lands is introduced. Pierre Gourou expresses in his analysis his disapproval with the development of the big mandarinal properties, "favored by the formalist nature of the French law" (pp.362-364). Their discourses also manifest consideration about crop yield and benefits (in Charles Robequain pp.174, 337, in Pierre Gourou p.394). Thus, despite the fact that they are describing societies which were different from the French, and that, in the Indochinese context, "nothing is more difficult than to be informed on the distribution of the land ownership" (Gourou, p.356)[60], Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou maintain similar juridical and economic components and terminology to construct their regional discourses as the ones used in other French theses of the time.

3.2.4.4 Non-rural activities considered as complementary occupations

Peasant activity is the major pre-occupation and is present throughout the geographical writings of the Vidalian School, and thus agricultural insights guide the various discourses. For example, the study of the regional climate is always associated, through the description of the seasons, with peasant life and agricultural work. It is the agricultural aspect which is dominant also in the analysis of other rural activities, geared to meeting local needs and demand, but also palliative measures which ease agricultural underemployment during the winter or compensate for the weak remuneration for peasant work. Albert Demangeon (1973, pp.292, 295) describes these extra incomes, based on local products such as wool or raw textiles, an "ingenious union of culture and industry, a subtle combination", where "the division of the work was developed to its extreme; each village confined to its specialty so to speak".

As well, both Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou consider the non-agricultural activities in Indochinese villages as complementary to the agriculture ones and as "labour

[60] "*Rien n' est plus difficile que de s' informer de la répartition des propriétés*."

industries." Their discourses covering these craft industries are built upon the conventional Western ideas of village "specialisation" and "division of labour/craftworks"[61]. Charles Robequain's viewpoint in particular is quite restrained because it is bound to the French colonial and capitalist[62] ideology. Here the poverty of indigenous people is regarded negatively, and seen partly as a result of their supposed lack of initiative (Chapter 5, section 5.3) and partly as a consequence of the tropical climate which is considered exhausting or even "debilitating" (Chapter 5, section 5.2.2.).

However, the descriptions of craft industries in French theses were representative of the interest of French geographers in the practical aspects of cultural facts centred on regional craft techniques. The know-how and the logic of their location and existence were more important than their societal significance. This interest in techniques is, in fact, characteristic of the time of the Industrial Revolution.

3.3 The Rhetorical Practice of Reasoned Description

While the content of the Vidalian monograph was prescribed so was its style and methods of presentation.

3.3.1 Vidalian descriptive practice

As Paul Claval (1993b, p.15) notes, the descriptive discourse constitutes the oldest tradition in geography. Paul Vidal de la Blache (1913) presented to students of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* the "descriptive method" as the "capital function" and the "distinctive character of geography", proclaiming that:

> Geography distinguishes itself as an essentially descriptive science ... One of its main tasks is to locate the various orders of facts which concern it ... Not one indicator, even not one nuance would go unnoticed; each has its geographical value, whether as a dependence or whether as a factor, in the totality that we must make perceptible[63] (p.297).

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61 See in Chapter 2 footnote 6

62 Based on a spirit of enterprise moulded through rationality.

63 "*On peut juger ... quel rôle capital joue ... la description. La géographie se distingue comme une science essentiellement descriptive ... Une de ses tâches principales n' est-elle pas de localiser les divers ordres de faits qui la concernent ... Aucun indice, aucune nuance même ne saurait passer inaperçue; chacune a sa valeur géographique, soit comme dépendance, soit comme facteur, dans l' ensemble qu' il s' agit de rendre sensible.*"

Throughout this particular lecture, he also gave some pedagogic instructions in regard to the descriptive vocabulary, and particular sources able to sustain or confirm the written description:

> It is often profitable for it [geographical description] to draw from popular terminology; ... such designation taken from life, ... such a rural diction, proverb might enlighten a relationship ... all things which take directly their inspiration from geography. Drawings and photograph enter as commentary in the description. The schematic figures have their use as an instrument of demonstration[64]. (p.298)

In his geographical works, Paul Vidal de la Blache practiced the descriptive method with talent. Jules Sion (1934) wrote an important article entitled *"l' art de la description chez Vidal de la Blache"* in which he asserts (p.479) that:

> Vidal was truly the creator of French geography, which is still animated by his thought. He owed this influence not only to the value of his ideas, but to the way he knew how to describe the aspects of nature and the imprint that the work of Man engraves[65].

Thus, Paul Vidal de la Blache evokes the descriptive tradition of geography and one of the most important elements in Vidalian geography was to observe finely and accurately, the "landscape" and the "physiognomy" of the regions. For each region, the originalities and specificities of the "landscape" and "physiognomy" were depicted in order to reveal the particular "personality" or the "geographical individuality" of the *pays*. In the general terminology of the regional theses, the expression "landscape" is usually applied in the introductory paragraphs, while the term "physiognomy"[66] appears later in the geographical discourse, to depict the regional appearance.

Through anthropomorphic or metaphoric analogies, descriptions are shaped according to different scales and grids of analysis. These include both topographical and morphological

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64 *"C' est souvent profit pour elle de puiser dans la terminologie populaire; ... telle désignation saisie sur le vif, ... tel dicton rural ou proverbe peuvent ouvrir le jour sur un rapport, ... toutes choses qui se réclament directement de la géographie ... Le dessin, la photographie entrent á titre de commentaire dans la description. Les figures schématiques ont leur utilité comme instrument de démonstration."*

65 *"Vidal de la Blache fut le véritable créateur de la géographie française qui vit encore de sa pensée. Il dut cette influence, non seulement à la valeur de ses idées, mais à la façon dont il savait décrire les aspects de la nature et l' empreinte qu' y grave le travail de l' homme.*"

66 This term 'physiognomy' has a Latin origin, and was concerned originally with descriptions of the aspects of the human face. But from the 18th century it was also used in various erudite discourses to describe geographical objects, such as the globe, or Europe, or countries, in order to particularize and singularize their aspects.

aspects. The geomorphological descriptions are substantive and come first, through a naturalist point of view characterized by a scientific and positivist approach[67]. Through this morphological and topographical description of the various elements of the landscape, the geographer was also to show that, behind the apparent uniformity of the geographical sector of study, is hidden a remarkable variety composed of contrasted natural regions. Hence, the "limestone landscape" of Picardy is opposed to that of the "depressions" (Demangeon, 1973, pp.4-15), or the *"pays du granit*" of Britannia to that of the *"landes schisteuses*" (Vallaux, 1906, pp.18-38), or "the Flamande depression" with its "sands forms" to that of the "clay" and the "maritime plain" to that of the "interior plain" in *les Flandres* (Blanchard, 1906, pp.42, 72-80, 117-122). Charles Robequain's discourse and its division into two parts, the *arrière-pays* (the hinterland) and the Delta, as well as his descriptions of "the structure and the relief: the natural regions" conforms to this Vidalian methodology. It gives to the region an image of diversity. Pierre Gourou's discourse on the other hand does not appear to differentiate sub-regions and, thus, offers a more particular and new structure, where the region is not constructed on contrasted morphological entities, but on a general comprehension and sympathetic analysis of the Annamite peasantry. In the prototype thesis, these physical descriptions are followed by an evocation of other natural (climate, vegetation) and rural aspects (rural habitat and intensive/extensive forms of occupation of the agrarian space) of the landscape (French human geography being attached to the study of rural landscape), where the relationships between topographic forms, climate and human facts are more suggested than developed. The description of the rural landscape was asserting itself in the 1920s under the influence of Albert Demangeon, who orientated his research to focus on the rural habitat and the forms of occupation of the agrarian space. Later, the additional aspects of the region are informed (economic, urban aspects).

Regional portrayals cover also aesthetic views, where the panorama and the various colours of the landscape are called to mind and celebrated as in a painting or animated like in "scenery" [68] and where, according to the French cultural code, the beautiful landscape has equilibrium,

[67] This naturalist perspective was developed during the 19th century, particularly through the works of geologists like Elie de Beaumont or Albert-Auguste de Lapparent, who introduced the concept of "natural regions", and showed that they are elaborated by processes which can be observed and objectively explained.

[68] It was Paul Vidal de la Blache himself who suggested the use of the English expression "scenery", to express the idea of a landscape of spectacle.

harmony and the kindness of tradition[69]. Thus, a region is described as a portion of space in which a harmony between nature and human realizations is established. This Vidalian conception of the harmony of a region is particularly present in Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's descriptions; Charles Robequain uses it in the idea of order and organization, while Pierre Gourou incorporates it in the idea of peasant community. To construct this notion of regional harmony, Vidalian geographers applied the method of "reasoned description".

3.3.2 The method of "reasoned description"

As in Auguste Comte's philosophy[70], the Vidalian geographer described the regional physical and human elements and, thereupon, was identifying causal factors where physical geography (and more specifically geology in countries like France) holds an essential place in regional differentiation. Paul Vidal de la Blache initiated this method, advising geography teachers to investigate the natural factors underpinning "the fundamental divisions of French land" (in Sanguin, 1993)[71]:

> On what, in short, these [the French] countries divisions are rooted? They sum up a body of phenomena, which are almost always dependent on the geologic constitution of the land. … [the geographer] looks at the geologic constitution of terrain searching for the explanation of their aspect and their external forms, and for the principle of the various influences that the land exerts on the inorganic environment as well as on human beings. (p.149)

Vidal de la Blache popularised this method in his *Tableau de la géographie de la France*[72] (Vidal de la Blache, 1903). The sentences are generally simple and repetitive, with one to one syntactical forms, from the cause to the effect or vice versa. The style is accomplished, or even poetic. Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's discourses are constructed as well with this type of descriptive and analytical syntax and aesthetic style, which was familiar to and easily absorbed by the French reader.

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[69] This idea of harmony in Vidalian geography corresponded with the medical science conceptions expressed by Claude Bernard (Bernard 1865), vol.II, 1 at the end of the 19th century: "*D' un autre côté, tous les phénomènes d' un corps vivant sont dans une harmonie réciproque telle qu' il apparait impossible de séparer une partie de l' organisme sans amener immédiatement un trouble dans son ensemble*."

[70] Auguste Comte's positivism rests on observable facts and relationships (Comte, 1990, pp.1830-1842).

[71] "*Les divisions fondamentales du sol français*" were published initially in Vidal de la Blache (1888a, b).

[72] The French historian Ernest Lavisse (see footnote 46 in Chapter 7) asked Paul Vidal de la Blache to begin his major work on "*History of France*" by "a description of the geography of France" ("*Tableau de la géographie de la France*"). This geographical presentation was considered as important to the understanding of French historical events. It constitutes the first volume of the *History of France.* But it was republished separately later.

Daniel Loi (1984, 1985), in his methodological investigation into the structures of causality in French regional geography, shows that causality is complex, often implicit and more suggestive than explicit. Thus, the explanatory synthesis, which aims to constitute a maximum of causal links all through the thesis chapters, is often not really convincing. He suggests that this is in part due to the linguistic limits of French language[73]. Hence, French geography experiences serious restrictions in its desire to be "a science of synthesis" through the method of "reasoned description". The practice of this method in the research on causal chains within a region was considered as objective and rational, preventing any critical reflection on the logic, the value and the relevance of geographical discourse or the pertinence of geographical knowledge and methods. The consequence of this prevalent practice of reasoned description through a descriptive and analytical language, rather than a doctrinal one, was the absence of inclusive theories able to apprehend and represent regional structures.

In any thesis, photographs were a part of the description. Paul Vidal de la Blache suggested that it is necessary for the reader to see the reality of the country; he saw photographs of landscape as synonymous with truth, comparing the vision of the human eye with the

[73] The place of the implicit in the explanation in Vidalian theses avoids heavy and long elucidations but could be unclear for the reader. As well, sometimes, in paragraphs and sentences, the causal structure is dispersed throughout several issues which weaken the efficiency of the explanation. Loi quotes many examples from famous theses such as those by Albert Demangeon and Raoul Blanchard. For our purpose, a quote from Charles Robequain serves to illustrate this point:

"*It is in the North Thanh Hoá that relief and hydrography, still well traced on the structure, are the most favorable to Man: this region offers a maze of basins expanding from the NW to the SE, from where the waterway is escaping through narrow passes cutting the porphyrite or limestone secondary ranges. These vast basins, with flat alluvium basis, isolated within a frame of heights which delay the erosion and limit the view, supply for centuries, at a few kilometers from the delta, the most stable and wealthy mountainous ethnic groups of the province. Retain that between them and the people from the plain, the relief does not erect any obstacle: the mountain and the delta penetrate into each other, these piercing the recent alluvium in hills bring little by little down to the marine shore, the other one [the delta] radiating to the west, between hillocks and woody rocks, through embanked valleys*".

"*C' est dans le Nord Thanh Hoá que le relief et l' hydrographie, encore bien calqués sur la structure, sont les plus favorables à l' homme: cette région offre tout un dédale de bassins allongés du N-O. au S-E, d' où le cours d' eau s' évade par des défilés étroits coupant les chaînons de porphyrites ou de calcaires. Ces bassins vastes, au fond plat et tapissé d' alluvions, isolés dans un cadre de hauteurs qui retardent l' érosion et limitent la vue, nourrissent depuis des siècles, à quelques kilomètres du delta, les groupements montagnards les plus stables et les plus riches de la province. Retenons qu' entre eux et les gens de la plaine le relief ne dresse pas d' obstacle: montagnes et delta se pénètrent mutuellement, celles-là trouant les alluvions récentes de collines progressivement abaissées jusqu' au rivage marin, celui-ci s' irradiant vers l' Ouest, entre les mamelons et les rochers boisés, par de larges vallées remblayées*" (p.92).

In these sentences, Charles Robequain does not write explicitly what, in "the relief and hydrography", is favourable to human settlement, and it is up to the reader to reconstruct the explanatory links between "the basins", "the waterways", "the flat alluvium basis", the "isolating environment which slow the erosion" and the favourable context for the human settlement. Besides, Robequain joined another element to his causal explanation, reckoning that between the mountainous and the plain societies "the relief does not put obstacles in the path", and introducing extra explanations to justify this last statement, that makes the explanation complex. Hence, because of the linguistic limits in explanatory proceeding where the linearity does not allow composite explanations, the geographical synthesis is more virtual than rigorously proved.

photographic apparatus[74]. In addition, the descriptions were more and more supported by statistical and cartographic work, linked with the development and institutionalization of the statistical sciences (Palsky, 1996).

Moreover, with some geographers, such as Jean Brunhes[75], photography also invites the reader to see the cultural aspects of a region and to understand all that can be deduced from the study of the techniques of construction, of the variety of their materials, of the ornamentation, and of the regional variety of the forms of the roofs. Hence, Jean Brunhes (1920, 1947) writes about his map of the roofs of France that he prepared for inclusion in the *Géographie humaine de la France* . He wrote (Brunhes, 1947, p.232):

> If the explanation of this distribution of roofs is not yet definitely determined, that is no reason why so striking a feature of the human landscape should not be given its full value in the form of a geographical outline.

Jean Bruhnes (1947) considered that the physiognomic feature of the roofs should be given a full value in the form of the geographical outline of "a regional or more extensive areas", opposing "the roofs of France, gently sloping and covered with curved tiles, with the solidly built northern roofs, steeply sloping and covered with thatch, small flat tiles, slates, or shingles" (p.232).

Pierre Gourou (pp.309-348) went further into this cultural dimension, describing in detail the deltaic different types of roof (with two or four slides and many variations, displaying numerous photos and sections), frameworks and partitions, as well as certain elements of decoration in the houses of the Tonkin Delta (see Chapter 7, section 7.4.2.3). More generally, the descriptive practices of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou present similarities but also have some original perspectives compared with other theses.

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[74] However, following the reflection of Pierre Barboza (Barboza 1996, p.218), the geographer who photographed his region "engages himself in his work, at such a point that he puts there his own subjectivity, his feelings, his opinion, his beliefs." (p.218)

3.3.3 The descriptive practices of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's writings are generally thought of as enlightened examples of the Vidalian art of "reasoned description, but evocative" (Sion, 1934, p.407). Now and then sensitive and poetical images are introduced and incorporate the daily life of the Indochinese population into geographical analysis. Their descriptions often use the same terminology, despite some distinguishing characteristics in Pierre Gourou. For example, compared to the other French geographers, Pierre Gourou describes the region using only the concept of landscape, but not physiognomy. In fact, landscape is more scenic than physiognomy, and in his thesis Pierre Gourou laies great stress upon the scenic qualities of the Tonkin delta (see Chapter 5, section 5.3). Physiognomy related more to the particular aspects of a region (as mentioned above, section 3.3.1 and footnote 56). For instance, Charles Robequain describes the "new characteristics which identify the physiognomy of the typical Thai hamlet" (p.197). But, generally, the two geographers adopted the same aesthetic style than the other Vidalian geographers, being appreciative of the regional landscape (with its dramatic or bucolic aspects) and the every day life of its population. Both Vidal de la Blache and Pierre Gourou evoke the landscape through its colours, its sounds and its scents giving to the reader a lively image of the region. For example, as Jules Sion reported in an article where he emphasizes "*the art of description*" in Paul Vidal de la Blache (Sion, 1934), Vidal described the "bocage vendéen" where "the rye and sarrasin fields make in summer large reddish-brown and white stains …" and with "the vegetation with ferns and brooms from where an acrid scent radiate during the dew hours …" p.485. Describing the "Côte armoricaine" (the coast of Brittany), Vidal relates that "at the back of coves and under the trees, some little building sites from where hammers were blending their rhythmic sounds with the quietness of old Briton harbors" (p.485). Pierre Gourou depicted as well the colors of the Tonkin delta (pp.554-556), its clamor ("Sometimes, a funeral breaks the silence of the fields with the uproar and the shrills of its gongs, its cymbals and its recorders…"p.110) and its fragrance:

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[75] We have already mentioned (footnote 11) Jean Brunhes concern in regard to photographic documentation. His written works were always accompanied by an extensive use of photographs, the vast majority of which were taken personally in order to reproduce the visible reality of the distant countries. His geography has closer relationships with the ethnographic sciences than other geographers. However, he excludes from the geographical field "the explanatory study of races and languages as outside the scope of human geography in the strict sense, because it is based on observation of a bodily and philological character whose connection with geography is and can be, a very distant one" and ethnographic facts, such as the various instruments used by Man 's activities (bows and arrows; the miner 's pick...agricultural implements, cooking utensils and so forth), which "get farther and farther away from geography proper, while remaining concerned, legitimately, and of necessity, with geographical localization and distribution" (Brunhes 1947, p.201). Jean Brunhes wanted to express that the description of organic and corporal differences between races, the study of languages through texts, or the detailed examination of the diversified utensils used by societies do not provide substantial arguments able to contribute to a better understanding of human distribution, activities and societies.

> *In the parts cultivated with the fifth month rice, the Delta smells good with rice, and this aroma, similar to the one which arises from a cooking pot with boiling rice, pleasantly tickles the peasant nostrils*[76] (p.384*).*

As well, Jules Sion appreciated in Charles Robequain this Vidalian style. He identifies and honours, in his commentary on Charles Robequain's thesis, which was published in the *Annales de géographie,* this specific Vidalian "intelligence", "ability" and "talent". Jules Sion (1929b, p.514) writes,

> Mr Ch Robequain knows not only how to explain, but also how to depict and [bring the reader] to see, with rapid but evocative remarks, or within paintings, such as the evening falling on villages of the mountain (p.198), the calendar of the works and the days among the peasants in the rice fields (p.370). Could his example illustrate that geography loses nothing of its solidity by sometimes giving impressions of the country![77]

Concerning the evening falling on villages of the mountains, Charles Robequain gave a lively account of the animals' noise and behavior as well as the people's activities, talk and chatter (about "work and days, the weather …the ricefield…the sick old man in the nearby hut, the girl ready to be married", p.200, see also in Chapter 7, section 7.3.2.2):

> *The hamlet, with the rapid nightfall, rings out with their [the pigs] grumbles, mixed with the long and sad bellowing of black or white buffalos bristling with straight fur or breastplate with mud …Little by little, all the noises are deadening and become less frequent: only a late housewife hastens the knock of her pestle …*(p.200)*[78].*

Pierre Gourou also recalls the Tonkin agricultural calendar, together with the daily peasant gestures and work, the Annamite life, and the rural landscape. Albert Demangeon and Charles Robequain are in the same way appreciative of Pierre Gourou's "art of description" in their commentary on the style of his thesis. For example, Charles Robequain (1936) writes about its "picturesque details" which are designed "to animate the demonstration", "the delicate touches" which "allow us to feel the poetry of the delta." (p.496)

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[76] "*Dans les parties cultivées en riz du cinquième mois, le Delta fleure le bon riz, et cette odeur, semblable à celle qui s'élève d' une marmitte de riz bouillante, chatouille agréablement la narine du paysan*."

[77] "*Mr Ch. Robequain sait, non seulement expliquer, mais décrire et faire voir, en notations rapides, mais évocatrices, ou en tableaux, comme le soir tombant dans les villages de la montagnes (p.198), et le calendrier des travaux et des jours parmi les paysans de la rizière (p.370). Puisse son exemple montrer que la géographie ne perd rien de sa solidité à donner parfois l' impression du pays*!"

[78] "*Le hameau, sous la tombée rapide de la nuit, retentit de leur grognements, mêlés aux mugissements longs et tristes des buffles noirs ou blancs hérissés de poils raides ou cuirassés de boue …Tous les bruits peu à peu s' amortissent et s' espacent: seule une ménagère attardée précipite les coups de son pilon …"*

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou also follow Paul Vidal de la Blache by using rich photographic, cartographic and graphic documentation to support the description of their region which, with Pierre Gourou, takes the form of a geographical process systematically united with his discourse and its rhetoric (see Chapter 6, section 6.4.1, and Appendices D, F and G).

Compared with the Vidalian tradition, the particularity of Charles Robequain's description lies in his more direct style, in which he expresses his personal feelings about the life of the Indochinese people, such as his "sadness and dismay " on viewing the Annamite markets (p.537)[79]. To some extend, these feelings reflect of the French colonial ideology, based on the idea of the inferiority of the Indochinese civilizations compared with the modernity of the French one (see Chapter 5).

The style of Pierre Gourou's descriptions is generally more detached, even though he gives picturesque details of Annamite life. He says "It is impossible to find a countryside more saturated with humanity, and at certain moments, alas, more infected with baleful odours exuded by the human race" (pp.109-110). Pierre Gourou gives a more indulgent[80] description of the Indochinese people: "We will not attribute more importance than they deserve to these little calumnies" (p.270), and a more majestic and romantic picture of the deltaic countryside and its "beauties" (pp.554-556, see chapter 5, section 5.3.3.2.).

These different descriptive positions with respect to Indochina could be related to two major differences in the preparation of their theses. Charles Robequain did not stay as long as Pierre Gourou in his region and chose to study a poor province formed by two contrasted entities. As Lê Bá Tháo[81] (1997, pp.430, 432) notices about the plains of North Trung Bô (the North of Central Vietnam, with the Thanh Hoá plain):

[79] See also in Chapter 7, section 7.3.2.2.

[80] But this facility to excuse the Annamite failings could be as well linked to a colonial feeling of superiority, in which the French colonizer becames the judge of the deficiencies of the colonised society (see Chapter 5).

[81] Professor Lê Bá Thâo was engaged in several French projects of cooperation about the evolution of the traditional Vietnamese villages, and has written a book about the geography of Vietnam translated in many languages (English, French, Russian). He worked on the new regional scheme of Vietnam, advising the Government Planning Committee. I met him in Hanoi, in October 1996, and had a regular correspondance with him. Sadly, Professor Lê Bá Tháo died in October 2000.

> The people are hard-working, they labour throughout the year in agriculture and animal rearing, but it is not infrequent that the results of their labour are wiped put overnight due to sudden disasters: drought and the Laos wind, typhoons accompanied with heavy rains coming from the East Sea that cause the sudden swelling of rivers, submerging villages and ricefields, the calamity is generally more serious in North Trung Bô than in other regions in terms of intensity and frequency.
>
> In spite of very great efforts in production, North Trung Bô remains poor until now.

In contrast, Pierre Gourou spent a longer time in fieldwork where he was introduced in the villages by the Vietnamese students to whom he was teaching history and geography in Hanoi and whose relatives were living in the deltaic plain he was investigating. As well, he chose to study a remarkably natural and humanly uniform region, more densely populated and intensively sculpted by the Annamites, and less poor than Thanh Hoá and most other Indochinese regions. Therefore, in his discourse, Pierre Gourou investigates the logic of this intensely human landscape, and writes about the creativity and potency of the Annamite society and the virtues of its effective interaction with the natural environment. His description focuses on work, association, solidarity and harmony, as expressed in the ideology of the Republican French.

The originality of Pierre Gourou's thesis thus stems essentially from his formalized geographical description through the concept of a humanized landscape which allows him to incorporate in his discourse the various characteristics of a human society that a geographer must take into account in describing the relationships between societies and their environment. Hence, Pierre Gourou establishes the landscape as a component of the geographical analysis, and this becomes a key to observing the human foundations of a region (see Chapter 7.4). Furthermore, Pierre Gourou extends his geographical description of a region to include municipal and social dimensions. He describes the local political and social organizations and institutions as major factors in the understanding of a region (p.263) and his descriptions become linked with every characteristic, which together establish a "civilization". With Pierre Gourou, a region ceases to be described mainly in ecological or naturalist terms but is determined by the civilization which makes use of the space and "moulds" the landscape. Epistemologically, Pierre Gourou's formalization of the description of landscape and the social organization of a region constructs a geography with a stronger social and cultural content, and enlarges the Vidalian vision.

As a result, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou constructed different representations of Indochina: Charles Robequain portrays an exotic and foreign image of Thanh Hoá, where the reader is like "a European traveller" "who runs vainly his regrets of vast lawns, of his mother country over the whole delta"[82] (p.364) or who is "surprised" (p.99); Pierre Gourou presents a more friendly and favourable image to the reader who is encouraged to be absorbed by the country and its inhabitants, where the charm and the beauty of the Delta "are revealed little by little to the one who accepts the necessary initiation, who follows during the different seasons dikes and footpasses, and penetrate the villages"[83] (p.554). Because of the stereotyped image and conception that a flat country is monotonous and not as beautiful as a varied one, Pierre Gourou observes the colours in all their shades and reflections, using a style rich with adjectives (pp.555-556). Like Vidal de la Blache, his style stays clear, and his landscape is animated by the human presence, the sounds and odours that could be felt (p.109), and the sensations that could come, very often, from senses other than the eye. But, even if Pierre Gourou kept his French stereotypes at a distance, his description of the landscape remained influenced by an aesthetic, philosophical and moral vision of the world, stemming from the French culture in both its classical and more modern aspects. It is a French geographer's construction despite their effort to portray the Asian essence. While the rice field, the rural landscape or the peasant descriptions outlined by Charles Robequain or Pierre Gourou may be factual, their descriptions are related to the culture to which Charles Robequain or Pierre Gourou belonged as well as to their own lives and experiences.

Consequently, to grasp the sense of the description of the geographers, we must understand that there is no one single representation, because the truth is not univocal, identifiable and universally definable, but rather is a norm, differently conceived by each culture, each civilization and also, at a more individual level, by each person

But their representation were also shaped by the development of the sciences and new techniques of the time.

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82 "*le voyageur européen promène en vain dans tout le delta le regret des vastes pelouses, de son pays natal.*"

83 "*Mais sa joliesse et sa beauté peu à peu se dévoilent aux yeux de celui qui consent à subir l' initiation nécessaire, qui suit aux différentes saisons digues et sentiers, et pénètre dans les villages*".

3.4 The Introduction of New Techniques and Problematics.

3.4.1 The advances of Vidalian geographers: modern techniques and methods

The Vidalian geographers of the 1920s and 1930s also integrated into their discourses the growing scientific and technical knowledge of the time, initiating agricultural or economic approaches to the countries, through a desire for objectivity and rationality. New tools and methods were developed to bring more substantial or exact descriptions and explanations to the geographical facts. For example, Albert Demangeon formulates a questionnaire in order to analyse a region (Demangeon, 1909, 1926) then, more specifically, the distribution of rural settlements (Demangeon, 1927), ultimately proposing a cartography of the population based on statistics (Demangeon, 1933).

The development of cartographical tools and the utilization of aerial photographs also appealed to geographers like Emmanuel de Martonne. In the *Institut de géographie of Paris,* in 1926, he organized the teaching of cartography to students of geography which he conceives as a synthetic work able to represent the essential relationships between the geographical entities. Emmanuel De Martonne was convinced that the use of photographs and aerial pictures was a fundamental geographical tool (Martonne, Feyel and Tessier, 1925).

Hence, the discourse of the French geographers became more related to scientific research and new investigative techniques. In fact, this evolution was not specific to the Vidalian geographers, but concerned most of the world geographical community. Cartographical and statistical methods began to be practiced by geographers such as John Buck (whom Gourou cited in his bibliography, see Chapter 2). Geographers began to conceive “thematic maps” focused on particular problems as well as “the idea of cartography applied to research”, as Marie-Claire Robic observes in her investigation about the International Geographical Union and the International Geographical Congresses. Marie-Claire Robic quotes Emmanuel de Martonne at the Congress of Varsovie, who considered the cartography of erosion surfaces through methodical maps as a “powerful instrument of scientific investigation” (Robic, 1996b, p.235). The semantic bases of topographical and statistical cartography were already formalized in the 19th century and were represented on maps through a gradation of white and black (Palsky, 1996). Despite the earlier interest of Vidal de la Blache in the use of these types of map, these methods only became extensively used during the 1920s and 1930s. At the time of the first regional theses, the databases did not stray from the domain of simple information. It is only in

the 1920s and mainly in the 1930s that the idea arose that the data itself could be a matter for research and reflection.

3.4.2 Territorial organization and development

This opening of geographical discourse to new tools of investigation was also connected to the search for a better knowledge of French regions, the colonial ones in particular. It was based on idiographic practices and convictions, with the intention of discerning the specific influences of the geographical conditions and the degree of civilization, and a concern for the growing problems of the traditional and/or colonial world, as it confronted modern society. It was also in the 1930s that Vidalian geographers like Albert Demangeon (1934) began to introduce into geographical terminology the world “tropical”. As well, in a more general way, the tropical countries began to be considered as a distinct zone compared to the temperate ones in the International Geographical Congress of Paris in 1931.

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were part of this evolution in terms of geographical techniques and approaches, and both presented papers derived or quoted from their theses in the International Geographical Congresses of the 1930s which attested to their interest in the characterization of tropical geography and the extention of relationships between cartography and geographical analysis. For example, during the International Geographical Congress of Paris, in 1931, Pierre Gourou and Charles Robequain both contributed on the subject of “the distribution of the human groups in the tropical regions” (fourth section of Human Geography), the paper given by Pierre Gourou being entitled “The various types of villages in the Tonkin delta and their distribution” (Gourou, 1931b, pp.487-490) and the one of Charles Robequain “Notes on the modifications of the settlement in French Indochina for 50 years” (Robequain, 1931b, pp.491-500). During this congress, Charles Robequain also gave a report concerning “The developing of railways and roads in French Indochina and Siam” (Robequain, 1931a, pp.513-520). More significantly, Pierre Gourou was involved in a discussion on the question of “Modes of representation of the density of the population” where he exhibited a map of the densities of the population of the Tonkin established from the statistical data of the French administration (Gourou, 1931c).

Their theses reveal this adoption of new methods or instruments. They frequently incorporated aerial photographs of the Fleet Air Arm service to visualize and investigate the forms of Indochinese rural settlement, and their theses included a concern for the statistical

representations of economic and demographic data and statistical cartography to represent spatially the relative density of the population by administrative divisions. Pierre Gourou further developed this cartographical investigation, correlating the density with other spatial components. Maps become a major instrument of his research (Chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis). As well, the demographical data that Gourou analysed in his Chapters II and III (pp.138-223) are also a major tool for him to seek an explanation and understanding of the region.

These new practices encouraged the geographers to become more involved in the regional problems of planning and development in order to determine an authentic rationalization of the French national territory. Marie-Claire Robic shows that the Vidalian geographers were also engaged in the economic and regional recovery of France after the damages of World War One (Robic, 1996a). Marie-Claire Robic (1996a, p.41) quotes Albert Demangeon, who affirms that:

> Our exact knowledge of France, of its economic aptitudes, its vital sources, is dependent on these geographical inquests made on the fields[84], in the search for the truth, with the concern of assembling and explaining the facts. They bring Vidal de la Blache to envisage the reassessing of the administrative divisions of France and the creation of new districts to frame the geographical regions; his project, adopted with fervour by all the regionalists, is used as a basis of several attempts at official reforms[85].

We find the same logic and request for territorial rationalization in Charles Robequain's thesis, where his concern for the regional problems of modernization of the Thanh Hoá region is particularly apparent in his final part, "The Work of France" (pp. 585-613) but is also present in others chapters. As well, in his conclusion, Pierre Gourou identifies the regional problems of development of the Tonkin plain that the French authorities seek to tackle and resolve.

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84 This "new" method where the geographer proceeds "in the field" to try to understand a region began to be also used by ethnologists such as Léopold Cadière or, in the anglo-saxon world, Bronislaw Malinowski in order to understand ethnic groups (see Chapter 7). But, in fact, the principle of realizing field inquiries was not new. It was first announced in the late 18th century by a French society called "the Observers of Man" ("*Les Observateurs de l' homme*") established by a group of French thinkers called the "*Ideologues*". Its members produced a questionnaire in 1799 for the expedition of Captain Nicholas Baudin to Australia (the "Austral Territories"), in order to comprehend the 'uncivilized' people.

85 "*Notre connaissance exacte de la France, de ses aptitudes économiques, de ses sources de vie, dépend de ces enquêtes géographiques faites sur les lieux, à la lumière de la réalité, avec le souci d' enchaîner et d' expliquer les faits. Elles ont mené Vidal de la Blache à envisager la refonte des circonscriptions administratives de la France et la création de nouvelles circonscriptions ayant pour cadre les régions géographiques; son projet, adopté avec ferveur par tous les régionalistes, sert de base à plusieurs essais de réforme officielle*".

Another growing concern of the social sciences in general, and human geography in particular, was linked with the demographic theme, the developing of the census data[86] and the explanation of human settlements and distributions. The geographer Pierre Deffontaines (1933, pp.15-22), who investigated the reasons for human settlement, and asserted that high densities of population are the result of intensive labour-work, stated this concern. It was also in the 1930s that the French sociologist Alfred Sauvy[87] began to develop demographic science. Along with these new concerns, the contemporaneousness of Gourou's discourse relies on his attempt to decipher the dynamic of the population through the analysis of census data (see Chapter 6).Thus, the French geographers faced the problems and tensions of their times and, *a fortiori,* Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's writings need to be put in relationship with the evolving colonial ideology and problematic. In the 1920s, when Charles Robequain wrote his thesis, the colonies were matters of planning/developing concern related to empirical projects. In the 1930s, Gourou views them in a different context. Even if the colonial idea was at its pinnacle, after the world crisis new questions and political debates arose about colonies such as the problem of their industrialization (with the controversy about whether industrialization must be or must not be developed in the colonies (Marseille, 1984, pp.240-257)[88]. The notion of 'overpopulation' in colonial regions occurred as well at this time, where, from French socio-economic reasoning, the increase of indigenous populations, linked with high birth rates, critically exceeded the increase of regional production. These distinctive periods presented different regional perspectives for the two geographers (see in Chapters 5 and 6).

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86 The British authorities organized as well census data in India, that both Charles Robequain (p.497) and Pierre Gourou (p.175) quote in their works. This promotion of census datas can be seen as the attempt of western countries to represent their population in a standard and comprehensive form adequate for understanding and regulating their modern society and to consider colonized populations as subjects of pragmatic knowledge.

87 It is after WWII that Alfred Sauvy became famous, mainly with his work *General Theory of Population* where he studied the relationship between the demographic-biological characteristics of societies and their economic and social circumstances (Sauvy, 1963, 1966).

88 As Jacques Marseille observes, the emergence of this problem is well illustrated by Charles Robequain in his book written in the 1930s on the economic development of French Indo-China (see in Chapter 6 footnote 3) where he wrote: "For some time industrialization of overseas territories has been a much talked about colonial problem in France as well as in other countries. Until recently the question had always been broached cautiously and uncomfortably. Now the tendency is to consider it in all its ramifications. Should processing industries be encouraged in the colonies? And if so, how can the legitimate interests of the mother country be safeguarded? What would be the effect of such development on native society? Would imperial ties be strengthened thereby or, on the contrary, would they be weakened? These questions are being ardently discussed today and rightly so. Undoubtedly this new trend is the result of the general change of attitude on colonial questions caused by the war and post-war conditions. It is scarcely necessary to add that similar problems do not develop at once in all the colonies and that the same solutions cannot be applied everywhere. Of all France's colonies, Indochina seems to be the one best suited, on the whole, to industrialization" (Robequain 1939, p. 317, and p.284 in the English version).

3.5 Conclusion

We can conclude from the above epistemological and deconstructionist approach of geographical discourse that French regional discourse, beyond the unity of its themes and rhetoric, is diverse and evolves. The Vidalian approach was not absolute, but rather is a norm, differently conceived by every political and historical period, context, and discipline but also, at a more individual level, by each person according to his own experience and nature. In this respect, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou added to Vidalian conceptions and method their own regional interpretations. In the following chapters, it will be investigated how respectively they inaugurate new conceptions in Vidalian geography (Chapter 4), or modernize it thanks to the development of the sciences and new techniques of the time (Chapter 6), and which relationships and positions they convey in regard to the Indochinese country and societies. These relationships were shaped by their personality together with French culture (Chapter 7), or generated by the evolving colonial context and ideology (Chapter 5), within two distinctive periods, the 1920s and the 1930s.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONSTRUCTION OF REGION IN THE THESES OF ROBEQUAIN AND GOUROU

4.1 Introduction

Although Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses are connected to the influential Vidalian methodology of regional geography, they applied it through two distinctive arguments. Hence, this Chapter examines how Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou adjusted the Vidalian model and concepts in order to construct their Indochinese regions. Questions investigated include: How do Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou conceive the natural bases of their region? How are the natural factors linked with the human geography of Thanh Hoá and of the Tonkin Delta? Are the borders of their regions defined only by natural factors?

Although both theses are steeped in Vidalian geography traditions, the two discourses remain different as a result of the respective individual dispositions and experiences of the two authors. According to this reflection, Charles Robequain's naturalist framework contrasts with the societal mould of Pierre Gourou's, producing parallel discourses but both contained within the precepts granted to Vidalian geographers[1]. Vincent Berdoulay's arguments concerning the autonomy of the discourse (Chapter 2) is especially pertinent to this investigation.

4.2 Charles Robequain –Naturalist Conceptions of Regional Space

4.2.1 A region defined with physical boundaries

With the Thanh Hoá region Charles Robequain chose to study a "middle" sized province, equivalent to the usual area chosen by French geographers investigating French regions. It was 10,850 square kilometres and contained 850,000 habitants. He specifies in a footnote that "Thanh Hoá is a little bigger than the biggest of the French departments (Gironde: 10,487 square kilometers)" (p.5). In a concern to give objective, concrete, meaningful and honest information

[1] As Pierre Gourou said, "His [Robequain] study of the plain of Thanh Hoá is very different from my study of the delta of Tonkin, because it is much shorter and less deep. It is not the same point of view even if obviously, the Thanh Hoá plain looks like the Tonkin plain ….. ", see Appendix H, Pierre Gourou's interview, 20-8-1995.

which accorded with the aspiration of French geographers to do scientific work, and to give a clear picture of their region, Charles Robequain (p.5) discusses the accuracy of the French maps which cover his region, and the uncertainties and failings of the population data.

The region studied by Charles Robequain was a historical Annamite province, originally one of the administrative regions created under the regime of the Emperor Lê-Thánh-Tôn at the end of the 15th century. During the colonial period, it became the North province of the French Protectorate of the Empire of Annam, which the French authorities had severed from the Tonkin and Cochin China parts of its original territory. It was also in Thanh Hoá where the first resistance was mobilized around mandarins and peasants for the defence of the legitimate Emperor against French authority, with the siege of Ba Dinh and guerilla activity in the mountains of this Province, in 1885.

In his geographical definition, Charles Robequain does not introduce these historical and colonial facts. He begins by formulating the physical limits and configuration of Thanh Hoá: -in the north, a limestone range; -in the west, two granite massifs: Le moyen Song Ma , and le moyen Song Chu. Charles Robequain (p.7) compares these through analogy suggesting that the region be like a building for human habitation where the two massifs are like the framework of a house, which protect its inhabitants. He wrote that the two massifs are:

> *... the major supports of the framework under which the province of Thanh Hoá shelters, like under the two sections of a roof*[2]. (p.7)

In the south, the hills of the Nhu-Xuan separate Thanh Hoá from the more southern province of Nghe-An; in the East is the sea. These borders, formed by natural obstacles, contribute to him giving a naturalistic meaning to Thanh Hoá.

Charles Robequain also determines in his Introduction that the province is composed of two distinctive units which are the two basic territorial aspects of the Tonkin and Annam: a background mountainous country, less populated, and inhabited by various peoples whom are not Annamite; and the delta plain heavily populated by the Annamites and covered with rice fields.

Consequently, Charles Robequain's framework does not correspond to a single, natural and homogenous region, but to two contrasting regions. As already mentioned in Chapter 3, he

[2] "*telles sont les pièces maîtresses de la charpente sous laquelle s' abrite la province de Thanh Hoá, comme sous les deux pans d' un toit*".

studied them separately, in two different parts, *L 'Arrière-pays* and *Le Delta* that constitute the two dominant divisions of the thesis[3] (Appendix C.1, "Reduced structure of Charles Robequain's thesis"). His theoretical regional framework is based on the dialectic between the internal contrasts and the implicit unity of the province in historical and administrative terms. This structure therefore has links with Hegelian rhetoric where the differences (for instance 'opposite' regions such as mountainous regions and deltaic ones) are first opposed and then reconciled around their reciprocal imperatives and complementary needs (through the exchange of products etc.). Therefore, he notes that his province has actually a "lively unity combined with variety", with two "different" but "interdependent" (*solidaires*) regions:

> *...the contrast is luminescent between the Delta and the background country, and it is vigorously expressed in the totality and all the details of the landscape: on the one hand, an alluvium plain, with slow rivers, rare trees, entirely cultivated, continuously and abundantly populated; in the other, an area of massifs and wild secondary ranges, woody desert, punctured with oblong basins where rice fields and men are concentrated. These two interdependent regions are however too different not to require for each of them a distinct study ...,* (p.52)[4].

Charles Robequain saw as a "manifestation of deep laws"[5] the different relations between the geographical phenomena he could observe in the province. This assertion implied that the regional oppositions produced deep complementarities that defined Thanh Hoá:

> *It is not only an administrative province, it is truly a "pays", a harmonious grouping, around delta lands, hills rising progressively to mountains, a lively unity combining variety, and in which we discovered more than the effect of chance, the manifestation of deep laws*[6].(p.7).

Charles Robequain's writing reproduces the dominant French discourse concerning Thanh Hoá, represented for example by Pierre Pasquier who wrote in regard to its past, present and future in a lyrical and heroic style typical of the Third Republic:

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[3] The other divisions being concerned with "the climate" pp.9-52, and with "the work of France" pp.585-610.

[4] *"…le contraste est éclatant entre le delta et l' arrière-pays et il s' exprime vigoureusement dans l' ensemble et dans tous les détails des paysages: d' une part, une plaine alluviale, aux fleuves lents, aux arbres rares, presque entièrement cultivée, continûment et abondamment peuplée; de l' autre, une zone de massifs et de chainons sauvages, boisés et presque déserts, crevés de bassins oblongs où se concentrent les rizières et les hommes. Ces deux régions solidaires sont néanmoins trop différentes pour ne pas solliciter chacune une étude distinctes"*.

[5] In the context of the development of sciences, "law" is a general expression, which states the mutual connections inherently incorporated between physical phenomena. Generally, French geographers used the term "laws" to designate the causal sequences constitutive of the environment, and the rationality of the interactions between the various elements constitutive of a region.

[6] *"Ce n' est pas seulement une circonscription administrative, c' est un véritable "pays", un harmonieux groupement, autour de terres delta?ques, de collines qui se haussent progressivement en montagnes, une unité bien vivante, faite de variété, et dans laquelle on découvre, plus que l' effet d' un hasard, la manifestation de lois profondes"*.

> Thanh Hoá is not merely an administrative area, it is a “pays”. It has as many distinct parts as the whole of the province of Tonkin of which it is a microcosm, with its lush, fertile delta, its rolling, grassy plains and its wild high country densely covered with magnificent tropical forests. …In times of danger Thanh Hoa rather than Hanoi was for Annam a holy shrine holding all the hopes of the race. From this chosen land…came the finest and bravest heroes of its history. Thanh Hoa was the cradle of three dynasties, the Ile de France of Annam [7] (Pasquier, 1918); (quoted in Bouault, 1930).

More particularly, we can discern in Charles Robequain’s region the same association of two different bodies, the mountain and the plain, as in Paul Vidal de la Blache's interpretation of the Mediterranean region (1926, pp.129-154). Using the same approach as Vidalian geographers describing mountainous or Mediterranean regions[8], Charles Robequain demarcates the geological formations of the mountainous area and the ones of the plain. He distinguishes in the “background country” (*arrière pays*) as well as in the deltaic plain (pp.256-279, vol.II) "three large zones" and divides these each into smaller "natural regions". Concerning the *arrière-pays*, Robequain discerns the hills and basins of the North Thanh Hoá, with two dominant formations: the limestone (with karst forms), and the schists. The description begins always with the lithological structure, and the topological forms that it produces; the description and analysis of the streams come after. He shows the structural "complexity", but, in conformity with the rationalist disposition of western scholars, tries to "introduce some order in this confusing whole" (p.55). Thus, he selects some common characters: "the dropping and progressive erasure of the relief to the South-East and the sea" (p.55), the alignment in "parallel stripes with North-West - South-East directions", underlining that this last disposition, “very characteristic of the South Tonkin, in the South of the Red River, is found in all the province” (p.56).

The Vidalian motivation in studying a region composed of mountainous country and a plain was to reveal the linkages operating between its entities, and through the notions of “unity with variety”, “solidarity” and complementarity[9]. The problem for Charles Robequain was that the close relationships attested by Vidal in the Mediterranean region between pastoral and sedentary groups or by other Vidalian geographers such as Maximilien Sorre in regard to the

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[7] “*Thanh Hoá n’ est pas une simple division administrative, c’ est un pays. Aussi divisé que le Tonkin tout entier dont il reproduit l’ image réduite il a son delta opulent et fertile, sa moyenne région herbeuse et ondulée, son haut pays tumultueux que la forêt souveraine vêt de son manteau somptueux de frondaisons….Thanh Hoá aux heures d’ épreuves a été pour l’ Annam mieux que Hanoi le reliquaire sacré conservant tous les espoirs de la race. De cette terre élue…sont sortis les héros les plus glorieux et les plus valeureux de son histoire. Elle est le berceau de trois dynasties… Elle est l’ Ile de France de l’ Annam*”

[8] Such as Jules Sion with the Pyrénées (Sion and Sorre, 1934).

[9] This idea of totality, with general laws built by the connections between various and different geographical phenomena, come from the German geographer Karl Ritter, who was the first to formulate it, in the 19th century. Ritter is considered an originator of human geography.

Pyrénées through the phenomenon of transhumance (Sorre, 1913), does not arise in the Thanh Hoá context. Charles Robequain could not apply the regional approach that Paul Vidal de la Blache conceived for the Mediterranean basin and for France as a whole, where links between the different physical areas, societies and regions were established and clearly described[10]. On the contrary, Charles Robequain states that each group is living essentially an autarchic existence and that the exchanges were limited "on both side of a desolate march between the mountain and the plain" (p.94). It required Charles Robequain to adjust the Vidalian model to the Asian *milieux* through a comparative and opposite scheme, different from the Vidalian one, and to build finally the regional unification around the idea of the superiority of the Annamite civilization and the work of French colonialization. Charles Robequain (p.251) writes:

> *It is the Delta which creates the unity of the province, which is its heart, and the limits of Thanh Hoá are the extent of the Annamite influence which originates in the Sòng Mã plain*[11]*.* (p. 251).

The "required" Vidalian unity is conceived in the rhetoric as two back to front regions, where the peripheral region cannot exist without the central region and vice versa (something like a donut or a Paris-Brest where the outside cannot exist without the centre and vice versa).

4.2.2 The naturalist conception of the regional environment shaded with social factors and colonialism

Having defined the boundaries of his region from a more or less arbitrary geomorphic point of view, Charles Robequain, in the tradition of Lucien Gallois (1908), analyses it through a close study of the relationship between the natural environment and the people who live in it. In order to find how the different natural elements and phenomena of the landscape are combined he begins his task by analyzing the relief and its various lithologic and structural forms based on geology[12]. By reference to the works of reputed geologists (Ch. Jacobs and L. Dussault) or

[10] Paul Vidal de la Blache's approach combines the different ways of life of the Mediterranean basin between the mountainous and pastoral groups and the plain and cultivator groups with a dialectic of the scales which allows the different human entities of the "rivieras" (the mediterranean coasts which are well sheltered from winds) or altitudes zones to participate in exchanges with the more productive and important Greek, Arab, Spanish or Italian spheres.

[11] *"c' est le delta qui fait l' unité de la province, qui en est le cœur, et les limites du Thanh Hoá sont celles du rayonnement annamite issu des plaines du Sòng Mã"*.

[12] Charles Robequain considered the climate that he introduced at the very beginning of the research (First book) as a dominant factor, albeit at the South East Asia scale. He remarks in the first sentence about the climate that there is not a regional climatic specificity, writing, "we could not see in Thanh Hoá a climatic unity" (p.9). More precisely, Charles Robequain considers the climate of Thanh Hoá as belonging to the 'Tonkin climate', which is characterized by four seasons instead of only two in the classical schematic (the dry season and the wet one) constituting at this time the definition of a tropical climate with monsoon. According to Charles Robequain, the climatic differences between the mountainous country and the Deltaic plain are not a sufficient factor for regional differentiation between the two parts.

naturalists (Auguste Chavalier) who worked in Indochina, his regional geography becomes quite 'naturalised'. Charles Robequain had familiarised himself with the works about Indochina written by the geologists. It is the relief with its structure that defines two majors parts in Thanh Hoá and many regional subdivisions. In fact, his logic stays dependent on the geological conceptions, but is also linked to the kind of information available to Charles Robequain: for example, the particulars of the local climatic were not yet known. He does not bring new physical concepts relevant to tropical Asia, and organizes the physical and geological elements in a descriptive nomenclature through what Marie-Louise Pratt calls "imperial eyes" (Pratt, 1992). That is, he categorizes the Indochinese landscape through geomorphological classification and conceptions established by Western researchers. Consequently, the descriptions of the natural Thanh Hoá areas are tinged with exoticism.

In accordance with the concept of "geographical region", defined by Lucien Gallois, geography is differentiated from the geological or natural sciences by a consideration of human action in natural environment. For example, identifying gorges ("*défilés*"), he defines their role in the communications, using the example of the Phõ-Cát, where "by the pass of Dông Giao...the Mandarin road and the railway edge their way" (p. 57). However, if Charles Robequain introduces human actions into his physical descriptions, the natural environment remains largely determinant in his approach. For example, the distributions of the various Indochinese groups are considered to adapt to, and be ordered by, the natural divisions of the province. Thus, in his naturalist regional conception, Charles Robequain conceives the distribution of the ethnic groups through the various natural regions he has discerned:

> *...the Mu'ò'ng habitat coincides largely with the area of the hills and basins of the North Thanh Hoá, while the Thai habitat coincides with the high region of the West. These natural regions can be used as the framework for a more precise statement*[13]*.* (p.114).

> *It is the 15 metres contour line which, on a map with little scale, and overlooking the details, would represent, in the province, the geographical areas with the richest significance [between the Deltaic and the mountainous regions]*[14]*.* (p.93).

This naturalist view is reflected also in his conception of the ways of life, which he sees as the result of primarily "the physical conditions" of an area. The human conditions are also important but "to a lesser extent".

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[13] *"l' habitat muong coïncide à peu près avec la zone des collines et bassins du Nord Thanh Hoá, et l' habitat thai avec le haut pays de l' Ouest. Ces régions naturelles peuvent servir de cadre à un exposé plus précis".*

> *It is essentially an agricultural civilization of these mountainous people, and, as throughout Indochina, it is based before all on rice. But the culture of this cereal assumes different modes compared with the Delta, and varies according to the physical conditions, and also, but to a lesser extent, according to human habits. Thus, from one end of the mountain to the other, from the North to the South, from the East to the West, the economy is modified and the way of life assumes various nuances*[15]*.* (p.152).

In accordance with Paul Vidal de la Blache's concept of the *genre de vie*, Charles Robequain measures the primordial influence of the natural environment by observing the specific techniques that each ethnic group developed to exploit the surrounding environment and extract from its soil what is indispensable for life. He considers these techniques as an adaptation and a response of the human group to its environment so there is a correspondence between each natural region, their techniques and the population density of each ethnic group. In presenting this argument, his discourse can be seen as tinted with determinism where the physical causes prevail, although his discussion also includes combined views of the different natural and human aspects of the regional subdivisions as well as human causes, as asserted in following examples:

> *In the West Thanh Hoá, the lowest [density] is in the district of Luc Canh...spread out completely on an area of hard granite rocks of the mid Sông Mã … The most important is Quân Nhân ... where ... the Sông Trang ... was able to widen, between the secondary ranges of rhyolite and limestone, the pleasing and well irrigated valley of Lâm Lu' ... In the whole of this area, we see the density increasing from the North to the South ... in fact, as we move to the South, the granites, massive and poor, are less extensive, and the streams clear off less narrow basins between the range of eruptive and sedimentary rocks*[16]*.* (pp.217-218).

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[14] "*C' est la courbe de niveau de 15 m. qui, sur une carte à petite échelle, négligeant les détails, figurerait, dans la province, la limite géographique la plus riche de signification*".

[15] "*C' est une civilization essentiellement agricole que celle de ces montagnards, et, comme dans l' Indochine entière, elle est fondée avant tout sur le riz. Mais la culture de cette céréale y affecte des modes différents de ceux du delta, et très divers, selon les conditions physiques, et aussi, quoique à un moindre degré, selon les habitudes humaines. Ainsi, d' un bout à l' autre de cette zone montagneuse, du Nord au Sud, de l' Est à l' Ouest, l' économie se modifie et le genre de vie revêt des nuances variées*"

[16] "*Dans l' Ouest Thanh Hoá, la plus faible [densité] est celle du canton de Luc Canh, étendu tout entier sur le massif granitique du moyen Song Ma … La plus forte est celle de Quan Nhan où…the Song Trang … a pu élargir, entre les chainons de rhyolites et de calcaire, la vallée riante et bien irriguée de Lam Lu … Dans l' ensemble de cette zone, on voit la densité augmenter du Nord au Sud…en effet, à mesure qu' on avance vers le Sud, les granits, massifs et pauvres, tiennent une place moins grande, et les cours d' eau se taillent des bassins moins étroits entre les alignements de roches éruptives ou sédimentaires*".

The Annamite civilization ... has fixed its essential characteristics in the Tonkin and North Annam deltas. The Sông Mã is one of the deltas which has supported and maintained its slow elaboration, and which has nourished its influence, impregnated with its virtues[17]*, and which has been at the same time deeply transformed by it, so deeply that land and Man look inseparable, and compose a complete image, a picture full of meaning*[18]*.* (p.253)*.*

The different agricultural areas of the delta appear to be traced on the natural regions that the study of its physical environment and of its relief has distinguished. We recognize them easily, with the simple observation of the fields ... :the combination of the two essential elements examined, the nature of the soil and possibilities of irrigation, determine in each of them, with a certain body of cultures, an original landscape and some particular modes of human activities[19]*,* (p.332)*.*

In fact, in regard to the Indochinese context, Charles Robequain observed that the natural factors cannot explain everything. Hence, Charles Robequain recalls on occasion other factors (for example, cultural factors such as geomancy, occasionally tempered by Annamite "common sense observations", p.496) than the natural environment:

It is more difficult to explain the prosperity of Cho Bang ... it is possible that this belief in the geomantic value of the place is at the origin of the market wealth ... The strict determinism is, at any rate, failing, because nothing has especially assigned Cho Bang to that prominence[20]*.* (p.540)

Consequently, the cultural specificities of the Indochinese context cause Charles Robequain to contain his naturalist discourse (see Chapter 7, section 7.3.3.2). But, as an alternative he introduces less the role of Indochinese societies and instead substitutes a colonialist view (see Chapters 5, 6), where the supposedly superstitious and primary behaviour of the Indochinese people have not always been able to exploit with discernment or take advantage of the natural conditions to develop their activities. For example, he wrote

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[17] In this metaphoric rhetoric, the validity of cultural concepts such as the one of harmony between nature and Man appear clearly. This emphatic style is characteristic of many discourses during the Third Republic.

[18] "*La civilization annamite, qui pénètre ainsi les montagnes de la province, a fixé ses traits essentiels dans les deltas du Tonkin et du Nord-Annam. Celui du Song Ma est l' un de ceux qui ont supporté et entretenu sa lente élaboration, qui l' ont pour ainsi dire nourrie de leur influence, imprégnée de leur vertu, et qui ont été en même temps profondément transformés par elle, si profondément que le sol et l' homme y apparaissent partout inséparables, et y composent une image complète, un tableau plein de sens*".

[19] "*Les différentes zones agricoles du delta apparaissent calquées sur les régions naturelles que l' étude de son évolution physique et de son relief a permis de distinguer. On les reconnaît aisément, à la mince observation des champs, lorsqu' on a traversé quelquefois la plaine, de la mer à la montagne: la combinaison des deux éléments essentiels que nous avons examinés, nature du sol et possibilités d' irrigation, détermine dans chacune d' elles, avec un certain ensemble de cultures, un paysage original et quelques modes particuliers de l' activité humaine*".

[20] "*Il est plus difficile d' expliquer la prospérité de Cho Ban … il est probable que cette croyance en la valeur géomantique du lieu est à l' origine de la fortune du marché … Le strict déterminisme se trouve en tout cas pris en défaut, car rien ne désignait particulièrement Cho Ban à cette préeminence …*". This quotation is more developed in chapter 7, section 7.3.2.2.

Instead of establishing him on a territory where the natural and economic conditions would be more valuable for his activity, he [the Annamite] prefers generally to stay at home, with a more miserable life, near the tomb of his ancestors. On that account we may explain the disconcerting habitat of the Annamite craftsman[21] (p.461).

Thus, with Charles Robequain, the human action of Indochinese populations on their environment is not systematically presented like a challenge as it is in Paul Vidal de la Blache or Pierre Gourou 's discourses, because it is infused with colonial ideology (see Chapters 3 and 5).

4.2.3 An anthropomorphic interpretation of the physical environment

Following the geomorphologic interpretations of the time, influenced by Darwinist conceptions, Charles Robequain reconstitutes the reality of the geomorphological aspects of the landscape by calling on the long geological cycles to explain the complex lithologic successions, the dissection of the relief and the dawning of the hydrologic system in the hills and basins of the North Thanh Hoá and the high region of the West. His argument comes back to an "old peneplain" (p 79):

an old bumpy surface, which has been exhausted, of about one thousand meters elevation in the West of the province while in the South-East, it remains close to sea level. The erosion seems to have worked with a great regularity in this sloping bloc[22]*(...)* (p. 90).

Describing the lithological complexity of the hills and basins in the south of the region and using the research of the geologists such as L. Dussault and Ch. Jacob, Charles Robequain defines overthrusts dating from the end of the Triassic epoch.

In the Delta, Charles Robequain reconstitutes the geological history of the continental shelf and the geological age of the "monadnock" which dotted it (pp. 255-260), and of the formation of the sand bars (evoking the sea currents but interrogating also the modifications of the sea level). The morphologic vocabulary suggests this long elaboration, with "morphological contrasts" between the different parts of the Province. Some present "oldness aspects, other" looking "still very young" (p.82) or forms which are "not yet senile" but have "an appearance of maturity" (p.85).

In the Thanh Hoá North area, the forms are not yet senile: it is only an appearance of maturity that begins to be outlined, with the enlargement of large embanked basins[23] *…*(p.85)

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[21] "*à s' établir sur un territoire où les conditions naturelles ou économiques seraient plus profitables à son activité, il préfère souvent vivre chez lui, d' une vie misérable, près des tombeaux de ses ancêtres. Ainsi expliquera-t-on peut-être, l' habitat, parfois déconcertant, des artisans annamites*".

[22] "*une vieille surface bosselée a été relevée d' environ 1000m. dans l' O. de la province, alors que vers le S.E., elle conservait un niveau voisin de celui de la mer. L' érosion semble avoir travaillé avec une grande régularité dans ce bloc incliné …*".

Charles Robequain follows the geomorphological conceptions of Emmanuel de Martonne and William Morris Davis, by looking at the general structural morphology and the action of the erosion of stream water and epeirogenic movements. He uses the terminology of William Morris Davis (1909) when he describes the residual reliefs such as *monadnocks* (p.85) and applies the notion of the cycle of erosion to produce the knowledge and understanding of the relief of the Annamite province. Like William Morris Davis, Charles Robequain uses by analogy a vocabulary of metaphors considering the geomorphologic entities as if they were human, and reflecting the different periods of life: birth, maturity, ageing, old age. This anthropomorphism is typical of French geography and, more generally of Western philosophy, where divine or natural phenomena are often apprehended as human facts[24]. Thus the image of a natural region is conceived as a body composed of distinctive elements, but coordinated in order to build an authentic, accurate and lively totality. In due course, it reinforces the naturalist basis of the region.

This naturalist approach, where the morphological characters of a region are analogous to human life, does not appear in Pierre Gourou's argument. In contrast, Pierre Gourou considers that "Man is the most important geographic fact in the Delta" (p109) and that the Annamite peasant "has kneaded its relief with his hand"(p.109) (see below).

4.3 Pierre Gourou's Regional Framework

The regional division in Pierre Gourou's work does not correspond to a provincial, administrative or composite region such as Thanh Hoá. Pierre Gourou's frame of reference is more restrictive and thematic, dealing only with, as the title of his thesis announces "The peasants of the Tonkin Delta" [25]. The mountainous area of the Tonkin region surrounding the Deltaic plain, which were inhabited by ethnic minorities, the urban areas such as Hanoi, the industrial or mining activities and their associated developments are all excluded from Pierre Gourou 's research.

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[23] *"Dans la zone du Nord Thanh Hoá, les formes ne sont pas encore séniles: c' est seulement une apparence de maturité qui commence à s' esquisser, avec de larges bassins remblayés …"*

[24] Such as in Baruch Spinoza's philosophy (1975). Spinoza's philosophy proposed to reform the way people think and live in order to bring a new ethic where the wise man engages in a life of philosophical contemplation studying the rational and eternal, and views the world from a "sub specie aeternitatis" position. His rational (as opposed to mystical or religious) understanding that God is the ultimate eternal reason of all things caused him to be expelled from the synagogue. Spinoza considered Man to be a part of Nature and Nature to be a conceptual as well as a material totality.

But Pierre Gourou's geographical approach remains close to Paul Vidal de la Blache in the way that he examines the man/environment relationship and regional unity through the observation of the density of the population (as we have mentioned in chapter 3). As Pierre Gourou says in the very first sentence (p.7) of his thesis about his regional frame:

> *The Tonkin Delta is a plain of restricted extent: it covers only 15,000 square kilometres; but it is extremely densely populated, because it nourishes, badly if truth be known, 6, 500, 000 peasants; thus, the population density rises to the remarkable level of 430 inhabitants per square kilometre on average*[26].

More generally, Pierre Gourou focuses on the "human unity" of the Deltaic region (p.14) and on the fact that it is "a country moulded by humanity" (p.14). Consequently, Pierre Gourou examined the concordance between geological and human limits such as the population density, the Annamite dwellings, or the Annamite ethnicity and his chosen limits are linked with natural or physical factors as well as with "considerations of human geography" (pp.11-13). For example, besides the distinct physical criteria which delimit the Deltaic plain, like the 15 metres topographic line or the geological perimeter of the recent alluvium, Pierre Gourou superimposes (p.13) on the Northeast a human boundary "determined by considerations of human geography:

> *As limits for our study, we have adopted in the direction of the South-West and the North-East of the Delta the geological demarcation. … On the contrary, in the North-West, serious rectifications to the geological border must be undergone: it is a country with low terraces where the Annamite settlement could have encroached. … The fig n.1 shows our Delta delimitation and the few differences it presents compared to the geological border, differences determined by considerations of human geography such as relatively dense population, deltaic type of habitat, and cultivation of the major part of the soil*[27] (p.13)

The particularity of the physical approach in Pierre Gourou's thesis rests on its orientation to the analysis of natural factors only to the extent that they have an influence on peasant life, and it thus occupies fewer pages than the human geography of the thesis (pp.19-108).

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[25] To underline this purpose, the publications of the E.F.E.O. chose a drawing of a peasant with his buffalo to figure on the front of the thesis. As Lê Bá Tháo explains: "It is a peasant with his buffalo who holds in his hand a traditional plough, that traditional paintings of the Vietnamese popular art are used to represent" (letter of the 18th March 1999).

[26] "*Le Delta tonkinois est une plaine d' étendue restreinte: il couvre seulement 15.000 kilomètres carrés; mais il est extrêmement peuplé puisqu' il nourrit, -à vrai dire assez mal,-6.500.000 paysans; la densité de la population y atteint donc un taux remarquablement élevé de 430 habitants au kilomètre carré en moyenne.*"

[27] "*…dans le nord-ouest, la limite géologique doit subir de sérieuses corrections: c' est un pays de basses terrasses où le peuplement deltaïque a pu empiéter … La figure n1 montre notre limite du Delta et les quelques différences qu' elle présente avec la limite géologique, différences déterminées par des considérations de géographie humaine telles que peuplement relativement dense, habitat de type delta?que, mise en culture de la majeure partie du sol.*"

4.3.1 A human geography

Pierre Gourou' s research is "A Study of Human Geography" as he notes in the subtitle to his work. He shows at the end of his Introduction the human connection between the Tonkin Delta and its peasant civilization. It is on this authentic peasant civilization "living of itself, and for a long time closed to any foreign ethnic addition" (p.15) that Pierre Gourou constructs the local individuality of his region. Compared to the other regional theses, his physical analysis presents only the natural regional factors that have helped shape the human and social ones. Through this chosen Annamite peasant orientation, Pierre Gourou's discourse does not imply or refer to an analysis of the existing or potential relationships and exchanges between other human groups of the Tonkin area (with the mountainous area for example, as Charles Robequain did in his analysis of the Thanh Hoá delta) or between Indochina and other South East Asian countries. The significant region for Pierre Gourou is composed of the space conceived and developed by its actors, the Annamite peasants, where they can perform their expert rice cultivation, confirm their social and political life, and establish their institutions within villages. Thus, the Tonkin mountainous country is excluded from his regional study in the way that:

> *The state of health, material and social conditions of the life in the mountains are not such to attract the Annamites in the mountains*[28].p.158.

Pierre Gourou explains in this sense that malaria, the infertility of the soil and the impossibility of practicing an intensive rice cultivation in the mountainous region surrounding the deltaic one are the factors which cause the opposition between the two regions, and more specifically, between the high population density of the delta and the low density of the surrounding mountainous areas (p.155).

4.3.2 A study of physical environment through its human ramifications

In accordance with the Vidalian conception that the natural environment influences human distribution, Pierre Gourou' s physical argument rests on the conception that landforms, and more especially the alluvial and fluvial terraces of the delta, act directly on the habitat and on the distribution of the rice-fields and cultures. The physical discourse of Pierre Gourou starts in a conformist way with the presentation of the natural environment, but presents also some new options where the geographer, more concerned with the human societies than their natural

[28] "*Les conditions hygiéniques, matérielles et sociales de la vie dans les montagnes ne sont pas faites pour attirer les Annamites dans les montagnes*".

environment, analyses this natural frame essentially and fundamentally in relationship to human society. His approach puts in first place not the environment but Man.

Thus, he comments in the introduction of the chapter "the relief of the Delta":

> *To study the geography of this country, the geographer must center his attention on human facts. The physical environment calls for examination first, since it has created the frame which is varied, rich and important.*(p19-20)*...this plain has its relief, which is of major importance for Man, because minimal differences of elevation protect a region from the floods, or result in another being submerged during most of the year. A few more centimetres higher and here is a country which could not cultivate rice in winter, where the villages get wider and the houses disperse; a few less centimetres lower draws the villages in, the houses squeeze up against each other, and stop the rice cultivation in the rain season*[29]. (p.20).

The human consequences of the relief conditions are methodically introduced through the presentation of a hypsometric map of the Delta at the scale of 1/250,000 (First Appendix in attachment in his thesis) which creates an idea of the variations of the level of the alluvium which are represented in different colors. These variations need to be known, because they command the regime of the waters, the nature of the cultures and the establishment of men (p.29). Pierre Gourou advances a synthesis between these physical conditions and the human components, by suggesting the connection of the map of the villages to the analysis of the hypsometric map (see chapter 6, section 6.3.1).

> *The Northwest of the Delta appears on the (hypsometric) map higher and more tortured (…) The rivers are bordered by natural levees which are above the level of the alluvial plain. These natural levees (...) do not have a relative elevation of more than two or three metres. They are, however, an essential accident in the landscape and, by their elevation, which protects them from ordinary floods, they attract villages to them. The fact is confirmed by the map of the village (separate, in color, n.3), examination of which will clarify the hypsometry of the Delta*[30]*.* (p.29).

Unlike Charles Robequain, the part in the thesis dealing with the geological formation and evolution of the relief of the deltaic plain is short (pp.43-54). Pierre Gourou begins this paragraph with the historical evolution, (A-the historical pieces of information), that is to say the scale and the time of the Annamite people; the geological one coming only after (B-the geologic

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[29] "*Le géographe, pour étudier ce pays, doit concentrer son attention sur les faits humains. Le milieu physique veut pourtant être examiné en premier lieu, puisqu' il crée le cadre de l' activité humaine, mais c' est le contenu de ce cadre qui est varié, riche et important … cette plaine a son relief, qui est de grande importance pour l' homme, car de minimes différences de niveau mettent une région à l' abri des inondations, ou valent à une autre d' être submergée pendant la plus grande partie de l' année. Quelques centimètre de plus et voilà un pays qui ne peut plus cultiver le riz en hiver, où les villages s' élargissent et les maisons s' égaillent; quelques centimètres de moins amènent les villages à se resserrer, les maisons à se presser les unes contre les autres, et empêchent de pratiquer la culture du riz en saison des pluies*".

[30] "*Le nord-ouest du Delta apparaît sur la carte comme plus haut et plus tourmenté … les fleuves s' accompagnent de bourrelets qui dominent la plaine alluviale; ces bourrelets sont très larges et n' ont pas une altitude relative supérieure à deux ou trois mètres; cependant ils constituent un accident essentiel dans le paysage, et par leur niveau, qui les met à l' abri des inondations moyennes, attirent les villages. Le fait est nettement souligné par la carte des villages (hors-texte en couleur n.3) dont la consultation éclairera cette étude de l' hypsométrie du delta*".

hypotheses), and is written in just four pages. Pierre Gourou finishes this analysis of the evolution of the relief by a study of the soil, inasmuch as it "presents a primordial importance for the agriculture" (p. 50). This last sentence comes back and connects to the human approach he has stated in the first sentence of his physical part presented just above and, furthermore, to the problematic of the thesis, the understanding of the high density of the Annamite population.

> *The fertility of the soil is reflected in the density of the population which reaches its higher values on the richest soils and not in the most anciently populated regions. The relief and the nature of the soil are dominated by the settlement of the villages and the quantity of the population; in this country that he has worked with his hand, defended with an immense network of dykes, man is still the slave of things* (p. 54).

Regularly, through the different Chapters of the human analysis, Pierre Gourou recalls his physical observations in conformity with the Vidalian problematic of the relationships between Man and natural environment but, in fact, mainly to provide full comprehension of the humanised landscape. For example, in his analysis of the distribution of the population, Pierre Gourou recalls the different aspects of his physical analysis in order to recognize the relations which exist between the peasant and the physical features: in his chapter II ("the density of the population"), the high densities of the peasant population along the Red River are related to the fertility of the soil and Pierre Gourou (p.160) refers the reader to the study of the soils that we have mentioned above. He writes:

> *The Red River is flanked by banks of high population densities (...) There is nothing astonishing in this. The banks of the Red River (...) are more fertile than the rest of the Delta*[31]. [And he adds in footnotes] *see above, p.50, the study of the soil.*

To explain the "qualitative distribution" of the villages industries, Pierre Gourou evokes obvious laws to explain some of the villages' specialisations such as the fabrication of bricks located near clay deposits (pp.507-508). But, in counterpoint, he restricts the significance of determinist laws by observing the fact that some potters' "have to go very far to find their clay" (p.507) or that

> *…when we tackle the industries which use raw materials which are not produced in the Delta, any determinant law disappears*[32]. (p.508)

Compared to Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou's restriction on his use of determinist proposals separates him from colonialist opinion, where the appearing absence of "rational

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31 "*le Fleuve Rouge est accompagné par des bandes de fortes densités … Rien d' étonnant à cela: les rives du Fleuve Rouge … sont plus fertiles que le reste du delta*".

32 "*Mais, quand on aborde les industries qui utilisent des matières premières non produites dans le Delta, toute loi déterminante disparaît*".

causes" leads to disapproving judgements (see Chapter 5). More generally, throughout his writings, the human factors are used more assertively than the physical ones in the understanding of the Tonkin delta region that Pierre Gourou conceived as a "country steeped in humanity, in which man has everywhere created the landscape to its present appearance"[33] (p.14). As Pierre Gourou said: "The action of Man is determined by the civilization to which he belongs. Nothing can be done against this" (see Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou, 29-8-95).

4.3.3 Climate and rivers as major components of the peasant life.

The climate is studied by Pierre Gourou in Chapter II and the water, which is linked to the climate, in Chapter III. Like in other regional theses with rural themes (chapter 3, section 3.1.4), Pierre Gourou's approach is led by considerations about daily peasant life. But Pierre Gourou 's argument is more selective and he says in his introduction to the climate that his aim is not to describe all the elements and the complexity of the climate for itself. He identifies in the elements of climate the aspects which contribute to shaping and influencing peasant life and activities. For example, he considers that "the temperatures called for few observations" (p.56), and chose instead to develop mainly the fact that the temperature conditions allow the peasant all year plants and crops. He also talks about the drizzle, this thin rain of the dry season which permits a rice harvest (the fifth month harvest), which comes in addition to the major ten month harvest, and which allows also non irrigated agriculture.

> *Tonkin has a hot climate broken by a cool season. It is rather cold in winter, the thermometer has been seen to drop to 5, 6 degrees in the Delta, so that the peasant clad in thin cotton clothing, shivers in his unsealed house. But all seasons provide warmth sufficient for cultivation. There is not a month in which some crop does not ripen. The cold season somewhat slows the development of the fifth month rice which occupies the ricefield longer than the rice of the tenth month. But it allows the cultivation of the temperate plants such as vegetables of Europe (...) The Tonkinese peasant has never lost a crop from excess heat or cold*[34]*.* (p.56)

[33] "*Dans ce pays pétri d' humanité, où l' homme a crée partout le paysage tel que nous le voyons, cette unité de la population est un puissant facteur d' uniformité*".

[34] "*Le Tonkin a un climat chaud, atténué par une saison fraîche. Il fait assez froid en hiver, - on a vu le thermomètre tomber à +5,6 dans le Delta, - pour que le paysan, vêtu de minces habits de coton, grelotte dans sa maison mal fermée. Mais toutes les saisons offrent une chaleur suffisante pour permettre les cultures. Il n' est pas de mois où ne mûrissent quelques récoltes. La saison froide ralentit un peu l' évolution du riz du cinquième mois qui occupe la rizière plus longtemps que le riz du dixième mois; elle permet la culture de plantes tempérées comme les légumes d' Europe … en somme, la température peut être acceptée comme une donnée brute: le paysan tonkinois n' a jamais perdu une récolte par excès de froid ou de chaleur.*"

Indeed, great importance should be given to the drizzle and to the "dry" season precipitation; it is thanks to these small quantities of humidity and to the suspension of evaporation assured by the drizzle, that theTonkin Delta can grow rice in the dry season , which produces the so called fifth month harvest, and that it can produce numerous crops without irrigation (...)[35] (p.62).

His argument remains linked to his problematic of the densities and he concludes about the drizzle that:

We can then say that, generally speaking, it enables the Delta to grow a second crop, and for that reason the drizzle appears to be one of the determinant factors of the demographic density of the Tonkin Delta[36]*.* (p.62*).*

Concerning water, the human issue of the analysis of the physical environment is also very apparent, and Pierre Gourou' s concern is to show that:

The defence against the river floods, the seawater, the drainage and the irrigation dominate the Tonkin peasant life[37]*.* (p.71).

The force and the speed of the floods peculiar to the Red River regime constitute the main danger against which the Annamite had to protect themselves and their harvests. Pierre Gourou writes at the beginning of this paragraph, called *The waters and their dangers*, (pp.72-81):

The dykes ... are the essential facts of the deltaic landscape...The study of the regime of the rivers is going to show why Man resigns himself to this enormous work[38].(p.72).

Moreover, we find in the introduction of his next paragraph about the dikes:

Through the work of thousands, the peasant has constructed this considerable network; he has moulded the soil with his hand; he has determined the relief of the country as we could see it nowadays; he has made productive a territory which given over to itself would only be swamps. In its actual aspect, the Delta is the work of Man[39]. (pp.82-83).

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[35] "*Il faut en effet accorder une grande importance au crachin et aux précipitations de saison 'sèche'; c' est grâce à ces médiocres quantités d' humidité, et à la suppression de l' évaporation assurée par le crachin, que le Delta tonkinois peut faire une culture de riz de saison sèche, qui procure la récolte dite du cinquième mois, et qu' il peut réussir de nombreuses cultures non irriguées*."

[36] "*On peut donc dire que, dans l' ensemble, celui-ci permet au Delta de faire une seconde récolte, et par là le crachin apparaît comme un des facteur déterminants de la très forte densité démographique de Delta tonkinois*."

[37] "*La défense contre les inondations fluviales et contre les eaux marines, le drainage, l' irrigation, dominent la vie du paysan tonkinois*."

[38] "*Les digues … sont un fait essentiel du paysage deltaïque. … L' étude du régime des fleuves va montrer pourquoi l' homme s' est résigné à cet énorme travail*."

[39] "*Au cours d' un travail millénaire, le paysan a construit ce réseau considérable; il a pétri le sol de ses mains; il a déterminé le relief du pays tel que nous le voyons aujourd' hui; il a rendu productif un territoire qui livré à lui-même n' aurait été que marécages. Dans son aspect actuel, le delta est l' œuvre de l' homme*."

Diagrams and photographs with their commentaries reinforce Pierre Gourou's human orientation, as do the graphs or schemes of classical physical facts (River sections, floods graphics etc), other illustrations expressing the "prodigious" (p.82) responses of the Annamite society to the physical constraints. All the photos chosen by Pierre Gourou to portray the relief of the Tonkin delta and their commentaries depict more the humanised aspects of the landscape than the natural one (photos 1 to 8). As well, the very first drawing of Chapter III concerning the Waters (pp.71-108) represent the dykes in the Tonkin delta (fig.12, p.73, see Appendix D2 in this thesis, "The dikes in the Tonkin delta"), and Pierre Gourou inserts, a few pages further, another more detailed drawing of the density of the dyke networks "to protect" the ricefields (fig.18, p.82), and, then, a map of the south rice fields compartment of the Thai Binh Province (fig.24, p.100). It is also in this chapter that photos of the different irrigation techniques are presented (photos 12, 13, 14, p.82, see Appendix D.2, "the Annamite irrigation techniques"), always containing a peasant using the irrigation mechanism.

4.3.4 The regional significance of the high density of population.

The subject of the high population density is central in Pierre Gourou's thesis. Pierre Gourou adapts Paul Vidal de la Blache's proposal of the densities as the leading tool of his geographical analysis. The high density of the Tonkin peasant population becomes the initial and central criterion which defines the perimeter of the area studied by him. It had an undeniable specificity compared to Europe. Pierre Gourou explains that this parameter "cannot be compared to the regions of Europe where a swarming population proliferate" because "European countries with high density are all industrial countries, with strong urban development". But "In the Tonkin ... this prodigiously high population density is exclusively agrarian"[40] (p.9).

After determining that the delta is "extremely densely populated", the introductory pages of Pierre Gourou 's thesis present the regional unity as specific human factors related to this high density of population. These factors are essentially cultural, such as the history and the civilization of the Tonkin plain, which has more links with Chinese civilization and its populated deltas than with the rest of the Indochinese peninsula.

[40] "*Le Delta du Tonkin, avec ses 430 habitants au kilomètre carré, ne peut absolument pas être comparé aux régions d' Europe où pullule une population grouillante. Les pays européens de très forte densité sont tous des pays industriels, à grand développement urbain. Lancashire, Ruhr ne sont que des rues bordées de maisons, forêts de cheminées d' usines. Au Tonkin, même dans les parties les plus peuplées, dans celles qui dépassent 1.000 habitants au kilomètre carré, le paysage reste rural, les habitants restent paysans. Cette population prodigieusement dense est exclusivement campagnarde*."

[A] ..country well populated from ancient times, the Tonkin Delta is not very Indochinese. This civilization is a reflection of the Chinese, and it would be necessary to do a meticulous study, - which has not been done -, to determine all what in Annam is not of Chinese origins (...) which civilization has been a model for the Annamites[41], (p.9).

Thus, compared with the Vidalian grid of analysis based on the *genre de vie*, that is to say the material confrontation of human groups with their natural environment, Gourou is influenced by the cultural factors which shape his geographical framework[42]. The human orientation, focusing on density, makes Pierre Gourou more problem-focused and thematic than the other French geographers of the time. He established in his Introduction that:

...so, the double interest of this study appears: the Tonkin Delta is extremely heavily populated, and it is almost exclusively inhabited by peasants. We must try to extricate the actual conditions and the causes of this overabundant population settlement, and the characteristics of this compact peasantry[43], (p.11).

The functioning of the Annamite society is connected to the high population density in order to understand how such a country could be "saturated with humanity". Pierre Gourou demonstrates that it is the result of the intersection in the deltaic plain of two significant and interdependent parameters, which structure and organize this space. First, the peasant population. This analysis in done in several parts and includes the history of settlement (in order to inquire the sources of the densities), the population density and movements, (in a descriptive statistical and cartographic approach, and inquiries on the demographic evolution), the villages and the houses, (in order to analyse the spatial distribution of the densities), and finally the political and social life. Secondly, in the third part of the thesis, called "The Means Of Existence Of The Tonkinese Peasants", he examines the relationships between the economic activities and the high densities by describing the intensive agricultural techniques that enable the survival of the abundant workforce. In this part he also discusses the numerous village handicrafts industries, which constitute a complementary peasant activity to improve their meager incomes.

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[41] "*…pays fortement et très anciennement peuplé, le Delta du Tonkin est peu indochinois. Et, en effet, le Delta tonkinois se différencie de l' Indochine non seulement par ces deux caractères, mais aussi par bien des traits de sa civilization. Cette civilization est le reflet de la civilization chinoise, et il faudrait une étude bien minutieuse,- qui n' a pas été faite,- pour mettre en valeur tout ce qui en Annam n' est pas d' apport chinois. L' originalité humaine de ce Delta tonkinois très peuplé, et depuis longtemps, n' est donc pas contestable vis-à vis du reste de l' Indochine; cette originalité est beaucoup moins nette en face de la Chine, dont les plaines alluviales ont une forte densité très ancienne et dont la civilization a servi de modèle aux Annamites*."

[42] These cultural factors are investigated in Chapter 7, section 7.4.

[43] "*Le double intérêt de cette étude apparaît donc: le Delta tonkinois est extrêment peuplé, et il est à peu près exclusivement habité par des paysans. Il faut essayer de dégager les conditions actuelles et les causes de ce peuplement surabondant, et les caractères de cette compacte paysannerie.*"

4.4 Discussion – The Two Approaches Compared

The theses present two different geographical interpretations of the Vidalian notion of region. Throughout Pierre Gourou's work the realization and achievement of the Annamite peasant society is emphasized, while Charles Robequain's argument remains more focused on the normative laws of nature and their impact on societies.

Charles Robequain constructed his region by observing the natural environment and researching the mechanical and physical causes, which model it and how each ethnic group is connected to a particular natural subregion of Thanh Hoá. This 'environmentalist' discourse, where the role of nature is dominant in the understanding of the relationships between societies and their environment, can be still seen in the work of current Vietnamese geographers. About the North-West region of Bac Bo, which includes the previous Thanh Hoá province described by Charles Robequain, Professor Lê Bá Tháo writes: "Due to the terrain being out piecemeal, the ethnic groups are scattered accordingly" (Lê Bá Tháo, 1997, p.369). The determinant influence of the natural environment is linked to the fact that Vietnam is a developing country, where the material and social processes of the appropriation of nature are not as advanced as in the West. But, according to the same contemporary Vietnamese scholars, this separation between Indochinese mountainous regions and plains was as well inherently a French construction which, eventually, diverted French researchers from focusing on political and colonial questions. Furthermore, according to Lê Bá Tháo (1997, p.14), the factual separation between mountainous ethnic groups and the Viet people is not as prominent as it is represented to be in French discourses, and the Kinh (or Annamite, as Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou called them) "are present in all parts of the country, in the plains as well as in the mountains, but their density is higher in the plains because of the cultivation of wet rice."

In contrast to Charles Robequain, even if Pierre Gourou concedes that "man is still the slave of things", his discourse concerning the physical environment is more aware of the way Annamite society is acting within natural constraints rather than in submission to them. Furthermore, for Pierre Gourou, the understanding of the Annamite peasantry overtakes the understanding of the physical environment because it is the Annamite society which develops the regional landscape. It is on this concept of landscape, and not on the notion of natural region, that Pierre Gourou gave form to his description of the Red River Delta.

The originality of the regional framework of Pierre Gourou is that it is based on a human and demographic reality, while Charles Robequain conceives his region more as a structure

made of different natural sub regions, each of them corresponding to a particular way of life adapted to its own natural environment. These bring forward two types of regional monographs. First, Pierre Gourou's 'human geography monograph', where the argument is constructed around the general Asian theme of the high population density, and secondly, Charles Robequain's 'regional monograph', where he attempts to demonstrate the existence and functioning of a geographical area as a regional body, beyond its sub-divisions. That is to say, on the one hand, Pierre Gourou based his approach on the problematic of high density and the fact that it is the Annamite peasantry that the geographer must study to understand the deltaic landscape (p.110). Doing so, he constructed a discourse of 'human geography' based on the understanding of the Tonkin delta peasant life and means of existence. Pierre Gourou's study of the population density was a convenient approach to reach a cultural understanding of the Annamite land and its peasantry. This new grasp of overseas societies came to constitute the core of the French discourse of tropical geography after World War Two. This lead Pierre Gourou to look at the development of the Tonkin delta in terms of general problems of overpopulation and, ultimately, of a dichotomy between the French and the Vietnamese points of view (pp.107-108)[44] (see Chapter 6). As a result, with Jacques Weulersse[45], Gourou was one of the first geographers to build a regional discourse where the work of French colonialization was occasionally challenged (see Chapters 5 and 6).

On the other hand, Charles Robequain leads his discourse in more dialectical directions, and to a classical 'regional' approach. He focused his argument on the idea of a "diversity of physiognomies" between the various parts of Thanh Hoá, in association with the idea of creating an "harmonious" regional "unity" (Chapters 5, 6). This aspect of his discourse is no longer widely accepted by Vietnamese scholars: Mrs Thanh Tâm Langlet[46] expresses also the concern that Robequain "shattered Thanh Hoá into a multitude of little sub-divisions … without having the global vision which would have allowed him to unite them … He seems to be just walking

[44] Pierre Gourou wrote about the French irrigation projects: "*nous entendions exprimer ironiquement par un indigène, qui avait quelques doutes sur leur efficacité réelle (il s' agissait plus précisément du barrage du Day), l' espoir qu' un jour ou l' autre le Tonkin se débarasserait comme bien d' autres pays de la charge de sa dette extérieure et que ces travaux trop onéreux ne lui coûteraient finalement rien*", (p.107) See the full quotation in Chapter 6, section 6.4.3.

[45] Jacques Weulersse was another French geographer working in the colonial field like Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, but in Africa and the Middle East (Syria). See Chapter 5, section 5.4.3, and the footnote 61 in Chapter 6.

[46] Mrs Thanh Tâm Langlet is a geographer and a professor at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (Paris). She was born and brought up in Vietnam. She moved to France to do her university studies. Now, she considers that she belongs to both the Vietnamese and the French culture (see chapter 7, section 7.2.3)

through the countryside …)"[47] (interview 13 September 1995). His regional approach can be connected to the positivist objective of the classification of knowledge and especially the knowledge of the diversity of the Indochinese population and of the potentiality of the colonial territories. In the Vietnamese context, the comparison between the ways of life in the mountainous and the plain areas through a study of their combinations and their complementarities is conceived more as an opposition and antithesis: the densely populated and intensively cultivated plains are opposed to the open settlements and extensive, primitive or archaic agriculture of the mountains. This comparison contributed to the French thought that characterized the mountainous areas with their several ethnic groups as behind the times and therefore the backward parts of Indochina, and to the idea that the construction of a modern society is more likely in the Annamite societies living in the plains (see Chapter 5). Commenting on this view, Thanh Tâm Langlet (Interview September 1995) said that:

> This opposition between the plain and the mountains has continued for several decades… We have to go further. Or it is like a blockage. When I read Robequain, I have the impression that the mountainous areas are like an ethnological museum, full of folklore[48]…Geography is not something which must rigidly fix geographical spaces and populations for all time… (September 1995).

On the whole, the two authors drew on different Vidalian concepts and notions. Charles Robequain considers his region like a "body" made of "natural regions" with their correspondent "way of life". In contrast, Pierre Gourou built the delta through its transformation by "Man". In all, because of the colonial context, their discourses became creative and explored new geographical fields of study, with planning or cultural perspectives. This is what we are going to investigate in the next Chapters.

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[47] *"A force de vouloir rechercher les individualités des régions naturelles [de la province du Thanh Hoá] Robequain fait éclater cet espace en une multitude de petites sous-unités sans pouvoir les relier faute de vision globale qui puissent les concilier …Sa vision de l'espace, c'est presque la vision d'un promeneur*".

[48] *"Finallement, cette opposition plaine/montagne courre depuis des dizaines d'années…Mais il faut avancer. Sinon, nous sommes bloqués … Quand je lis Robequain, j'ai l'impression que les régions montagneuses sont comme un musée ethnologique avec tout son folklore…La géographie n'est pas quelque chose qui doit figer l'espace et les gens qui s'y trouvent…*".

CHAPTER 5

THE DIALECTICAL RELATION BETWEEN THE GEOGRAPHY OF INDOCHINA AND FRENCH COLONIAL IDEOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

It has been established in the preceding chapter that Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's basic conceptions of the Thanh Hoá and Tonkin deltaic regions fall within the scope of Vidalian geography, where a region is conceived through the relationship between the societies and their physical environment. Because the regions chosen by Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou belonged to the French Colonial Empire, the two theses can be examined within the colonial context, as French colonial ideology, like any political doctrine, was expressed through discursive and oratorical practices. These constituted a privileged instrument of political authorities in the way that they made domination legitimate (Claval, 1978)[1], and assisted in overcoming the social, cultural and/or political tensions engendered by colonial domination. In its discourses, colonial ideology converted relative realities, myths and partial concepts (progress, modernization, and superiority of the French civilization.) into absolute terms and postulates. Through a paternalist eloquence, as well as by a "colonial humanism" (Girardet, 1972), France imposed its control and domination under a logic of protection.

Before discussing these issues in detail in relation to Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, it is important to clarify the colonial terminology used. The adjective 'colonial' defines what is relative and connected to the colonies. The word 'colonialism' and its derivatives, 'colonialist' or 'colonialization', are more related to the political system which advocates the development and exploitation of the territories in the practical or virtual interest of the mother country. It is also attached to the practices, idioms and methods of the colonial system.

[1] In *Espace et pouvoir*, Paul Claval (1978) considers the relationships between individuals, societies and power, and asserts the importance of "political communication" and "information flow". Paul Claval does not tackle colonial domination, but brings an original contribution to the analysis of the affinity between society and power.

5.2 Recent Reinterpretations of the Relationship between Geography and Empire

According to the contextual problematic for this thesis, which examines the interactions between geographers and the influence of the scientific, economic, political or cultural models of their time, the reading of the geography of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou requires a recognition of the reciprocal and dialectical relationship between the text of their regional discourses, and the colonial context of French Indochina. This approach has recently been explored by some Anglo-Saxon and French geographers.

5.2.1 "The histories of geography and empire are inextricably entwined"

A number of geographers examined the interactions between geographers, imperialist ideas and socio-historical episodes in a volume on *Geography and Empire* which viewed "the histories of geography and empire [as] inextricably entwined" (Godlewska and Smith, 1994). In particular, in his paper on "the science of Empire", Michael Heffernan (1994) explored "the forms of French Imperialism" (p.92) between 1880 and 1920, investigating the connections between French geography and French imperialism of the time. He concludes that "… the various imperial geographies which were developed in France during the 19th century all carried ... an identifiable set of moral and political values which command critical attention and which speak directly to our contemporary values" (pp.113-114).

The discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou inevitably display this "identifiable set of moral and political values" that we must identify for a better understanding of the bases of their regional perspective. Inevitability, Indochinese societies are interpreted according to their similarities or differences with French values[2].

Recent writings by French geographers, such as Vincent Berdoulay (1981), Mohamed Naciri (1984), Olivier Soubeyran (1989, 1994) and others explore the development of French geography in the late 19th century and its links with the development of French imperialism. These works provide a relevant background for the consideration of the interactions between the regional geography of French geographers and the Indochinese context.

Vincent Berdoulay (1981, p.28), for example, demonstrates that geography and its teaching, in the context of the Third Republic, was inextricably linked to the colonial missions,

[2] Recent approaches which appreciate how Asian and Western societies conceive differently their human environment (see Chapter 8) were not conceivable in the context of the colonial time in general or according to the basic discourse of French geography in particular.

noting that "geographical instruction and research were considered as useful to the conquest and development of the [French] colonies." (see also above, in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2 and 2.3.4) He reveals the role of geographers in the lobby groups that were in favour of colonialization, and the scientific and institutional impact of the colonial movement on the geographical discipline.

Mohamed Naciri investigated the political function of geography and its contribution to the colonial cause as illustrated in the discourses of two geographers, Jean Célérier and George Hardy who, at the time of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, were carrying out field work in North Africa and more specifically Morocco. He established that

> It is with the passing of their (Hardy and Célérier) reflections about the colonial fact, of their engagement in the service of colonialization and in regard of the conception they had of the function of their discipline in a system of domination that colonial geography has been progressively elaborated[3] (pp.311-312).

Mohamed Narcici demonstrates that "colonial geography was consequently a geography eminently political" (p.342), and that Jean Célérier and George Hardy both considered the geography of Morocco as a geography in the service of French colonialization aimed at enabling French administration to understand better this protectorate and its problems. A comparison can be established between those two geographers and Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou by investigating Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's contribution to the French ideology which "must allow a better understanding" of French Indochina.

5.2.2 Colonial geography as "blind spot of modernity" (after Soubeyran, 1994, p.264)

The aim of Olivier Soubeyran is to attempt to understand the structure of the French school of geography from its roots and its role in the colonial movement. In his inquisition, two simultaneous but opposite geographical conceptions are proposed (Soubeyran, 1994). The first one is that of Marcel Dubois and colonial geography from a planning view. In this, space is adaptable and has a potential (for utilization, for economic development). The second concept is attributed to Lucien Gallois[4], for whom the reference space is France. Observing a landscape is enough, since we can read "in the soil the reasons and the laws of settlement" (p. 257). Therefore, the determining factors of location are physical. It was Lucien Gallois' system which

[3] *"C' est au fil de leurs réflexions sur le fait colonial, de leur "engagement" aux services de la colonisation et aux conceptions qu' ils avaient de la fonction de leur discipline dans un système de domination que la géographie coloniale s' est progressivement élaborée*".

[4] We have already quoted Lucien Gallois on several occasions in Chapter 3, section 3.1.1.1.

was adopted by the Vidalian school, and the colonial context was no longer discussed as a geographical theme. However, as Olivier Soubeyran suggests "perhaps it is time to focus our attention more critically and completely on the colonial sciences, those blind spots of modernity" (p.264).

The difficulty is that the contextual approach to understanding geographical writings must involve the consideration of geographical texts and colonial contexts, not only through a static relation of causality in which the colonial context explains the geographical approach, but in their interrelations. This is more difficult to establish because it requires vast amounts of information on the personal reflections and political thoughts, actions and commitments of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. It is also difficult because of the inconsistencies and the shifts within the social, political and economic positions of French colonialization.

However, one of the major arguments for considering the interrelation between the geographical texts and colonial context is the predisposition towards accepting the moral and civic destiny of French Imperialism, connected with the colonial ideology. Before investigating this aspect, the geographical theories related to the problems of colonialization, which influenced Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, will be discussed.

5.3 French Geographers and Colonial Theories

The geographical considerations to be applied to colonial countries were formulated principally by three geographers, Marcel Dubois, George Hardy and Albert Demangeon. Marcel Dubois held the first chair of colonial geography at the Sorbonne University[5]. Despite his relegation from the French school of geography, certain characteristics of Marcel Dubois' thought can be found in the arguments of geographers working in the colonial field in the 1920s and 1930s. George Hardy was a highly-qualified geographer and director of the *Ecole coloniale* during the 1930s, where the management personnel of the colonial administration were trained. Charles Robequain (1934) supported Hardy's work, and made complimentary remarks about his book on geography and colonization.

[5] This chair was transferred in 1902 to Augustin Bernard and called the chair in "the geography and the colonization of North Africa". In 1935, Augustin Bernard retired and was succeeded by Marcel Larnaude, while a second chair renamed again "Colonial Geography" was established in La Sorbonne, and given to Charles Robequain (see Appendix A 2).

5.3.1 Marcel Dubois and the preparation of the ground for colonial geography

In his inaugural speech at the first lecture on colonial geography (December 14 1893), Marcel Dubois (1894) stated that colonial geography is the "science of the analysis of the physical characteristics of a colony" and that "the best naturalist might be the best colonist" (p.134). He further confirmed that:

> the recognition of the nutritious qualities of the soil, the mountainous relief and, above all, the climate, although most of our colonies are located in the tropics, will dictate to us an invigorating adaptation of the cultures, will preserve us from useless and expensive experiences! By observing the regime of the rain which determines the rivers, our administrators could decide what role internal navigation has to play overseas, which place is reserved for transport by railway[6] ... (Dubois, 1894, p.134).

The intention of Marcel Dubois was to produce an authentic colonial geography, not merely a descriptive "geography of the French colonies" (p.124). Despite the popularity of this title in geographical circles, there was a certain amount of reluctance and hesitation by some people with respect to the title of "colonial geography" because of its ambiguity, its uneven "abstract cast of mind" and its "philosophical style". This reluctance represented a conservatism in French thought, averse to gimmicky theories, and, consequently, to the planning and principles of Marcel Dubois's colonial geography. According to Marcel Dubois,

> the Government, by instituting a chair of colonial geography, has asked us to study in order to conclude, to enlighten by the careful examination of the overseas areas of France and by instructive comparisons with other peoples, the generous initiative of our explorers and officers, to find the laws for a truly rational colonialization[7] (p.125).

Marcel Dubois' colonial geography aimed at supplying geographical material, appraisals and analysis concerning the possibilities of development of colonial regions and their entering into the modern economy of Western countries and world trade. This colonial geography of Marcel Dubois was born at the time of colonial expansion, and was linked with the concern to present accurately and skilfully the colonized countries in order to establish a statement of the

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[6] "*La reconnaissance des qualités nutritives du sol, du relief montagneux, du climat surtout, puisque la plupart de nos colonies sont situées sous les tropiques, nous dictera une saine adaptation des cultures, nous préservera des expériences inutiles et coûteuses! En observant le régime des pluies qui détermine celui des fleuves, nos administrateurs pourront décider quel rôle doit jouer, dans un pays d' outre-mer, la navigation intérieure, quelle place est réservée aux transports par voie ferrée*".

[7] "*[Mais je veux croire que] l' Etat, en instituant une chaire de géographie coloniale, nous a demandé d' étudier pour conclure, d' éclairer par l' examen attentif du domaine d' outre-mer de la France et par d' instructives comparaisons avec l' œuvre des autres peuples, la généreuse initiative de nos explorateurs et de nos officiers, de rechercher les lois d' une colonisation vraiment rationnelle*".

resources of the French Empire, and offer better information for colonial development and improvement of the living conditions of the indigenous people.

Marcel Dubois' first lecture on colonial geography also revealed an economic approach where only French economic interests were taken into consideration. This approach, where the mother country is the exclusive referee, is inherent in colonialism and colonial ideology. In Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses, France is included indirectly by the including subject pronoun "we", which involved all French people in the discussion as well as the two authors, or "one" ("*on*") which is more undefined (see also section 5.4.1.1). This French possession occurs most patently in the concluding part of Robequain's thesis, "*The Work of France*", where he appropriates the region of Thanh Hoá in the name of France by using the first person or subject attribute of the plural (*our duty, our great work of irrigation, our rectilinear canals* for example*).*

Humanistic philosophy can also be seen as another important element in Marcel Dubois' colonial geography. Marcel Dubois pleaded for a humanistic colonialization with respect to "the fields and the straw huts of the poor savages against the reasons of commercial exploitation which is often pitiless like the reason of State". (p.136). More generally, Marcel Dubois' colonial geography is linked to the colonial doctrine and myths and to their political interpretations. At the time of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, French colonial doctrine was clearly defined by the work of Sarraut[8] entitled *la mise en valeur des colonies françaises*[9] (the development of French colonies) (Sarraut, 1923).

Some aspects of Marcel Dubois' approach to colonial geography applicable to the *mise en valeur* of French Indochina and the colonial perceptiveness associated ambiguously with humanistic thought, could also be seen in Charles Robequain's regional discourse (mainly in his concluding Chapter "The Work of France" pp.585-613) as well as in Pierre Gourou (who had a more critical approach towards French colonial achievements and policies). As Marcel Dubois had suggested, Charles Robequain thought over the best possibilities to promote and exploit the agriculture, industry and trade of Thanh Hoá (see Chapter 6).

[8] Albert Sarraut was Governer General of Indochina from 1911 to 1915, and from 1916 to 1919. He was in the 1920s-1930s several times Minister of the colonies and was considered as one of the best specialists on Inter-War colonial questions.

[9] See Chapter 6, Introduction, footnote n.2.

Marcel Dubois' thought was quite different from George Hardy's (1933), who called into question the specificity of "colonial geography" and preferred to use the nomenclature "geography of the colonies." According to George Hardy, the geography of the colonies should operate within the "usual boundaries of [Vidalian] geography" (p.206).

5.3.2 George Hardy and "the geography of the colonies"

Hardy was the other significant theoretician of colonialization and had also developed an applied, naturalistic and French conception of the geography of the colonies. He gave to colonialization the following meaning (Hardy, 1933, p.25):

> This word colonization […] signified at that time [in the late 19th and the 20th centuries] the deliberate exploitation of the resources and the improvement of indigenous life in a country under the domination or the guardianship of a modern nation[10].

However, he had a stronger Vidalian and social orientation than Marcel Dubois, and considered that we must not use the term "colonial geography" because "the geography of the colonies" must be based on the same principles as the geography of French or other regions (Hardy, 1933, p.206). In this view, he advocated Charles Robequain's thesis as a model able to provide the best knowledge of the colonized regions that France has to transform and develop:

> None of this can ever take the place of an increase in the number of university chairs devoted to the geography of the colonies (we prefer not to say colonial geography lest we give the impression that the geography of the colonies is not subject to the rules of geography in general)….Already a few remarkable theses - like Charles Robequain's recent thesis on Thanh Hoá - have shown how much our colonial administrators can learn from this type of carefully documented and completely objective work. Unfortunately, there is in the whole of France only one chair of this type, the North African chair…However distinguished the professor, and there can be no issue here, given that Augustin Bernard and Emile-Felix Gautier[11] are the professors in question, it is equally clear that one solitary chair is very little for a colonial power like France[12].

[10] "*Ce mot de colonisation (…) désigne alors [vers la fin du XIXe siècle et du XXe siècle] le développement méthodique des ressources et l' amélioration de la vie indigène dans un pays placé sous la domination ou la tutelle d' une nation moderne*".

[11] Apart from the general works of Marcel Dubois and George Hardy and from Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's contribution to the knowledge, other geographers such as Augustin Bernard in Algeria, and Emile Félix Gautier, in Maghreb, analysed in the 1920s-1930s how the nomads and sedentary societies lived in their respective African environment. In their writings, they expressed their confidence about French colonialism. Their geography operates within the colonial context and celebrates firmly the work of France in North Africa.

Thus, using the Vidalian notions of the study of the way of life and the human adaptation to the natural environment, but mixed with a powerful colonial ideology underpinned by the belief that France was greater than colonial societies, he identified different types of colonies by refining and completing the classical, economic terminology established by the economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu (1874) differentiating between those colonies to be settled and those to be exploited[13], George Hardy (1933) distinguished the colonies that were "taking root colonies", such as Australia (pp.33-90), from those managed or supervised by the colonial authority, such as the Tonkin Delta Protectorate (pp.91-174)[14], and those of strategic position, because of their natural resources or their crucial location for trade and geopolitics, such as the Sahara, or ports of call such as Dakar, Djibouti or Tahiti (pp.175-202). He examined each of these types in order to present a better comprehension of the colonial physical and human environments that colonizers occupy and exploit.

George Hardy offered a reflective and theoretical treatment of the political and social meanings, aspects and problems of colonialization. He expressed confidence in the French educational guardianship role[15] and advocated the use of the usual Vidalian conception of

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In fact, Augustin Bernard did his thesis on New Caledonia, but he did not have the opportunity to visit his field site. Sutton wrote in Bibliographical Studies (1979), his thesis entitled *"L' Archipel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*" was innovative in the colonial field with "an appraisal of the processes and results of a new experiment in penal colonization" (p.19). Augustin Bernard (1907, p.646) argued that "the future prospects of New Caledonia are good on account of its wealth in coffee and nickel, and the prospect of free colonization taking the place of the present convict system". But he did not produce a reflexive work on the relationships between indigenous societies and their environment. After his thesis, Augustin Bernard stayed several years in Algeria in order to study North Africa. He became quite aware of the problem of the *mise en valeur* of Algeria and Morocco and their demographic evolution (Bernard, 1929) but remained attached to Vidalian geography when he wrote about the "*genres de vie*" of the nomads and sedentary groups (Bernard, 1931).

Emile Félix Gautier (1920, 1930) was concerned by the "indigenous question", and particularly the gap separating the Muslims from the Europeans, while he praised the colonial action which occurred to him as inevitable. Emile Félix Gautier and Augustin Bernard's works constituted substantial summaries on the physical geography, history, indigenous populations and French colonial organization, works and questions.

Neither Augustin Bernard nor Emile Félix Gautier generated a distinctive discourse on North African countries and their societies based on a specific problematic as Robequain and Gourou did.

[12] "*Rien de tout cela ne remplacera jamais le rayonnement des chaires d' enseignement supérieur spécialement consacrées à la géographie des colonies (nous ne disons pas géographie coloniale, pour n' avoir point l' air de prétendre que la géographie des colonies échappe aux règles ordinaires de la géographie tout court. …déjà quelques thèses, -comme celle de Charles Robequain, toute récente, sur le Thanh Hoá, ont brillamment démontré tout ce que notre administration coloniale pouvait retirer de ce genre de travaux, minutieusement documentés et tout à fait objectifs. Par malheur, il n' y a dans toute la France qu' une seule chaire de cet ordre,-la chaire de l' Afrique du Nord-…C' est tout, et, quelle que soit la valeur des professeurs, qui n' est pas en cause, puisqu' il s' agit de MM. Augustin Bernard et E.F. Gautier, on reconnaîtra sans doute que c' est peu pour une puissance coloniale comme la nôtre*".

[13] See section 5.5 and footnote 93.

[14] Later, Pierre Gourou recalled also the notion of "management" to circumscribe the techniques with which a "civilization" (instead of a colonizer authority) identifies and controls its space (see in Chapter 8, section 8.3.2).

[15] George Hardy occupied major colonial positions in education in Morocco (he was head of the "Direction de l' instruction publique") then in Paris (he was Director of the Colonial School) and in Algiers (he was head of the University).

geography. George Hardy (1933) shared with Jean Bruhnes the idea "that all colonial enterprise must be inspired by a solid comprehension of the facts of physical and human geography - human mainly -" (p.31), and conceives colonization as a phenomenon of human geography. He also conceives his geography as an applied geography at the service of other scientific disciplines and administrative institutions working towards the development of the colonies (Hardy, 1933, pp.203-204):

> Thus, the colonial regions are as various as the world itself ... They offer not only a large diversity of ethnic families and traditions, but very pronounced differences of climate, soil and vegetation. How are we to see clearly in this whole complex phenomenon if we are not supported in our approach by geographical preoccupations? The case is not only for the economist and the agronomist; it applies just as well ... to the administrator, the financier, the engineer, the providers of hygiene or education. Only geography - doubled probably by the ethnography, but not absorbed by it - is able to communicate to the work of colonialization clear-sightedness and adaptability without which it is exposed to the biggest mistakes[16].

Considering the Tonkin Delta, George Hardy (1933, pp. 123, 136), assigns to the human condition a primordial attention in order to explain that "the French administration can be here only indirectly, the development of the resources allows only the colonizer the task of economic animator and technical guide", (pp.132-133). Similar to Marcel Dubois, he attributes to the work of France a humanitarian task and the duty of bringing peace and modernization. He asserts, without proving it, that French colonialization is able to solve the grave problems of colonial regions, such as in Indochina, the demographic and social problems of the congestion of the deltaic plains, (pp.130-136), and to raise them to a superior degree of civilization for the good of the colonies, the French homeland and the whole of humanity. However, for him colonial development "supposes a perfect knowledge of the regions to be transformed". He saw that works like that of Charles Robequain about Thanh Hoá were a contribution to renewing "from top to bottom our knowledge of Mediterranean or intertropical countries" (Hardy, 1933, pp.203-205).

[16] "*Or, les régions coloniales sont aussi variées que le monde lui-même (…)Elles offrent, non point seulement une grande diversité de famille ethniques et de traditions, mais des différences fort accusées de climat, de sol, de végétation. Comment voir clair dans cet ensemble de phénomènes complexes, comment concevoir les adaptations nécessaires, si l' on n' est soutenu dans ses démarches par des préoccupations géographiques? Le cas est net pour l' économiste et l' agronome; il ne l' est pas moins (…) pour l' administrateur, pour le financier, pour l' ingénieur, pour les services d' hygiène ou d' enseignement. Seule la géographie, - doublée sans doute de l' ethnographie, mais non absorbée par elle, - est capable de communiquer aux œuvres de colonisation la clairvoyance et la souplesse sans lesquelles elles sont exposées aux plus graves erreurs*".

In the late 1930s (after the publication of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses), he conceived a "psychological geography" which aimed to study the collective mentalities, daily gestures and habits of human groups (not only in the colonies) within their natural environment (Hardy, 1939). He noted that colonial life has "the effect to ask in clear-cut and constant terms, the problem of mutual comprehension" (p.7). Later, he wrote a "Social History of French Colonization" where he regarded colonization as "substantially an instrument of social revision" (Hardy, 1953, p.8). The works of George Hardy were, in fact, not very popular among Vidalian geographers, such as Albert Demangeon (1940), who was particularly critical of George Hardy.

However, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's writings present the same concern as George Hardy for the development of a solid comprehension of the physical and human characteristics of the colonial regions, with a strong human orientation, and urged the need to conceiving colonization in terms of problems. Pierre Gourou's approach to the physical and human geography of the Tonkin region is far more cautious towards French colonialization than George Hardy. While George Hardy wrote about floods and engineering improvements in the Tonkin delta suggesting that "traditional means have reached their limits" … and the remedies "demand substantial capital … and vast general plans. As for the irrigation problem, it is even more urgent to solve it"[17] (p.133), Pierre Gourou considered that "often local improvements … would bring in a better return than vast enterprises"[18] (p.107) and that "Irrigation is not … the first hydraulic conversion that the Delta needs" (p.102). George Hardy recorded that "as soon as it arrived, France substitutes workshops with factories and undertook, with totally modern methods, the transformation of the earth products…"[19] (pp.134-135), whereas Pierre Gourou says that "concerning the protector government, it cannot neglect these little [handicraft] industries … What is existing must be kept"[20] (p.535). While George Hardy informs that the Tonkin peasant "has appreciated straight away the protection that we [France] bring to him …he has clearly taken side with us"[21] (p.131), Pierre Gourou remains totally silent in regard to the

[17] "*Les moyens traditionnels ont atteint leurs limites … Tous les remèdes exigent d' importants capitaux, la science d' hydrauliciens consommés et de vastes plans d' ensemble. Quant au problème de l' irrigation, il est plus urgent encore de le résoudre, …*".

[18] "*…des améliorations locales … rapporteraient souvent plus que de vastes entreprises …*"

[19] "*A peine arrivés, les Français ont remplacé l' atelier par l' usine et entrepris, selon des méthodes toutes modernes, la transformation des produits du sol …*".

[20] "*Quant au Gouvernement protecteur, il ne saurait négliger ces petites industries … Il faut conserver ce qui existe*".

[21] "*Aussi a-t-il tout de suite apprécié la protection qu' on lui apportait … il a fait nettement cause commune avec nous*".

French conquest and never uses the terms "colonization" or "colonial"[22]. Although George Hardy was not a specialist of Indochina, these differences reveal two contrasting conceptions of French colonialization.

Charles Robequain is closer to George Hardy than Pierre Gourou in regard to the regional analysis of the colony (see Chapter 6). He uses the term colony to define Thanh Hoá and finds unsatisfactory, as did George Hardy, the classical distinction between settled and exploited colonies (p.611, see also below). He has a similar conception of colonialization, saying that the work of France consists in the transformation of this backward region for the benefit of its inhabitants and France. He expresses the same opinion as George Hardy concerning the question of the biological possibilities for the white race to settle in tropical countries, investigated since the 19th century by Western scientific medicine. This debate became more prevalent in the 1930s, with the publication of works and articles, such as those of Grenfell Price [23] (1938, 1939). George Hardy (1933, p.26) considers that the differences of settlement and domination are due before all to the climatic conditions and wrote about the "debilitating atmosphere" of the colonial regions. When Charles Robequain wrote his thesis, he perceived the possibility of white settlement in the tropical regions with the same naturalist and pessimistic perspective as Grenfell Price and George Hardy. He wrote (pp.610-611):

> *There is no doubt that the number of French people will remain low compared with the indigenous population. Although the missionaries are quite permanent, no white family has made stock in the province: of the 239 residents in 1926, 226 were born in France, and the other 13, born in the colony, are less than 15 years old; the officers are replaced every three years as a result of the debilitating climate, and most of the colonists themselves, even those attached to the land, hope one day to retire to their mother country.*

[22] Actualy, Pierre Gourou use several times the term colonization (pp.198-213), but only to characterize the internal migrations of the Tonkin peasantry with some limited emigration and colonization of uninhabited lands in the mountainous country (p.198) or the coastal lagoon (p.205).

See also footnote 97

[23] Grenfell Price, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou all gave papers during the International Congress of Geography in Amsterdam, in 1938, in the section "colonial geography": the one of Grenfell Price concerned the question of "possibilities of colonization (settlement) by the white race in the tropical area" and was entitled "*White settlers in the tropics*" (Price, 1938); Pierre Gourou wrote on the question of "the relationship between the density of the population and the mode of utilization (or explotation) of the land in the colonial regions" (Gourou, 1938); Charles Robequain addressed the question of "industrialization as an indispensable condition to the preservation of the level of the prosperity in the tropical regions with a very dense population" (Robequain, 1938). Pierre Gourou and Charles Robequain also gave other papers in the section "Human Geography".

In his presentation, Grenfell Price notes that "avoiding complex questions of so-called 'race', the term 'white' was taken in a broad sense" (1938: vol.II-p.267). Neither Charles Robequain nor Pierre Gourou construct an ideological geography through the concept of race, unlike the German or Italian researchers of the 1930s.

Thanh Hoá is not a populating colony and will never become one.[24]

In general, compared to Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou did not consider the Indochinese climate as a reason for human underdevelopment, and did not express views about the question of the white settlement in colonies. To explain the physical limits of the Annamite settlement, Pierre Gourou (pp.156-157) considered that biological factors[25], such as pathogene complexes (for example the anophele mosquitoe carrying the malaria), constituted a major restrictive factor to Annamite establishments (refer also to the previous section 4.2.1)

5.3.3 Albert Demangeon's socio-political approach to colonial geography

Albert Demangeon (we have mentioned on several occasions Albert Demangeon in Chapters 2 and 3) formulated a new geographical and social point of view on colonialization with the publication of his book *l' Empire britannique* (Demangeon, 1923), in which he argued it is essential "to study the contact between two types of people who are to be associated in a colony" (p.V). At the time, the original insight of Albert Demangeon was to perceive that a colony, like India, could not be attached to Great Britain like the British dominions, and that "in its religions, its races, its customs, its ways of life, it is different from Europe. It is a member of the Empire but its adherence to the union relies on force not on free association" (p.225). Like Albert Demangeon, Pierre Gourou perceives some of the contradictions between the French politics of modernization and colonialization and the very nature of the Annamite civilization with its mature civilization and refined knowledge (see Chapters 6 and 7). Pierre Gourou knew and appreciated Albert Demangeon's human geography, chose him as a supervisor, and shared some common colonial points of view. However, Pierre Gourou said "I never had, all things considered, a director in geography … basically I followed my own inspiration" (refer Appendix H).

In conclusion, the relationship between French colonization and geography took different forms, providing substantial information concerning the possibilities of *mise en valeur* of the colonies (Marcel Dubois), or of the physical and human characteristics of the colonial regions

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[24] "*Il n' est pas douteux que le nombre des français ne puisse augmenter encore, mais il restera toujours infime par rapport à la population indigène. Si les missionnaires sont assez stables, il n' est pas de familles blanches qui aient fait souche dans la province: sur les 239 résidents de 1926, 226 étaient nés en France, et les autres, nés dans la colonie, avaient moins de 15 ans; les fonctionnaires se renouvellent constamment, par suite des congés réguliers auxquels leur donne droit un séjour de 3 ans sous ce climat qui, malgré tout, reste débilitant; la plupart des colons eux-mêmes, les plus attachés au sol, gardent l' espérance de se retirer un jour dans leur pays natal.*

"*Le Thanh Hoá n' est pas une colonie de peuplement, et ne le deviendra jamais*".

[25] In this view, Pierre Gourou is close to the biological geography of the French geographer Maximilien Sorre (1943).

(George Hardy), or of the contradictions between European structures and the colonial countries (Albert Demangeon). While we can see traces of some of these arguments in Charles Robequain or Pierre Gourou's works, what these geographical theories have in common is that they are embedded in French colonial ideology and its founding concepts.

5.4 The Founding Concepts of Colonial Thought and the Geographical Discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou

Anne Godlewska (1995) notes in regard to the role played by French geographers and researchers in the Napoleonic period that their *Description of l' Egypte* "reflects as much about the participants' conception of themselves as about Egypt" and that, "systematic, spatial and analytic then, they are also descriptive not only of the world they seek to portray but of the system from which they emanate" (p.5). It is with the same direction that we can analyse the colonial arguments of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses. In fact, scholarly works, as well as those written by representatives of the French colonial administration, are all, in essence, embedded in the founding concepts of colonial ideology, such as the 'myth of progress' and the 'notion of superior civilization'.

5.4.1 The myth of progress and its presence in geographical discourse

5.4.1.1 Progress as human improvement and its European appropriation

In the colonialist discourse of the Third Republic, colonization is associated with the idea of modernization and related to the reflective notion of progress, which was a principle of 18th century Enlightment philosophy[26] and of 19th-century positivism. Progress was seen as a European movement brought about by Europe's recent scientific and technical discoveries, and the Western revolution of agricultural techniques and industrialization. It allowed better control and domination over the natural environment, and an improvement of the contingencies of human life through major scientific discoveries and technical innovations in the field of transport and communication, and in other fields, such as chemistry (medicines, artificial fertilizer etc) and civil engineering[27].

[26] The philosophers and writers of the 18th century who contributed to the elaboration of the Diderot and d'Alembert Encyclopedia, or who shared their ideals and the Enlightment philosophy based on the cult of 'Reason', are called the encyclopaedists.

[27] This infatuation with technical and scientific discoveries and progress occurs also in French literature in famous novels such as *L' Ile mystérieuse* (Verne, 1989). In this novel, Jules Verne described five survivors of a shipwreck who represent the defenders of a civilization based on science and morality which tries to triumph over the power of Nature.

It includes as well the Republican and social ideals of improving the quality of life through the acquisition of political liberty, the development of state institutions and the diffusion of knowledge by the development of a public, free-of-charge, obligatory educational system. It also introduced modern economic structures and an increasing standard material standard of living. This notion of progress is seen as a positive and evolutionary improvement of the human condition. Its ideal was incorporated into the moral and civic virtues of the Third Republic - 'labour/work', 'duty' and 'courage' - which were systematically taught to all French children at primary school. Consequently, progress became the justification of colonial enterprises, and its adoption by the French colonizers was expressed through the writing of Charles Robequain. He appropriates the region of Thanh Hoá in adopting a paternalist philosophy where the duty, the mission and the task of the French colonizers are justified through bringing protection and the benefits of progress to the Indochinese regions.

5.4.1.2 The assimilation of progress with the notion of superior civilization

This dogmatic and confident conception of progress in Europe and its ideological appropriation by the Third Republic caused French citizens to think that their civilization, with its Greco-Roman philosophical and cultural roots, its long and emphatic history and its access to industrial techniques, was 'superior' to others. Since the 18th century, it was thought to have surpassed those of China and India which, during the Middle Ages, were considered ahead of Europe.

In the discourses, this stream of French thought concedes, however, some superior values to the former civilizations like the Indian and Chinese in regard to their earlier Empire and cultural enlightenment. It introduced the idea of a hierarchy of civilizations, with at the bottom of the scale the most "primitive" ones, which supposedly were ignorant of any form of progress, and at the top those able to bring "superior" techniques or "superior" social and political organizations. This judgement is expressed in merciless turns of phrases to build the idea that the most "inferior" societies are the ones where "primitive communities" are living under the subordination of the natural conditions, where the "superstitious", the "unconcerned about the future", the "heedless" and the "thoughtness", have eclipsed the statute of Reason.

For example, as Raoul Girardet (1972) reports, French readers found in novels' descriptions about the inhabitants of Africa

> The lack of any idea of progress, of any morals does not let him (the savage and barbarian negro) realise the incalculable value of the infinite power of labour, and his only laws are his brutal passions, his fierce appetites, the caprices of his deregulated imagination. He is living day by day on adventure, unconcerned about the future[28]. (Dubarry, 1879, quote in Girardet, 1972, p.142).

French geographers were also part of this discourse. Emmanuel De Martonne[29] as an example, had written about the population of the Upper Nile (Martonne, 1896):

> The negro is a child; however aroused he may be, he lives in the world of impressionability and of the thoughtless[30] (p.62).

The discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses are embedded in this ordered, hierarchical and ideological system where the concept of progress leads to the conception of a hierarchy of civilizations. Their argumentation extends to a hierarchy of the Asian civilizations founded on the same postulates as the one which defined the superiority of Western civilization, that is, the potential to conquer, to impose their political power and administrative structure, to spread their culture and techniques. Because of its rational, methodical administrative organization, and also because of its scientific/technical and cultural traditions, the Chinese civilization was given credit for adding value and status to the Annamite one. Charles Robequain (p.303) writes:

> *The Tonkin immigrants have not only increased the indigenous population. More active, more industrious than indigenous people, substantially because they have been subjected earlier and more completely to the Chinese influence, they were and are always among them fermenters of progress: they have brought industrial processes that they did not know, they are their educators as regard trading; not happy to help them to the conquest of new lands, they have also directed them and seem to have been the major agents of the development of the delta, introducing in particular the practice of dyking, learned from their Chinese masters[31].*

Pierre Gourou also endorses this idea of the superiority of the Chinese civilization:

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28 "*Le manque de toute idée de progrès, de toute morale ne lui permet pas de se rendre compte de la valeur incalculable, de la puissance infinie du travail, et ses seules lois sont ses passions brutales, ses appétits féroces, les caprices de son imagination déréglée. Il vit au jour le jour à l' aventure, insoucieux du lendemain*."

29 We have mentionned Emmanuel de Martonne in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1

30 "*le nègre est un enfant; si éveillé soit-il, il vit dans le monde de la sensibilité et de l' inconscience*".

31 "*Les immigrants tonkinois n' ont pas fait que grossir numériquement la population indigène. Plus actifs, plus industrieux que les autochtones, sans doute parce qu' ils ont subi plus tôt et plus complètement l' influence chinoise, ils ont été et sont encore parmi eux un ferment de progrès: ils leur ont apporté des procédés industriels qu' ils ne connaissaient pas, ils sont leurs éducateurs en matière commerciale; non contents de les aider à la conquête des terres nouvelles, ils les ont généralement dirigés et semblent avoir été les principaux agents de l' aménagement du delta, y introduisant en particulier la pratique de l' endiguement, apprise de leurs maîtres chinois*".

The civilising influence of China deeply penetrated the country, the language became saturated with Chinese words while preserving the Thai syntax, and Chinese characters were adopted without difficulty, the country having no writing before the arrival of the Chinese. The Chinese endowed Tonkin with an administrative organisation which survived after they had left the country. This reasoned methodical organisation gave Annam its superiority over Champa and later over Cambodia, both of which were more loosely organised. These political institutions of Chinese inspiration provided the means for the development of a very dense population in the Delta, for they could resolve problems posed by a crowded population among which relationships between individual and groups, that is to say, political life, are much narrower and more complex than in a more widely spread population, in which by the thinning of the population one can reach the suppression of political life, as we can witness in the Moi country[32] (p.133)

Thus the Annamese people emanate from an Indonesian and Thai base with Chinese additions. In the plain of the Tonkin Delta, very vast in comparison with all those located on the way to Cochin-china, little by little masses of human beings were gathered, who, endowed by their number and relatively superior organisation with great power for expansion, made their way southward in search of habitats similar to the Tonkin Delta[33]*.* (p.133).

Pierre Gourou's vision of the Annamite society, "which is a reflection of the Chinese civilization" (p.8) concurs with the construction of a positive image of Indochinese people, compared to other colonized people:

This situation is very different from the one occuring in other colonial lands like North Africa, where the indifferent natives exploit often-fertile lands with a minimum of effort. (p388).

This affirmation of the superiority of the Chinese civilization is linked to the colonial ideology and testifies how it was difficult, or even impossible, to escape from its system of thought. In his later works about Africa, written after the French colonial period, Pierre Gourou describes sympathetically the African peasantry, giving an explicit representation of the diversified African cultivations and societies and reflecting on their agricultural problems with the same concern as in his thesis about the Annamite peasantry. (Gourou, 1970, 1991).

However, in the Indochinese context of the 1920s-1930s, the Annamite economic, social and political organization was thought to be 'superior' to the mountainous one, but 'inferior' to the French society: the Annamite agricultural techniques were considered not as efficient as in

[32] "*L' influence civilisatrice chinoise pénétra profondément le pays, la langue se satura de mots chinois, tout en conservant une syntaxe T'ai, les caractères chinois furent adoptés sans difficulté, le pays ne connaissant pas l' écriture avant l' arrivée des chinois. Les Chinois dotèrent le Tonkin d' une organisation administrative qui subsista quand ils eurent quités le pays; cette organisation rationnelle, méthodique, fit la supériorité de l' Annam sur le Champa et plus tard le Cambodge, organisés de façon plus lâche. Ces institutions politiques inspirées de la Chine permirent d' autre part le développement dans le Delta d' une population très dense, car elles pouvaient résoudre les problèmes posés par une population serrée où les rapports entre les individus et les groupes, c' est à dire en somme la vie politique, sont beaucoup plus étroits et complexes que dans les pays à population lâche, où l' on peut atteindre par la raréfaction de la population à la suppression de la vie politique, comme cela se voit en pays moi.*"

[33] "*Ainsi naquit le peuple annamite, d' un apport chinois sur un fonds indonésien et t'ai. Dans la plaine du Delta tonkinois, très vaste par rapport à toutes celles que l' on trouve jusqu' à la Cochinchine, s' accumulèrent peu à peu les masses humaines qui, pourvues de par leur nombre et leur organisation relativement supérieure d' une grande force d' expansion, se frayèrent un chemin vers le sud, à la recherche d' habitats semblables au Delta tonkinois*".

France, the economy still archaic, and democracy undeveloped. The French authority conceived the Indochinese economy and societies as belonging to a traditional world, perhaps venerable in the case of the Annamite people, but considered out of date and belonging to the past. The social organization was said to be based mainly on the domination of a number of rich, influential families, on a restricted local economic exchange and the subsistence economy of the villages, on the bribing of clientele and bureaucratic cooption. By comparison, the colonial authority upheld the French republican model with its democratic and equality ideals (obviously in contradiction of the colonial fact), with superior techniques and a capitalist economy able to bring Indochina into the modern age of progress and improve the living conditions of its populations. This conviction is often apparent in Charles Robequain's thesis (p.563), for example when he interprets the political organization of the Annamite commune, "democratic only in appearance" (that is to say not yet 'rightly' democratic from his French republican eyes):

> *It [the Annamite commune] is democratic only in appearance, and the universal suffrage has not yet been applied there; practically, the poor are excluded from deliberations and, if the rich old people are honored and consulted, it is a little oligarchy of rich people or those with mandarinal diploma - we would say capacitaire - who take the essential decisions ..."*[34]*.* (p470)

According to this idea of the superiority of French society compared to Indochinese societies, Charles Robequain, like most French people, considered that it was his duty to bring the French headway to colonised people who were unaware of its advantages. This was linked with the Western idea of progress as a universal condition to which all humanity was committed.

5.4.2 Progress as a universal condition and the duty of colonialism

Progress in the colonial ideal is also conceived as a condition of humanity. This progress of humanity and of the civilizations towards an ideal state was not only present in political discourses but also in French academic literature at the end of the 19th century. For example, in one of his most celebrated works, *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo (1951) states "... progress is the condition of Man. The general life of humankind is called Progress. Progress marches forward... "[35] (vol.V, 1, XX) This description of progress as a "march" to which humankind is committed is also linked with the evolutionist philosophy and the conception of the hierarchy of civilizations,

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[34] "*Elle n' est démocratique qu' en apparence, et le principe du suffrage universel n' y a pas encore d' application; pratiquement, les pauvres sont exclus des délibérations, et, si les vieillards sont honorés et consultés, c' est une petite oligarchie de gens riches ou pourvu de grades mandarinaux – nous dirons de capacitaires – qui prend les décisions essentielles…*"

[35] "*Le progrès est le mode de l' homme. La vie générale du genre humain s' appelle le Progrès; le pas collectif du genre humain s' appelle le Progrès. Le progrès marche …*". The novel *Les Misérables* was first published in 1862.

where the less advanced ones such as the Indochinese mountain groups "change in contact with a civilization [the Annamite] superior to its own" (in Charles Robequain, p.151). Correspondingly, during the first two decades of the 20th century, the French architect Ernest Hébrard (trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and Prix de Rome-winner in 1904[36]) considered that "the history of architecture could be read as the history of human progress" and believed in "the universalization of culture and technology" (Rabinow, pp.244, 246). When Charles Robequain arrived in Indochina in 1924, Ernest Hébrard was finishing a new master plan for the Indochinese capital Hanoi aiming to renovate the existing city and transform it into a healthy, efficient and peaceful capital[37], such as Baron Haussmann aimed to achieve with the city of Paris under the reign of Napoleon the Third[38]. In his thesis, Charles Robequain described the development of the city of Thanh Hoá with the same emphasis on driving of "broad avenues lined with trees and embellished with green banks lined with administrative buildings and public servant housing"[39] (p.582) as Ernest Hébrard had done in regard to Hanoi (Logan, 2000, p.99-107)[40]. In this case, progress meant improved sanitation ("*une œuvre d'assainissement*") [41] as well as an economic and general urban benefits.

In more reserved terms, Pierre Gourou (p.577), notwithstanding his attachment, respect and consideration for the traditional and ancestral character of peasant life, considers that

[36] The Prix de Rome is an annual prestigious competition where architects who are no more than 30 years old have to present a project on a given subject. The winners are awarded a scholarship to work at the Institut de France's Villa Medici in Rome.

[37] In the following years, Ernest Hébrard worked on the master plans for the cities of Saigon, Phnom Penh and Dalat. He left Indochina in 1929, one year after Charles Robequain.

[38] Baron Haussmann is famous for his "urbanism of regulation", which aims to adapt at the end of the 19th century old cities like Paris to the necessities of modern capitalist and industrial society. In Paris, he planned the demolition of old and poor sectors to build a modern network of broad avenues, junctions and green areas (lines of trees, squares, gardens, parks) allowing the air to circulate. He also organized the water and sewage systems.

[39] With the same priorities as Baron Haussmann for good communications and a healthy and safe environment Ernest Hébrard (or other French planners) planned the destruction of part of the native town of Hanoi and Charles Robequain related in regard to the town of Thanh Hoá that "*les édicules en paillote, qui encombraient les rues les jours de grand marché, furent abattus…on traça, en rasant plusieurs pagodes et en refoulant le marché, une large avenue qui fut complantée d'arbres, ornée de massifs gazonnés, au long de laquelle s'élevèrent les bâtiments administratifs et les demeures des fonctionnaires français C'est le quartier européen*" (p.582).

[40] William Logan notes: "When Long (the Tonkin governor general at the beginning of the 1920's) suggested to him (Ernest Ebrard) that Hanoi needed new buildings and open spaces 'worthy of a great colony', they both inevitably had the Paris model in mind. They envisaged an elegant Hanoi constructed to a plan of wide tree-lined axial boulevards with green spaces and vistas enclosed by imposing monuments asssociated with French history in Hanoi…" (Logan, 2000, p.105).

[41] (see also Appendix F3, "Yên Mý concession", A: "3 years old coffee tree, B: 9 years old coffee tree. Road lined with xoan and abrasins").

We do not mean that we should oppose any kind of evolution; we cannot go against a transformation of the country that is realised by itself in an irresistible movement[42].

Given this logic, primitive civilizations were already regarded as belonging to the past, that is to say to the 'history of humanity', and their destiny was to enter modern times and be transformed by progress that the more advanced civilizations offered them[43]. At the same time, French cultural institutions such as the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (E.F.E.O), had the role of preserving and itemizing the 'vestiges' and notable relics of past times. Thus, the mission of the E.F.E.O. was

> to work on the archaeological and philological exploration of the Indochinese Peninsula, to sponsor the knowledge of its history, of its monuments, of its idiom (Second clause of its decree 15 December 1898, Finot, 1921, p.4).

The notion of colonialism is also inseparable from a certain humanitarian mysticism masking colonial racism, and based on the certitude that the superiority of the values of French civilization could not be dissociated from the general interest of all Earth's humanity. These humanitarian components of French colonialism began to emanate with Jules Ferry[44], who, at the end of the 19th century, played a primary role in the construction of the French colonial empire. In his discourse of July 28, 1885 where he described his doctrine of colonialism, Jules Ferry proclaimed (quoted in Pervillé, 1993, pp.47-48):

> We must say openly that the superior races have a right towards the inferior races...I repeat that there is for the superior races a right, because there is a duty for them. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races[45] (p.48).

These colonial conceptions emphasized by Jules Ferry at the end of the 19th century constituted during the 1920s and 1930s the basic doctrine of French colonialism. French people

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[42] "*L' on ne veut pas dire que l' on doive s' opposer à toute évolution; on ne peut pas aller contre une transformation du pays qui s' effectue d' elle-même par un mouvement irrésistible*".

[43] By way of illustration, we can quote the writer François-René de Chateaubriand in his major work *Mémoires d' outre-tombe* "The French, going across Rome, left there their principles: it is what always happens when the conquest is accomplished by a people more advanced in civilization than the people who are subject to this conquest ...". (Chateaubriand, 1965, p.XII, vol.III)

[44] Jules Ferry was one of the major partisans of French colonial expansion at the end of the 19th century for economic reasons, and wanted to restore French international prestige after the defeat by Germany in 1871. He considered that France needed overseas bases to develop its world trade, that colonies were privileged fields for French investments and proclaimed that "colonial politics is the daughter of industrial politics". His colonial philosophy included also racist dogma covered by some moral slogans. His government was overturned after his engagement in the Tonkin expedition and the Lang-Son incident where the French army was attacked by the Chinese in 1885. He was called derisively "Ferry the Tonkinese".

[45] "*Il faut dire ouvertement qu' en effet les races supérieures ont un droit vis à vis des races inférieures… Je répète qu' il y a pour les races supérieures un droit, parce qu' il y a un devoir pour elles. Elles ont le devoir de civiliser les races inférieures…*".

were encouraged to believe that France has the 'right' and the 'duty' to bring its superior civilization to the countries with which it associates. This colonial ideology reached its peak with the Colonial Exhibition of Vincennes in 1931 where 34 millions tickets[46] were sold in six months (Appendix E.2). Charles Robequain's thesis and Pierre Gourou's first major work on the Tonkin (Gourou, 1931a) were exposed in the Indochina House (*Pavillion de l' Indochine*). This colonial exhibition (Lemaire et al, 2000)

> …distinguishes itself by its gigantism and ought to be even more colossal than the British exhibition of Wembley in 1924. Its superintendent, Marshal Lyautey[47], wants a prodigious project in order to transform the event in high places for the French people's colonial education (p.10).
>
> The organization is gigantic since … the Angkor Wat temple has to be reconstituted in the real scale (on more than 5,000 square meters and 55 meters high) … (Appendix E.1)
>
> …the exhibition gives to French people the feeling of their superiority, of an ownership right to the conquered worlds and their populations, a substantial right for each French man to be devoted to the Republican "civilising" ideals … Between the communist model and the emergence of fascism, the [French] Republic originates its own indoctrination by dipping into its colonial epic: its white man is above all a civilizing man (p.10).

Hence, as the minister of the colonies Paul Reynaud[48] expressed in an article in the journal *Le Temps* published on 7 May 1931, commenting on the opening of the Colonial Exhibition of Vincennes, "the colonial fact is a fact of civilization" and "the colonization is the essential vehicle of the action of civilization." (Thobie et al., 1990, pp.216-217). In response to the success of the exhibition[49], Paul Reynaud noted in regard to the colonial enterprise in the exhibition visitors' book introduction on the solidarity between colonizer nations (Pervillé, 1993, p.80), (Appendix E.3)

> The French have the colonial calling.

[46] In fact, the tickets were sold by groups of four. This corresponds to a total of about 8 millions visitors (around 4 million visitors from the Parisian area, 3 million visitors from the rest of France, and 1 million visitors from foreign countries).

[47] see Chapter 6, footnote 11.

[48] Paul Reynaud was a French conservative politician. He was several times minister during the 1930s.

[49] With the exhibition, the year 1931 corresponds to the apogee of the French Empire.

> The visitors' book would not have been a faithful image of the reality, if it would not have shown us the colonial work of France surrounded by the work of the other nations, subscribing all together with the same effort to moral and material progress: more civilization and more wealth for a bigger number of people.

Apart from communists, this point of view seems prevalent among the political élite and leaders of the Third Republic whatever their political leaning: we find it exhibited by the conservative as well as by the socialist élite of the Inter-War period. It was associated with a good colonial conscience exemplified by Léon Blum, the leader and theoretician of the French socialist party, the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* (S.F.I.O). Despite his acknowledged generous and open-minded spirit and his faith in France as the land of liberty and justice since the French Revolution, Léon Blum could not take a firm position about the colonial problems and declared in 1925 in front of the deputies:

> We admit the right and even the duty of the superior races to attract to them the ones which have not reached the same level of culture and to bring to them the progress being realized thanks to the efforts of science and industry[50]. (Marseille, 1988, p.176).

When Léon Blum became the chief of the French government[51] in June 1936, a special commission was created to investigate the political, economic and moral situation in French colonies, to determinate the needs of their inhabitants, to revitalise the French colonial system and promote a "colonial humanism". Pierre Gourou was one of the seven high government officials appointed to this commission[52]. Thus, during the Inter-war period, all French governments, whether Conservative, Centrist or Socialist, considered French colonialization as a fact and associated this fact with a duty and an idealistic mission.

This 'good conscience' idea was embedded in Republican discourse where colonization was idealized and sanctified in terms such as "effort", "work", and the "hardness of the task to accomplish". It was made legitimate by the idea that the entrance of French Indochina into the

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[50] "*Nous admettons le droit et même le devoir des races supérieures d' attirer à elles celles qui ne sont pas parvenues à un même degré de culture et de les appeler aux progrès réalisés grâce aux efforts de la science et de l' industrie*".

[51] This government was called the "*Front populaire*" because it was a coalition of the French left political parties, where Radicals, Socialists and Communist politicians congregated together during the elections. It was the first time that France had a Socialist-Radical government (the Communists supported the government but did not participate it).

modern age of progress would improve considerably the poor conditions of the indigenous peoples. It brought with it the treatment of the 'inferior' civilizations of colonial populations who were considered children (see the quotation of Emmanuel De Martonne above) who have to learn and be protected by their 'superiors'. Hence, the colonial discourse was filled with paternalist accents, where the colonizer was the guide, the master, the educator, the protector, the pacifier (refer to the poster of the colonial exhibition in Appendix E.2) bringing progress, well-being, modern infrastructure and equipment, or even some basic Western techniques. Hence, in his letter of the 27 March 1898, the major Lyautey (Later, Lyautey was made Colonel, General then, in 1921, Marshal) wrote from the colony of Madagascar:

> ... I have this morning spent one hour in my professional school where under the direction of 5 foremen soldiers, 20 little Malagasy were learning to make furniture, to construct frameworks, to forge, to solder, to paint. From there I went to my Lazaret[53], half an hour away, where my doctor has undertaken, with an ingenious method to cure intensively the scabby which has rotted the people for centuries. From there to the school where a corporal presented me his pupils...Here is the only war that I like and understand, the one which makes more wealth, more cultures, more security, and the proof is that, all around me, the old villages demolish spontaneously their antique parapets and fill in their secular gaps[54]. (Girardet, 1972, p.126).

In the same self-congratulary colonial style, Charles Robequain represents the "work of France" as a "duty" ("Our duty the most urgent..."), insisting on the "efforts" ("our biggest effort ...") that this "great work" involves, (p.587). He describes the "ungrateful work" (p.589) as well as a work of "willingness" (p.612) of France. By the use of analogies, he represents the Annamites as "thankless" children (the Annamites "like children, are thankless in regard to their masters", p.585) with potential ("Despite the fact that some overload him with vices, the Annamite should be able to come, under our control, the only possible monitor of the other

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[52] Letters and specific questionnaires were sent to colonial institutions in order to investigate in an exhaustive way the demography, habitat, food supplies, labour work and education in all the colonies. But this was time consuming and the commission was slow to send investigators to the colonies. The "Front populaire" was also confronted with French conservative hostility, the flight of capital and the ascent of dictatorial powers encircling France (in Italy, Germany and Spain with Franco) and resigned in June 1937. In July 1938, the Commission was wound up without achieving its work. During WWII and the Vichy government, Blum became a political prisoner and was sent to the concentration camp of Buchenwald (he had Jewish roots).

[53] A Lazaret is a health establishment, where the contagious sick person is put in solitary confinement and looked after.

[54] "*(…) j' ai ce matin passé une heure à mon école professionnelles, où sous la direction de 5 soldats chefs d' atelier, 25 petits malgaches apprenaient à faire des meubles, à charpenter, à forger, à souder, à peindre. De là à mon lazaret, à une demi–heure d' ici, où mon médecin a entrepris, avec une installation ingénieuse, de guérir en grand la gale qui depuis des siècles pourrit ce peuple. De là à l' école où un caporal m' a présenté ses 60 élèves (…). Voilà la seule guerre que j' aime et comprenne, celle qui fait tout de suite plus de richesse, plus de cultures, plus de sécurité, et la preuve c' est que, tout autour de moi, les vieux villages démolissent spontanément leurs parapets antiques, comblent leurs fossés séculaires* (…)".

populations of French Indochina", p.613), but who are still immature and must be educated. And the colonizer "must keep an eye on without weakness" (p.613). Charles Robequain's 'good colonial conscience' let him overlook the possibility that any colonial and imperialist politics produces within the colonized country a nationalist or anticolonialist reaction (Said, 1993).

Using analogies of life, Charles Robequain (pp.587-588) associated the work of France and the promotion of the Thanh Hoá plain with the positive image of a young, vigorous and energetic body who has his whole future ahead:

> *our rectilinear canals ... rejuvenate the wrinkled face of the plain, where the slightest arroyo[55] rambled in a multitude of meanders, and print in it an energetic and deep mark, with a powerful contrast, which seems permanent[56].*

As several present historians interpret it, this rhetoric is hiding more or less unconsciously the French ambition of control, domination and general prestige, and appears to be a refuge and a way to help the French recovery after the loss of its previous world supremacy. As Henri Brunschwig wrote about the beneficiaries of French colonialism until 1915:

> All these men contributed to the carrying out of the policy of expansion. Each in his own sphere used the energy which the great ideals of the period, humanitarianism and nationalism, made available to him. And each of them, clothing himself as he wished to appear, conjoined his ambition with these ideals. Conscious hypocrites are rare. The least disinterested among them no doubt deceived themselves as to their true underlying motives, while the mass of those who paid tribute to these ideals easily justified them in their own eyes (Brunschwig, 1960a, p.166 and 1960b, p.170 in its original version).

Compared with Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou is more reserved and nuanced and does not use the words 'duty' or 'mission'. He recognizes that the work of France is "interesting" and "considerable" (p.107) but writes in his conclusion ambiguously about the best way to pursue it:

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55 A arroyo is a small and impermanent stream.

56 *"Nos canaux rectilignes allongent aujourd' hui, à perte de vue, les rubans peu à peu rétrécis d' une eau étincelante; ils rajeunissent la figure ridée de cette plaine, où le moindre arroyo divague en innombrables méandres, et y impriment une marque énergique et profonde, d' un contraste puissant, qui semble inéffaçable"*.

Thus, the work, which is offered to the administrative authorities, is particularly delicate; in this old country, exploited for such a long time in an intensive way, we can only act with circumspection. However, if the action must be reinforced with prudence, a beautiful field is opened to it. Enterprises wisely supervised provide and will provide interesting improvements but which can be only moderate and partial[57].(p.577)

Hence, Pierre Gourou gives a more circumspect picture of the work of France. In fact, Pierre Gourou's questioning about the colonial work echoed the first influential questioning of the civilizing mission of the French Occident.

5.4.3 Questioning the civilizing mission of the Occident

Of course, from a retrospective and unsentimental point of view, the myth of progress is seen as the vector of an ideology of territorial domination and exploitation of the colonial territories in the interests of the mother country. The French nationalist psyche, exalted by the ideology of the French Empire, was also the way France preserved its power and world position under the cover of humanist ideals. Daniel Hemery shows also that it is the crisis of economic growth and of the metropolitan profit which brought French capitalism (particularly the silk trade of Lyon) to research opportunities in Indochina at the end of the 19th century (Brocheux and Hémery, 1994, pp.50-55). He shows how colonization, behind the proclamations of French good intentions, orientated the Indochinese economy to the world trade (or the French one) and, thus, how the development of exports and economic, technical and scientific modernization and the development of communications were linked to this colonial priority. He divulges the taxation that French authority imposed on the peasantry in order to finance this economic modernization, mentioning the social crisis and disequilibrum that these heavy direct and indirect taxes produced in the colonized people (Brocheux and Hémery, 1994, pp.92-99, 113-129).

Even at the height of the French Empire during the 1920s-1930s, the trauma of WWI caused the notions of progress and the superiority of white races, or of European civilization, to be interrogated and challenged by relatively well known authors. They presented a more pessimistic view about the future of the European civilization. For example, in an influential work where the crisis of European identity is investigated and compiled in "letters", Paul

[57] *"L' œuvre qui s' offre aux autorités administratives est donc particulièrement délicate; dans ce vieux pays, exploité depuis longtemps de façon intensive, on ne peut agir qu' avec circonspection. Pourtant, si l' action doit s' armer de prudence, un beau domaine s' ouvre devant elle. Des entreprises sagement conduites assurent et assureront des améliorations intéressantes mais qui ne peuvent être que modérées et partielles*."

Valery[58] (1919) considered that "we ourselves, civilizations, we know now that we are mortal" (first letter) and asks the question if "Europe will become what it is in reality, that is to say a little cap of the Asian continent" (second letter). Paul Valéry brought also a more constricted conception of progress, reduced to its mechanical and instrumental aspects:

> I tried formerly to make to myself a positive idea of what we call progress. Hence, eliminating all consideration of moral, political, aesthetical nature, progress seems to me to be reduced to the very fast and very sensitive increasing of (mechanical) power utilisable by men, and the accuracy of their forecast[59]. (Valéry, 1931, p.172).

Some important French geographers also brought a more critical and conditional idea of progress and colonization. They express their scepticism toward the future of colonization by considering that the colonial fact was relying on a forced and unequal alliance. For example, Albert Demangeon (1920) wrote a book entitled *the Decline of Europe* where he called into question the European superiority and domination after WWI. In this book, Albert Demangeon stated in a style full of emphasis and allegation that was typical of the French Third Republic:

> Until now it was an elementary fact of economic geography that Europe dominated the world due to the superiority of her high and ancient civilization. Her influence and her prestige radiated since centuries to the extremities of the earth. She counted with pride the countries that she had discovered and had driven within the widespread life, the peoples that she had supplied with its essence and had shaped in her own image, the societies which were mandated to imitate and serve her.
>
> When one thinks of the consequences of the "grande guerre" … one can wonder if the star of Europe doesn't become pale and if the conflict that she endured so much was not the beginning for her of a vital crisis that foretells her decadence. … Is it not that the war will have carried a deathblow to the hegemony of Europe on the world?

[58] The French writer Paul Valéry was an observer of the problems of the time. After the First World War massacres, he recognized the 'fate' of European civilization as similar to the "ruin" of "Elam, Ninive and Babylon". He was conscious that any "civilization has the same fragility as a life" (Valéry, 1919, first letter). Valéry became professor at the Collège de France in 1937, where he taught "*Poetique*" (the theory and destiny of poetry).

[59] "*Je me suis essayé autrefois à me faire une idée positive de ce que l' on nomme 'progrès' [progrès is in italic in the original text]. Eliminant toute considération d' ordre moral, politique, esthétique, le progrès me parut se réduire à l' accroissement très rapide et très sensible de la puissance (mécanique) utilisable par les hommes, et à celui de la 'précision' [in italic in the original text] qu' ils peuvent atteindre dans leurs prévisions*".

> … is it not that the war has opened for our old continent a crisis of hegemony and expansion [60] (pp.13-15)

More specifically, in *"L'Empire britannique"* (see above), Albert Demangeon (1923) called into question the cohesion and the supremacy of "the British Empire". In his conclusion, he stated that the British Empire relies on three notions "the notion of distance, the notion of heterogeneity, the notion of ubiquity" (p.264):

> By the distance, the human communities who constitute it, distant from each other, fail with territorial continuity; they tend to be isolated and live their own life; thus the Empire contains an interior strength of disintegration. By his heterogeneity, the Empire brings closer under his domination such different peoples by their civilization that any fusion between them appears impossible: these differences appear irreducible between the peoples of the temperate zone and those of the tropical zone. If it is true that these differences do not involve fundamental inferiority of the dominated people, it is unavoidable that these peoples, reaching little by little the level of the Europeans, claim their right to an autonomous development. By ubiquity, the Empire is so to speak in direct contact with all nations, all religions, all races of the world; the neighbor with other human communities that have neither his interests, nor his civilization; in any place, he is opposed to something; the more he spreads, the more he increases the surfaces of friction and shock[61].

Jacques Weulersse[62] brought also a critical view of colonization (Weulersse, 1993) with a descriptive analysis of the benefits but also the inherent limits, dangers and weaknesses of colonization in the South-West part of Africa that he visited in the late 1920s. He described with compassion the ambivalence of colonization while relating the words of the Reverend Doctor

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[60] *"Jusqu' ici c' était un fait élémentaire de géographie économique que l' Europe dominait le monde de toute la supériorité de sa haute et antique civilisation. Son influence et son prestige rayonnaient depuis des siècles jusqu' aux extrémités de la terre. Elle dénombrait avec fierté les pays qu' elle avait découverts et lancés dans le courant de la vie générale, les peuples qu' elle avait nourris de sa substance et façonnés à son image, les sociétés qu' elle avait contraintes à l' imiter et à la servir.*

Quand on songe aux conséquences de la grande guerre … on peut se demander si l' étoile de l' Europe ne pâlit pas et si le conflit dont elle a tant souffert n' a pas commencé pour elle une crise vitale qui présage sa décadence. La guerre n' aurait-elle pas porté un coup fatal à l' hégémonie de l' Europe sur le monde?"

… la guerre n' a-t-elle pas ouvert pour notre vieux continent une crise d' hégémonie et d' expansion".

[61] *"Par la distance, les communautés d' hommes qui le constituent, éloignées les unes des autres, manquent de continuité territoriale; elles tendent à s' isoler et à vivre leur vie; l' Empire contient ainsi une force intérieure de désagrégation. Par son hétérogénéité, l' Empire rapproche sous sa domination des peuples si différents par la civilisation que toute fusion entre eux paraît impossible: ces différences apparaissent irréductibles entre les peuples de la zone tempérée et ceux de la zone tropicale. S' il est vrai que ces différences n' entraînent pas l' infériorité foncière des peuples dominés, il est inévitable que ces peuples se haussant peu à peu au niveau des Européens, revendiquent leur droit à un développement autonome. Par son ubiquité, l' Empire se trouve en contact direct pour ainsi dire avec tous les Etats, toutes les religions, toutes les races du monde; il voisine avec d' autres communautés humaines qui n' ont ni ses intérêts, ni sa civilisation; en tout lieu, il s' oppose à quelque chose; plus il s' étend, plus il accroît les surfaces de friction et de choc*".

[62] We will see in chapter 6 that, in his interpretation of the Syrian and Middle-East peasantry, Jacques Weulersse was close to Pierre Gourou.

J.H. who was the headmaster of the black University of Lovedale in Fort Hare. On that account, the Reverend reported to Weulersse that he and his missionaires were teaching in English "arts and craft" or "the English literature, way of life and mode of thinking" to black children while wondering if it was really the right thing to do and realizing how hypocritical it was (pp.213-214). In fact, Jacques Weulersse was the geographer who went furthest in questioning the civilizing mission of the Occident and he concluded his chapter about Lovedale by stating

> In the compartment reserved for the blacks, the white controller looks at me like [if I was] a strange beast or a gentle madman. In front of our eyes, the big indigenous monotonous reserves is unfolded … On the denuded sides of the hills, in the twilight, these innumerable and similar huts look like some gigantic and sinister "concentration camp", some immense camp of convicts[63]… (p.222).

Jacques Weulersse was not as wellknown or appreciated as Albert Demangeon. But Pierre Gourou was aware of his work and later, he wrote in the preface of the second edition of *Blacks and Whites*:

> It is during his turn around the world that I get to know Jacques Weulersse: he came to see me in Hanoi, and we had long and substantial talks. We met again in Tokyo … In Japan Weulersse was as convincing and perspicacious as in Africa. Then, it was the long talks at the International Congress of Geography in 1938. Intensely shocked by the impertinence of nazi geographers, we were concerned without guessing that twenty-four months later, German tanks would drive on the Loire banks[64]. (Weulersse, 1993, pp.VIII-IX) See also Appendix H.

In association with this questioning of the eminence of Western civilization, the word 'civilization' started to be used with a different meaning. The 18th century idea of civilization, which was used in the singular, and was associated with the notion of Progress and reserved for a few privileged human groups representing the elite of the humanity, lost its distinction. French researchers began to use the term 'civilization' with a different sense, as the body of characteristics representing the collective life of any particular group or society. Consequently, the word civilization acquired a plural reality, and the first meaning (ie, Civilization used in the

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63 *"Dans le compartiment réservé aux noirs, le contrôleur blanc me regarde comme une bête étrange ou un doux aliéné. Devant nos yeux se déroulent, monotones, les grandes réserves indigènes … Sur les versants dénudés des collines, dans le crépuscule, ces huttes innombrables et toutes semblables font songer à quelque gigantesque et sinistre "camp de concentration", à quelque immense campement de forçats"*.

64 *"C' est au cours de son tour du monde que j' ai fait la connaissance de Jacques Weulersse: il vint me voir à Hanoï, et ce furent de longs et substantiels entretiens. Nous nous rencontrons encore à Tokyo, où je passais au cours de mon tour du Monde personnel pour rejoindre la France par le Canada et New York. Au Japon, Weulersse n' était pas moins animé et perspicace qu' en Afrique. Puis ce furent de longues conversations au Congrès international de Géographie d' Amsterdam en 1938. Choqués au plus haut point par l' outrecuidance des géographes nazis, nous en étions affligés, sans pouvoir imaginer que vingt-quatre mois plus tard les blindés allemands rouleraient sur les rives de la Loire*".

singular) lost part of its eminence. Along with this, a cultural and humanist knowledge of Asian civilizations, with their rich histories and vestiges of their previous brilliant empires, was spreading. As a result, a comparative approach between Western and South-East Asian philosophies was maturing, being based on a French desire for comprehension of Asian thought and of a mutual intellectual perception. French orientalists such as Sylvain Lévi encouraged this shift, where cultural dialogues with the fraction of the indigenous intellectuals who accepted the exchange of information with colonial scholars were substituted for colonial paternalism. Sylvain Lévi[65], in 1925, reconsidered the issues of the civilized action of French colonization by stating

> We have in Indochina a France of the Far Orient ... populated with peoples remarkably talented, equal in value to the best "human material" of the Orient. These peoples are the inheritors of a long tradition of history, of art, and of religion, the sense of which they have not entirely lost and which they were probably anxious to prolong .... We believe, and very faithfully, in bringing them up in the human order without questioning ourselves whether we provide them more happiness. Now, the hierarchy, in the human order, is difficult to measure...In a general way, wherever the European has intervened, the native perceives himself with a sort of general despair which is really poignant since he felt that the sum of his well-being, in the moral sphere more than in sheer material items, instead of increasing, had in fact diminished. All of which has made the foundation of his social life seem to be flimsy and to crumble under him, and the golden pillars on which he had thought to rebuild his life now seem no more than tinselled cardboard (Lefèvre, 1937, pp.123-124, quote also partly in Said, 1978, pp.248-249).

Further, a new orientalist discourse emerged where the "spiritual" values of Far-Eastern cultures were highlighted and opposed to Occidental "materialism" (see also Chapter 7). Raoul Girardet wrote in regard to the Indian poet Rabindranah Tagore[66]

> In these years also Western thinkers showed a new interest in Eastern and Far Eastern philosophies, and the passionate teachings of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore aroused fervent admiration: the West, according to Tagore, is being killed by its cult of technology, its greed for material things, its thirst for money and power.

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[65] Sylvain Lévi was an eminent member of the Asian Society and taught Sanskrit at the Collège de France. Along with his mission in Nepal in 1898, he renewed the French orientalist approach by opening it to the social sciences. He was one of the promoters of the creation of the E.F.E.O. He generated an Oriental humanism where culture and enlightenment were no longer western privileges and argued that Asian and Western civilizations must cooperate. Sylvain Lévi appears in Gourou's bibliography p.582, as editor of a work published in 1931 and entitled "*Indochine*".

[66] Rabindranah Tagore, who was an Indian mystic and patriotic poet, created in 1921 in the north of Calcutta an international university (Santiniketan) destined to promote the Indian ideals of culture and tolerance.

> The West is dominated by materialism, so it is up to the East to embody and demonstrate the pre-eminence of thought and disinterested contemplation[67]. (Girardet, 1972, p.226).

This improved knowledge of Asian civilizations and their irrefutable values was joined to the ethics of what French historians call "colonial humanism", generated by the humanist and republican constituents of the French culture. These liberal and democratic components were obviously in contradiction with colonial hegemony and the French intolerant repression toward colonial resistance. This colonial humanism is represented by major political figures like Pierre Pasquier, Governor General of Indochina when Pierre Gourou was in Hanoi, and other high-ranking public servants like Robert Delavignette[68]. Their colonial thought perceived the necessity of a colonial reworking in order to consider and recognize the indigenous competence, culture and interest with an aim of mutual "comprehension" or "understanding" (Bernard-Maitre, 1939, p.9). All these intellectuals supported colonialism, disregarded colonial resistance and, at least in the case of Pasquier, organized its repression. But, as Pierre Brocheux[69] notices in quoting Pierre Pasquier (Brocheux and Hémery, 1994), they brought a more questioning colonial approach.

> For thousands of years, Asia holds its personal ethics, its art, its metaphysics, and its dreams. Will it ever assimilate our Grecian and Roman thought? ... Is it wishful thinking? .... What cement or connection might be found between the Asiatic and us?[70] (Pasquier, quoted in Brocheux and Hémery, 1994, p.213).

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67 "*C' est dans ces années également que les philosophies orientales et extrême-orientales font l' objet d' une curiosité nouvelle et que la prédication passionnée du poète indien Rabindranah Tagore suscite de très ferventes admirations: l' Occident, affirme Rabindranah Tagore, se meurt de son culte de la technique, de son avidité matérielle, de sa soif d' argent et de puissance; face au matérialisme qui le domine, il appartient à l' Orient d' incarner et de faire triompher les valeurs de l' esprit et de la contemplation désintéressée*".

68 The anthropologist Robert Delavignette wrote with warmth in regard to Sudan villages, peasants, and African civilization (Delavignette 1931) and about the future of the cultural relationships between France and its colonies. In 1937 Pierre Gourou was involved with Robert Delavignette in the 'commission of parliamentary inquiry into the political, economic and moral situation of French overseas territories', during the Front populaire, mentioned with more details in footnote 52 above.

69 Pierre Brocheux is a French historian born in Cochinchina. His main academic research works are connected with the history of Southeast Asia. His doctorate thesis concerns the economic and social aspects of French colonization in the West part of Cochinchina. As he acknowledges "A topic of research depends upon the researcher. In this case the relations between the two are not only intellectual but also existential. I chose the subject of the following monograph because I was born in Nam Bo, or Cochinchina … While growing up, I often overheard my family's stories of land disputes, land grabbings, children given to creditors to pay their parents' debts, and the exactions of mandarins and village elders upon the peasants … My mixed ethnic origin, half-Vietnamese, half French, obliged me to be conscious from an early age of the racial inequality institutionalized by the French. This existence *entre deux mondes* – sometimes painful, sometimes rewarding, often uncomfortable – prompted me to scrutinize the society of Nam Bo with an especially critical eye" (Brocheux, 1995, p.XV).

70 "*Depuis des milliers d' années, l' Asie possède son ethique personnelle, son art, sa métaphysique, ses rêves. Assimilera-t-elle jamais notre pensée grecque et romaine? (…) Où trouver entre l' Asiatique et nous le ciment et le lien*?"

> We must confess it. We instruct the united group of schoolteachers and professors through the pedagogic image that has furnished to the Third Republic this admirable breeding ground of educators .... But is it really what the old, traditionalist Annam peoples wish[71]? (Pasquier, quoted in Brocheux and Hémery, 1994, p.214).This recognition and appreciation of Far-Eastern values was

accompanied by an aesthetic identification of the charms and beauty of the Indochinese landscape (Appendix E.4), art works and crafts. While these aspects of Indochinese culture were studied and protected by French institutions like the E.F.E.O., they were related to historical images and relegated to the past while the contempory fate of the colony was inexorably linked to the notion of progress. Gwendolyn Wright (1991) suggests that the identification of the Annamite vernacular architecture, with "the aesthetic domination of India and China in the past" was also one of the expressions of French hegemony and power. It allowed French authorities to control the Indochinese culture and politics, and to "provided moral and political lessons to Indochina" and "also served to primand" (Wright, 1991, p198). Meanwhile, contemporary Indochinese people "left their own legacy in ruins". As Gwendolyn Wright says:

> All historic architecture was aestheticized, then classified according to Western criteria. Archaeologists and government functionaries lauded the Ecole's formal classification system and its exacting reconstruction effort as the only legitimate ways to honor the great art of the past. (Wright, 1991, p.199)

This retrospective judgment however diminishes the contradictory fact that many French scholars and intellectuals, depending of their own sphere, asserted colonial humanitarian ideology as "saving" the cultural richness of the past Indochinese Empires from their disappearance. By way of illustration, French researchers of the E.F.E.O. worked on the history and restauration of the five cities and temples of the Angkor complex in Cambodia.

This concern for the past was also underpinned by the humanist opinion that French modernity was not in harmony with traditional ways. This conflict of tradition/modernity was in fact not a new problem, but became more apparent in the 19th century with the influence of philosophical movements, such as Romanticism[72], and the growth of the workclass associated with the French Industrial Revolution. During this industrialization period, the modern rational

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[71] "*Il faut bien l' avouer. Nous formons des phalanges d' instituteurs et de professeurs à l' image de la pédagogie qui a fourni à la troisième république cette pépinière admirable d' éducateurs (…). Mais est-ce bien celle que désire le vieux peuple conservateur d' Annam*".

[72] According to the romantic philosophy, the dissociation between Nature and Man must be overcome, in order to reach the primary unity and "harmony" between Man and Nature.

consciousness was often in conflict with the traditional, and the modern society in conflict with the traditional one.

French Romanticist thought is distinguishable in Pierre Gourou's writings when he describes the brown colors of the peasant suits or the grey roofs and clay walls of the houses as in harmony with the natural environment (pp.575-576).

> *One of the charms of the Delta is in fact this perfect accord which is established between man and nature. For centuries, the peasant can organize harmonious relationships with his surrounding environment. The clothes are too often ragged and dirty, but brown or greyish colors and the simple cut clothing sometimes highlighted by the cheerful note of a brilliant green belt, do not stain the natural environment. The countryman and the countrywoman have a supple and unencumbered walk …* [73]. (p.575).

> *The Tonkin presents in addition the character of a stabilized civilization in material and aesthetic accord with the natural conditions*[74]. (p.576).

If this romantic conception looks inadequate or deficient nowadays, it has to be placed in the colonial context of the beginning of the century and the dominant political philosophy of the French elite[75].

This aesthetic interpretation has the ambition to allow the French public to appreciate and express affection for the Indochinese landscapes and populations. These positive views can be opposed to the more extreme views of the colonies, where landscape and life are described as strange, unfamiliar, and rejected[76]. They also contrast with the more material and exotic descriptions of Charles Robequain who insists frequently on the hostility or strangeness of

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73 "*L' un des charmes les plus certains du Delta est en effet l' accord parfait qui s' est établi entre l' homme et la nature. Depuis des siècles le paysan a su organiser des rapports harmonieux avec le milieu qui l' entoure. Les vêtements sont trop souvent guenilleux et malpropres, mais leur teinte brune ou grisâtre, parfois relevée de la note gaie d' une ceinture d' un vert vif, leur coupe simple, ne font pas tache dans le cadre naturel; le paysan, la paysanne ont l' allure souple et dégagée de ceux qui font avec aisance des gestes auxquels ils sont ancestralement accoutumés (…)*".

74 "*Le Tonkin présente en somme les caractères d' une civilisation stabilisée dans un accord matériel et esthétique avec les conditions naturelles*".

75 In other words, in the context of the end of the 20th century, Pierre Gourou held a contrasting view in regard to the notion of Harmony between societies and nature and said "The concept of harmony, that goes beyond me" (Appendix H)

76 For instance, in some descriptions of novelists like Roland Dorgelès, *La route Mandarine (Dorgelès 1925)*, published partially in the weekly review *L ' Illustration*, where well-knowned journalists and authors were writing (200,000 copies in 1939). In fact, during the Inter-War period, the review was marked by the collaboration of a famous political personality, André Tardieu, from the conservative party, a member of the French government from 1929. Contrary to Pierre Gourou's regard for the Tonkin delta and its peasantry, Roland Dorgelès described (p.114) "this sad Tonkin delta", with "a population who suffer in rice fields or trot on the dykes, the bamboo on the shoulder, two burdens in balance. (Sometimes, a mother carries a child on one side, a piglet on the other, so we wonder if it is either the kid that she has taken as a counterweight, or the piglet)". Indeed, in this particular extract, Dorgelès writes equivocally about Annamite people, drawing a parallel between them and animals ["*…toute une population qui peine dans la rizière ou trotte dans les digues, le bambou sur l' épaule, deux charges en balancier. (Une mère, parfois, porte un enfant d' un bout, un petit porc de l' autre, si bien qu' on se demande si c' est le marmot qu' elle a emmené pour faire contrepoids, ou bien le petit cochon*")]. However, in some other sections, Roland Dorgelès provided more favorable descriptions of Indochinese landscapes and populations.

Indochinese Nature (in his description of typhoons, where "all the countryside groans" p.32; or his description of karst forms considered as "strange", "fantastic", "causing an impression of suffocation and harrowing" p.57), and the backward and miserable appearance of the societies.

Compared to Pierre Gourou or orientalists such as Sylvain Lévi, Charles Robequain (along with Albert Sarraut) considered that the preservation of the "picturesque" traditional Indochinese landscapes and societies was not such a major issue as the colonial modernization of Indochina. Albert Sarraut (1930, p.21) wrote:

> …It is sure that our civilizing action, where so many and different races are brought together and mixed and which supplies all these with modern creations, might blunt their originality. Despite the regrets that the lovers of the picturesque may have, this evolution [the modernization] is however indispensable and its benefits amply compensate for its damages[77].

Convinced of the benefits that colonialization would bring to indigenous life, Charles Robequain dismisses persons who ask "why do we try desperately to give to the indigenous new temptations and needs? The Annamite had a happy misery, why give him a morose affluence?". He explains how these questions are irrevelant and "pointless" because "It is certain that our politics tends towards the enrichment of the country, and we cannot see how it could escape from it" (see below for Charles Robequain's full quotation).

In reality, Pierre Gourou's opening to the Annamite traditional society is not only a characteristic during the 1930s of the relativist and conservative cultural humanism of the E.F.E.O., but also of representatives of the French authority like the Gouverneur Général Pasquier (see above). Despite the fact that, according to Pierre Gourou, Pierre Pasquier did not appear to be particularly interested in his thesis (refer in Appendix H), we find with Pierre Pasquier (1930, pp.245-246-247, volume II) the same aesthetic conception of the Indochinese landscape, based on the evocation of

> the lightness and colours, the forms and lines ..., the unusual conformity of the landscape ... with the social state of the people destined to live within ..., the outdated and charming pictures that it (Indochina) offered then with the spectacle of a modern life which offends all the emotional and picturesque devoted to the weakening forces of the past, in its feverish elaboration of a renovated decor (Appendix E.4).

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[77] *"Car il est certain que notre action civilisatrice, pénétrant et mêlant tant de races si diverses, et les dotant les unes et les autres de créations modernes, risque d' émousser leur originalité. Quelque regret qu' en puissent avoir les amants du pittoresque, cette évolution est cependant indispensable, et ses avantages compensent largement ses méfaits".*

Yet, through a more reflective questioning about the meaning of these colonial writings, we can notice with Yves Lacoste (1990, pp.55, 69) that the "aesthetic interest turned towards the real landscapes is a very recent social phenomena at least". It is related to a dominant position, which conforms to the colonial situation, where the observer contemplates at a physical and mental distance a specific panorama.

This valorizing purpose animates also Pierre Gourou's descriptions of the Tonkin landscape and Annamite society. Pierre Gourou cultivated a friendly image of the Tonkin by transposing it with French artistic movements or philosophical ideologies, and by inviting the reader to surpass the French cultural preconception that a flat and uniform landscape is "devoid of charm" (p.555). In fact, Pierre Gourou refers more to French artistic movements which characterized the 19th century, and especially Impressionism and Romanticism, rather than the avant-garde movements at the beginning of the century (Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism). Pierre Gourou describes the reflection and the movements of water and light on the rice fields, and the various nuances of colours reflected by the delta across the seasons of the year. Pierre Gourou brings as well a majestic impression of the landscape, of its largeness and greatness ("an appropriate serial of plans, leading the eye until the horizon, gives to the infinite greatness and attraction" p.555, "we must also taste the greatness of the river landscape" p.556). He identifies "romantic" aspects of the Tonkin plain, evoking (p.555) "the delicate and peaceful harmony", the "bucolic landscape", the "peace and quietness" of the Annamite countryside (Appendix E.4), and "the architectural regulations, well proven by time, are in harmony with the surroundings"[78] (pp.575-576, see also the quotation above, from p.575). Thus, Pierre Gourou applied the ideas of the French aesthetic movements of the 19th century to the Tonkin landscape. This familiarizes the French reader with this Indochinese region in such a way that, behind the French perception of "the contemporary fate" of the Annamite civilization (see in chapter 2, section 2.3.3, Edward Said's quotation) and "misery" of the peasantry, it draws attention to the aesthetic values of the countryside. Pierre Gourou, as did figures such as Pierre Pasquier, believed that these artistic and cultural values, as well as the "moral and social" virtues of the Annamite society, have to be protected from the offensive aspects of colonial development for the good of the indigenous

[78] Before his death, Pierre Gourou confirmed this opinion that the delta was a "beautiful country" because "there were no constructions which obstruct, there was no smoke of factory, nothing similar". This authenticity is also the reason why Gourou chose to study the Tonkin delta and not the Mekong (Cochinchine), where "The European intervention was too large. It was not an original geography. It was not a matured country, it was a country in the process of growth and change …. The country was not yet 'vietnamized' in a total way …" (refer in Appendix H Pierre Gourou's interview, 29-8-95).

people. They are considered the Asian heritage of the former Asian civilizations (or what is now called World Heritage) which allow peasants to "cope with their misery":

> *It would seem that, in the West, modern progress has been instrumental in a kind of divorce between man and his surroundings...The ancient harmony between man and nature could be preserved if the Annamese, and particularly the elite among them, bore in mind that it is the most precious possession of their civilization; that a village which clumsily restores a building, betrays its most sacred traditions and the peasant community; that the building of a brick structure of more than one story in the middle of an ancient village is an insult to what is most beautiful and noble in Annamese land. If there is any Annamite patriotism, it should devote all its care to the preservation of this precious harmony between man and nature, for it is the consideration of prime importance, the one which stands out above all others, whether they be economic or political. Of this harmony, the equilibrium and daily happiness of the peasant, and the humble and unconscious contentment that allow him to cope with his misery, are in fact dependent*[79]. (p. 576).

> *But this development must be allowed to go forward on its own and care should be taken not to accelerate it. A slow evolution will allow the traditional evolution to absorb the new elements ... we do not see what we can substitute for these ones (the traditions of the ancestors), which have been obviously superior, in the moral and social domains*[80]. (p.578)

Pierre Gourou's purpose is achieved also by describing the "extreme perfecting of agricultural techniques" (p.388, see also chapter 7, section 7.4.1), the "architectural regulations put to the test of time" (p.576), the handicraft skills, the traditional daily work of the "hard-working peasantry" and people of modest means, and their inherited traditions. Such evocations may have touched the French soul, which is generally attached to the past and its rural roots. The peasant and the rural figures had still in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries a dominant role in literature. The departure of much of the rural populace to the new industrial centres created nostalgia for the rural past.

In fact, Pierre Gourou's discussion of the Annamite peasants and society is close to Sylvain Levi who spoke of a "people remarkably talented, ... inheritors of a long tradition". In

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79 *"Il semble que le progrès moderne ait déterminé en Occident une sorte de divorce entre l' homme et le milieu naturel, jusque dans les détails les plus familiers. Le Tonkin jouit encore dans le monde d' une situation privilégiée à ce point de vue, mais les signes de contamination y apparaissent; les écoles construites dans les campagnes sont laides; ces plates imitations de constructions occidentales, où rien n' a été conservé du style local, apparaisssent comme des édifices veufs, avec l' aspect de petites gares de la campagne française qui attendraient éternellement que l' on voulût bien poser les rails; des villageois enrichis ont fait construire des maisons à l' instar de l' Europe, qui avilissent par leur laideur aggressive les quartiers où elles se dressent. Mais le mal n' est pas encore trop grand; l' ancienne harmonie entre l' homme et la nature pourrait être maintenue si les Annamites, et particulièrement ceux de l'élite, pensaient qu' elle est le bien le plus précieux de leur civilisation, qu' un village qui restaure maladroitement un édifice trahit ses traditions les plus sacrées et la communauté paysanne, que le fait de construire un édifice de briques à étages au milieu d' un village est une insulte à ce qu' il y a de plus beau et de plus noble dans le pays d' Annam. S' il existe un patriotisme annamite, c' est à la conservation de ce précieux accord entre l' homme et la nature qu' il doit consacrer tous ses soins, car c' est la question primordiale, celle qui domine toutes les autres, qu' elles soient économiques ou politiques. De cet accord en effet dépendent l' équilibre intime et le bonheur quotidien du paysan, et l' humble et inconsciente satisfaction qui lui permet de supporter sa misère*".

80 *"Mais il faut laisser l' évolution se produire d' elle-même et se garder de l' accélérer; une évolution lente permettra à la civilisation traditionnelle d' absorber des éléments nouveaux, des techniques modernes (…) on ne voit pas ce que l' on pourrait substituer à celles-ci, qui leur fût évidemment supérieur, dans les domaines moral et social"*.

the colonial context of the 1930s, Pierre Gourou's recognizable complex society (see also chapter 7, section 7.4.2) urges the reader to classify it among the more 'advanced' colonial communities, with its high degree of technical skill and political subtlety, that colonization cannot disregard and needs to understand and meditate upon. Like Sylvain Lévi, Pierre Gourou is very concerned by the danger that French colonization may surely destabilize the old Annamite "moral and social life". Pierre Gourou writes (pp.577, 578):

> *If this balanced and reasonable civilization collapses, what would happen*[81]*?*
>
> *But Man has not only material needs: the traditional civilization has been able to give to the peasant a moral and social equilibrium which is missing in many more evolved societies that exclusively material progress has thrown in disarray*[82]*.*

Thus, for orientalists such as Sylvain Lévi or researchers such as Pierre Gourou, with a humanist philosophy, the Occidental civilization was no longer associated with the idea of social, moral or intellectual superiority or unique and remarkable value, and the merits and benefits of the 'industrial civilization' were relativised. In contrast, Oriental civilizations affiliated with the Indian or the Chinese were valued for their complexity and the notable and mature development of their cultural and social constitutions[83], as well as their expert rice cultivation. This estimable image of the Orient was also the result of the joint partnership between European and Asian scholars.

The representation of agricultural work and "hard-working" peasantry also can be seen as impregnated with French classical culture which is affiliated with the Greco-Roman pastoral tradition, coming from Antiquity through famous writings like the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, a poem describing the peasant life and the work of the countryside where the myth of the earth, the daily peasant works, and the hard labour are aroused in a moral way. (Hésiode, 1979, pp.381, 385)[84]. In the same tradition is the *Georgics* of the Latin poet Virgil, where Man is confronted by Nature, and underlines the edifying value of the work (the "hard labor"). Later, moralists and poets, such as La Fontaine, went back to this conception of the morality of arduous, laborious

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81 "*Si cette civilisation équilibrée et raisonnable s' effondre, que se produira-t-il*?"

82 "*Mais l' homme n' a pas que des besoins matériels: la civilisation traditionnelle a su donner au paysan un équilibre moral et social qui manque à bien des sociétés plus évoluées que des progrès exclusivement matériels ont plongées dans désarroi*."

83 Nowadays, we can find some relevance to this discourse in reactions that the globalisation debate provokes, which appeals for respect for cultural and traditional values.

84 The time, the mode and the techniques for each task were fixed and the work of the soil was considered as a conscientious and venerable labour and achievement.

work in one of his famous fables taught in French primary schools, *le laboureur et ses enfants* (the ploughman and his children). The Republican ideology inherited this tradition, and valued the virtues of labour in association with an idealist and social morality and human solidarity (Pierre Gourou writes about the Annamite "moral and social world").

Thus, Pierre Gourou interprets also throughout his argumentation the dominant character of the colonial apparatus in the 1930s, that Pierre Pasquier (1930, p.337) (quote also in Brocheux and Hémery, 1994, p.108), expresses clearly and that Daniel Hémery qualifies as a "colonial romanticism"[85]:

> Allow to a friend of this people, of his old customs, of his respectable traditions, to believe that by studying the past we can learn to conduct into the future a race that the fates of development have assigned under our protection. Learning to know each other would be the best way to love one another. Do not destroy the old Asian edifice. Do respect the "character" where beats a thought[86]

There is no such romanticism in regard to the Annamite civilization in Charles Robequain's thesis. His approach is more embedded in positivist, Cartesian thought, where geomancy appears nothing more than "weird", "puerile and ridiculous" (p.550, see the quote in Chapter 7, section 7.3.2.2.). As Augustin Berque notices, from a positivist point of view, the *fengshui*[87] "has nothing to do with modern science", which operates through "measure and causality", and not "on principles of correspondence and influence" (Berque, 1995, p.99). But, in a concern for objectivity, Charles Robequain recognizes its significance in the organization of the Annamite space (see in his thesis pp.580-581, and in this thesis Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.2, the quotation from p.540, and Chapter 6, section 6.2.2).

The difficulty French geographers had in entering into the logic and structures of Vietnamese thought, despite their humanism and intent to provide a good understanding of the country, is also revealed in reflections of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou about the economic behaviour of the Indochinese peasantry. It testifies how, naturally and despite their

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[85] However, countries where the traditional life and society have been preserved remain still objects of interest or curiosity in France. The discourse is no more "romantic", but interrogates the way traditional societies conceive their environment (Claval & Singaravelou 1995).

[86] "*Permettez à un ami de ce peuple, de ces vieilles coutumes, de ces respectables traditions, de croire qu' en étudiant le passé on peut apprendre à conduire vers l' avenir une race que le hasard des évolutions a placée sous notre égide. Apprendre à se connaître serait le meilleur moyen de s' aimer. Ne détruisons rien du vieil édifice asiatique. Respectons le 'caractère' où palpite une pensée*".

[87] The Asian word for "geomancy" is "*fengshui*", and refers more to Chinese philosophy than "geomancy" as explained in Chapter 7 (in section 7.2.2 and footnotes 28 and 119).

humanist tendencies, they insert the Vietnamese societies into their Western economic schemes of thought, based mainly on the capitalist economic system, giving primacy to the economic initiative of the individuals and encouraging self-reliance, and, consequently, favourable to the improvement of production and economic efficiency. The beginning of the 20th century was also the time of the generalization of the principle of the division of work in Western countries, considered as significant to raising productivity (developed first by Adam Smith, who writes about the fragmented work in his book on the *Wealth of Nations* (Skinner, 1979)[88], then more significantly with Taylorism[89] and Fordism). Thus, Charles Robequain (pp.462, 463) states that

> *One might even be tempted to see in this division of industrial work in an essentially agricultural society the result of intelligent adaptation and up-to-the-minute progress. However, looking at what is happening carefully and realistically, we see that the explanation is completely different, that this specialisation is no more than another sign of habit, poverty, and the Annamite lack of foresight*[90].
>
> *Indeed, there is no connection between this specialisation and a desire for progress, a determination to do better. Although it is strictly determinate manufacturing is no better for it*[91].
>
> *It would be unjust to impute this poverty simply to the character of the inhabitants of this overpopulated delta: but it is necessary to discuss the Annamite's negligence, his inability to cost his goods, his disdain for the idea of saving money ... The Annamite foresees nothing, he is always caught unawares, he is always even-tempered. He is just like the grasshopper of the fable*[92].

As well, Pierre Gourou writes about "the waste of labour" (p.517), the "routine" (p.520), but not necessarily in negative terms, and occasionally he clears up French partiality (such as in page 388, see the quotation below, see also in chapter 7, section 7.4.1, the quotation from

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88 In this work (first published in 1776), Adam Smith related the division and specialisation of work to the development of trade and transport.

89 Taylorism is a method promoted by the American engineer Frederick W. Taylor (1856-1915) known as the father of industrial management to scientifically organize work. His ideas aimed at increasing the production efficiency of workers and eliminate wasted time. It led to the intorduction of production line work with each worker undertaking a strict specialization. Henry Ford applied these principles in his factories to build the "Ford T" car.

90 "*Dans cette division du travail industriel qu' offre une société essentiellement agricole, on serait même tenté de voir l' effet d' une adaptation intelligente et le dernier mot du progrès. Mais, à prendre avec la réalité un contact digne et prolongé, l' explication apparaît tout autre, et cette spécialisation ne semble plus guère qu' une marque nouvelle de la routine, de la pauvreté, et de l' imprévoyance annamite*".

91 "*En effet, elle ne s' accorde nullement avec un désir de progrès, une volonté de faire mieux. Pour être strictement déterminée, la fabrication n' en est pas devenue meilleure*".

92 "*Cette pauveté, il serait très injuste de l' imputer tout entière au caractère des habitants, dans ce delta surpeuplé: cependant, il faut bien parler ici de l' incurie annamite, de cette incapacité d' établir un prix de revient, de ce dédain de l' épargne (…) Il ne prévoit pas, se trouve toujours pris de court, et conserve une humeur égale: c' est une incorrigible cigale*". Robequain is making here allusion to one of the famous fables of Jean de la Fontaine, *la cigale et la fourmi* (the cicada and the ant). The moral of the story is the provident attitude of the ant, which has saved food all summer in order not to be caught foodless during winter, as the cicada is.

pp.387). However, distancing the Annamite way of thinking from the French one, Pierre Gourou writes in regard to the 8,000 questionnaires he sent to the villages that:

> *to be sure to get simple and clear answers, I did not ask any questions on the conditions of fabrication and sale, on the cost price and the selling price; actually, the Tonkin villagers do not think about these problems, and tackles them with clumsiness when we speak directly about them ... On the other hand, we did not want to awake his apprehension ... letting him believe it was a tax inquiry ...* p.451.

(see the full quotation in Chapter 6, section 6.4.2)

Hence, this protective, paternalist attitude where the foreign colonizer became the guardian of the traditional landscape and of indigenous values, and this difficult penetration of Vietnamese culture proves that, behind his charitable or philanthropic intentions, the colonial humanist discourse has a tendency to re-establish in his argumentation the colonialism that it tries to avoid.

5.5 Conclusion: Charles Robequain's Colonialist Discourse and Pierre Gourou's Colonial Humanism

Doubts about the benefits of progress, about the superiority of the French civilization, and about the morality, or about the ethics and the human values of colonization, are rejected in Charles Robequain's discourse, but understood and questioned in Pierre Gourou's discourse. But these distinct attitudes correspond in reality to two different economic and social contexts: one of the 1920s and the other of the 1930s.

Charles Robequain wrote his thesis in the middle of the 1920s, and this period corresponds to a golden age for colonization and to a condition of relative world economic prosperity, where colonial capitalism promotes the economic sectors of the Cochin China rice culture, the development of the Tonkin's mineral wealth (e.g. the coalmine of Hongay), or new agricultural ventures like the hevea (rubber) plantations (Brocheux and Hémery, 1994, pp.115, 122). The towns and harbours, the industries and the communication networks (railway and road) were developed during this period.

Thus, Charles Robequain writes at a time where the evocations of the *mise en valeur* and the civilizing actions are more important than ever before. This context has to be correlated with the fact that, in his writings, Charles Robequain remains confident about the image of a progress where the diffusion of Western knowledge, techniques, comfort and material well-being, and the radiation of the French Republican justice and principles will bring about the improvement of the

human condition. As a result, his rhetorical discourse idealizes the situation by repudiating any questioning about the effects of French colonization on the colonized country with, often, caustic analogies. For example, in the quotation below, Charles Robequain demonstrates that French colonialization cannot be compared to a “leech...sucking its victim”, and that criticisms of “a so-called occidental materialism and a pretended oriental idealism” are “pointless”. He also associated the colonial act with a humanitarian action and questioned the classical, classifying terminology defined by the economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu because of the grossness of the term “exploitation”. In Paul Leroy-Beaulieu’s theoretical work on colonization, presented in 1870 at the Academie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, revised and published in 1875 (Leroy-Beaulieu, 1874), a distinction between the "populating colonies" and the investment colonies or "exploitation colonies" was established. The historic analysis in this work aimed at demonstrating, thanks to the British example, that the populating colonies always lost money for the homeland compared to the second type. Thus, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu proposed that investments for colonial exploitation and limited emigration should be united.[93]

Compared with Paul Leroy-Beaulieu’s discourse, Charles Robequain (pp.611-612) insists rather on the well-disposed and humanitarian task of French colonization, where the improvement of the indigenous societies constitutes not only a consequence but also a priority motivation of the colonial action (see below “In this Annamite province ... the glory of France”):

[93] As Vincent Berdoulay (Berdoulay 1981) p.58 writes, “It is striking to notice that Paul Leroy-Beaulieu' s book, even if it accepts the free trade doctrine, otherwise claimed, without proving it , that French colonization was a national necessity”. He wanted to lead the industrial and business world to invest in the colonies to promote the development of latent and unexploited resources. It is how these countries could be pulled up to a superior degree of civilization for the good of the homeland as well as Humanity.

Thanh Hoá is not a populating colony and will never become one. Hence, would it be, according to the classical distinction, an exploitation colony? This term has something brutal, it chokes the thought and blackens the reality. It evokes the idea of a material profit without compensation for the indigenous, as a leech goes at fiercely and unrelentingly sucking its victim, of a shameless mercantilism. Without raising to the lips the resonant trumpet, we believe we have demonstrated how this interpretation is wrong. In this Annamite province where French blood has flowed, French intelligences, energies and lives have put all their dynamism into another aim than the fattening or even the glory of France. Others will retort bitterly "perhaps, but why try desperately to give to the indigenous new temptations and needs? The Annamite had a happy misery, why give him a morose affluence?" We don't want to philosophize: about the antinomy that a so-called Occidental materialism and a pretended oriental idealism seem to question, we don't take sides. It is certain that our politics tends towards the enrichment of the country, and we cannot see how it could escape from it. The accomplishments are still incomplete, but the first results are everywhere visible, in the houses in bricks replacing the huts, in the imports, always increasing, of some foreign products. The taste for hygiene and comfort is spreading, we buy petrol, soap, quinine; we eat meat more often. Let France take advantage of it a bit. Are we making people happy? The question seems to us pointless. But it is sure that we have reduced the number of the ragged, the beggars, the starving people[94]; we have brought more justice in the solution of the trials; we have allowed the peasant to work in peace …[95].

Hence, Charles Robequain's discourse could be seen as a product of the French colonialist ideology. Through this logic, Charles Robequain consecrates the French colonial order and identifies the colonial region by its general lack of progress and the indigence or misery of life of its populations. He also developed a more 'exotic' description of Indochinese societies and customs than Pierre Gourou, in the way that the Indochinese formalities and traditions that he depicts do not conform to the schemes of his French positivist thought.

A counterpoint to the universalism of the European civilization embodied in Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou's argument inclines towards a humanism of the French Renaissance (Montaigne, 1979), where the moral questions of the 'other' appear. As Pierre Gourou said (Appendix H, I), "the opening of Montaigne is splendid. When Montaigne talks about the Indians that he met in Rouen, who were brought from Rio de Janeiro, he makes a capital portrait

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94 In the French historical culture, from the 17th century, beggars and starving people were associated with an idea of disorder, perversion, derangement or disturbance. The idea was to control these social evils, dangers and shames in order to preserve the social order and to save the miserable people through labour and religion.

95 *."[Thanh Hoá] serait-il donc, selon la distinction classique, colonie d' exploitation? Ce terme a quelque chose de brutal, il choque l' esprit et noircit la réalité. Il évoque l' idée d' un profit matériel immédiat, sans compensation pour l' indigène, d' une sangsue acharnée à sucer sa victime, d' un mercantillisme éhonté. Sans emboucher la trompette sonore, nous croyons avoir montrer combien est fausse cette interprétation. Dans cette province annamite, du sang français a coulé, des intelligences, des énergies et des vies françaises se sont dépensées pour un autre but que l' engraissement ou la gloire même de la France. D' aucun rétorqueront amèrement: "sans doute, mais pourquoi vous acharner à donner à l' indigène des tentations et des besoins nouveaux? L' Annamite avait la misère gaie, pourquoi lui faire une aisance morose?" Nous ne voulons pas philosopher: sur l' antinomie que semblent poser un matérialisme dit occidental et un idéalisme prétendu oriental, nous ne prenons pas parti, et restons délibérément dans le sens commun. Il est certain que notre politique tend à l' enrichissement du pays, et on ne voit pas comment elle pourrait s' y soustraitre. L' œuvre est encore incomplète, mais les premiers résultats en sont partout visibles, dans les maisons de briques remplaçant les paillottes, dans les importations, sans cesse accrues, de certains produits étrangers. Le goût de l' hygiène et du confort se propage, on achète du pétrole, du savon, de la quinine; on mange plus souvent de la viande. Qu' on veuille bien permettre à la France d' en profiter un peu. Faisons-nous des heureux? La question nous paraît oiseuse. Mais il est certain que nous avons diminué le nombre des loqueteux, des mendiants, des affamés; que nous avons apporté plus de justice dans la solution des procès, que nous avons permis à chaque paysan de travailler en paix".*

of them". In this description of the indigenous Brasilian, Montaigne discusses the relativity of the customs, evoking the sociability, sagacity and common sense of the presumably barbarous and wild cannibals. Using the same approach, Pierre Gourou describes the Annamite society with its skilful, competent and convivial characters and stresses, and is critical towards the vices brought by the modern countries "exclusively material" needs which have contaminated the "more advanced societies", (p.578, see quotation above, in section 5.4.3). Pierre Gourou sees the Annamite peasant community in opposition to the impersonal modern world, as the convivial and rich social environment where peasant families have their roots and bloom. Pierre Gourou writes about "a rich social life". This reversal attributes to the colonized people a sense of "the moral and social world". It contrasts with the moral and social disequilibrium of the European societies.

Pierre Gourou also dwells on the Tonkin peasant's know-how and expertise about rice cultivation, the agricultural aptitude inherited from an ancestral practice more than from an abstract scientific knowledge:

> *To be sure, the Annamite cultivator is prudent and conservative, but he is not stupidly bound by routine. All the agronomists who have studied this country respect the adaptability of the peasant and his mindful spirit; they all recognize the perfecting of agricultural techniques and the difficulty involved in improving on them*[96]*.* (p.388).

Therefore, Pierre Gourou's perception of the Annamite region accentuates the idea of the merits of the Tonkin peasantry and, thus, contributes to its valorization within the French Empire. This is linked to the fact that Pierre Gourou, more than Charles Robequain, relied on Annamite scholars and friends to grasp the social reality of the Tonkin delta. This is attested in Pierre Gourou's footnotes when the works of Vietnamese scholars[97] are mentioned often in laudable terms, or when he related, in a less formal way, talks with his Vietnamese associates such as the memory of a food shortage related by "one of his Vietnamese friends" (p.573, footnote 2). However, this dialogue was limited because of the colonial context and ideology and neither Pierre Gourou nor his Vietnamese friends were in a position to question openly French

96 "*Certes le cultivateur annamite est prudent et conservateur, mais il n' est pas stupidement routinier. Tous les agronomes qui ont étudié ce pays rendent hommage à la souplesse d' adaptation du paysan et à son esprit d' observation.*". This is particularly the case of the French agronomist René Dumont (see footnotes 42 in Chapter 6 and 81 in chapter 7).

97 For example, Pierre Gourou quotes with esteem the works of Nguyen Van Khoan whom he knew personally (see Chapter 7, section 7.2.3).

domination[98]. Therefore, we can notice that all the Vietnamese referees that Pierre Gourou quotes are related to cultural themes in regards to Vietnamese customs, morals, beliefs, villages institutions and communities which assist the French representation of Vietnam as a village country with a worthwhile but outdated Annamite society not yet transformed by Progress, as was French society[99]. But it brings a different geography, more based on social and cultural realities than on naturalist conditions, where the regional space is less appropriated by the fundamental principle of progress than in Charles Robequain's geographical discourse.

This particularizing ideology where the regional space is formalized not only from the French point of view, but also the Annamite one, introduces restrictions to the universalist principles linked with the concept of progress that the French civilization has to extend all over the world, especially in its colonial regions, and which becomes axiomatic in the planning views of Charles Robequain.

Consequently, Pierre Gourou's discussion is more nuanced and is part of the discursive argument of "colonial humanism" and the context of the 1930s, which resulted from the aggravation of the social problems of the late 1920s and of the consequences of the world economic crisis. More specifically, the French efforts to project Indochina during the 1920s into a modern economy did not touch the majority of the population which stayed traditional. By contrast, Indochinese peasant life became more and more socially destabilized, mainly because of the effects of the colonial interference on the social web. For example, a new Annamite land-owning bourgeoisie, landlords and a new intelligentsia who had been trained in the French educational system acquired new ideals and nationalist principles, while the patriarchal and conservative class of graduates and mandarins and the traditional Annamite elites and political institutions disintegrated. The direct and indirect colonial taxes on the inhabitants of the villages, the custom dues and the French control and taxes on salt, alcohol and opium products were particularly unpopular and a source of resistance. The deltaic plains were also destabilized by the increasing demographic pressure, partly a consequence of the colonial medical managerial progress which decreased the rate of child mortality. Thus, when Pierre Gourou wrote his thesis at the beginning of the 1930s, the colonial power was in confrontation with this rural instability, as well as, at another scale, the depression of the world economy. The effects of the depression

[98] For example, as Jean Suret-Canale (1994, p.159) notices, Pierre Gourou never mentioned openly French colonialism. Pierre Gourou never suggested in his thesis the French wars of conquest, Vietnamese resistance and French repression after the Yen Bay revolt which occurred in Tonkin in 1931.

[99] This will be more developed in Chapter 7.

of the 1930s on the Indochinese populations included increasing taxes and the exclusion of any political reform favourable to the emancipation of Indochina. Associated with the deficit of rice production against a background of poor harvests and nationalist or communist resistance, rising peasant misery and social crisis promoted various uprisings in the Tonkin and Thanh Hoá regions, followed by increasing colonial repression. In response to the demographic and agrarian problem, the French authorities continued, however, to implement important hydraulic programs, in order to restore the food supply equilibrium, but without modifying the colonial structures.

These two contrasted situations partly explain the two different arguments of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou in terms of modernization and colonial problems of development. This is what we are going to investigate in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

INDOCHINESE REGIONS, THE COLONIAL CONTEXT AND MODERNITY.

6.1 Introduction

It has been established in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 that two major perspectives - one Vidalian and one colonial - can be identified within the discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. These two positions are complementary, the knowledge of the Man/environment relationship allied with the French colonial thought forming a base from which to draw on in order to develop viable economic and planning perspectives of the colonial regions. As Marie-Claire Robic (1996) observes[1], the geography of the inter-war period was not as politically inactive as is currently thought and geographers, in their writings, advanced practical arguments, and engaged in the debates of the time. Accordingly, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourses cannot be separated from the French political search for adequate forms of development and the modernization of Indochinese societies and their economies. The strength of their theses was linked partly to the way they mobilized to their benefit the available and modern information resources of French institutions and administration.

The Indochinese context was a particularly favourite field for French researchers because scientific information tools were well developed. More precisely, the essential roots of their theses were due to different types of sources furnishing distinct information and eventually leading to opposite representations on Indochina. These included cultural, historical and philological information about Indochina affiliated to the historical sciences study of ancient or typical Asian civilizations. Another was cartographic and statistical documents, aerial photography or economic inquiries often based on modern techniques and approaches with the aim of bringing progress and the construction of a modern Indochina. Such major sources included on the one hand the publications of the *Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient*, whose role in the understanding of Indochinese societies will be examined in Chapter 7, and on the other hand the various cartographic, statistical and scientific works of the French administration that

[1] In her article, Marie-Claire Robic (1996a) considers the latest fieldwork (urbanism, planning) in which French geographers began to be involved after the First World War.

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou quote and use in their regional analyses. Their two discourses rely significantly on official information and the cordial relationships which they established with the French officers and scientific researchers working in the colonial institutions, such as Marine and Army captains, officers of the topographic institute and scientists of diverse French establishments. These people were developing topographic, geological, hydrographic, botanic and climatic maps whose object was to make an inventory of resources, to establish precise information on the different regions of the French Empire, and to modernize Indochina. This scientific inventory of the Indochinese resources and ecosystems was linked with the process of the colonial appropriation of Indochinese nature in the name of the progress (Chapter 5). The colonial discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were supported by this highly informative documentation established by the Indochinese administrations in drawing up an appraisal of colonial resources. It was necessary preliminary work to the French politics of development and modernization of the colonies (the politics of *mise en valeur* defined by Albert Sarraut[2] (1923, 1931)).

At the same time, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou contributed to the improvement of this information, by their exhaustive descriptions of the physical characteristics, population settlement, the various ethnic groups, and the resources and traditional activities of Indochina. Thus, their theses developed an informative description of Asian regions of the French colonial Empire not yet well known by the colonial and military authorities or by the French public. Consequently, their works constitute basic and essential materials dealing with the regional organization of Indochina, which are still quoted as essential narrative references by researchers. Indeed, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's argumentation are more substantial than other Vidalian geographers in their analysis of the demographic, social, agricultural, industrial or commercial problems of regional development, and their treatises present more practical themes.

Thus, their geography is also 'active', linked to the debates about the French politics of *mise en valeur*/development of Indochina. Schematically two major tendencies are represented. The first is a modernist one, with a strategy of intensifying and increasing agricultural production, the modernization of technology, economic practices and ways of thought,

[2] Albert Sarraut defined his theory of *mise en valeur* of the colonies in a book called *la mise en valeur des colonies françaises*, which summarizes his ideas in his colonial programme of planning policy presented to the French Parliament in 1921, called the "*Plan Sarraut*". It develops a modern conception about land development and exploitation of the colonies, where the French State government guarantees the public funding necessary to modernize and make profitable the economic activities of the colonies. These modernist ideas were applied only after the world crisis, in association with more cautious practices of the "colonial exclusive", where France used its colonies as its exclusive economic outlet. This theoretical book of Albert Sarraut was the inevitable reference book of any decision concerning the elaboration of colonial projects of development.

industrialization and the promotion of exports and trade. The second is a more traditionalist one which, according to Daniel Hémery

> … has found its legitimization in the sincere idealization by the person in charge of the Indochinese civilizations, in a kind of conservative Romanticism, *passéiste* and paternalist, that French thinkers, writers, Orientalists fascinated by the history of these civilizations drew up. (Hémery, 1994, p.107).

These two aspects which emanate from the regional discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou reflect the "ambiguity", contradictions and confrontations of the French politics of colonialization and its associated discourses.

Neither "Thanh Hoá", nor "the peasants of the Tonkin delta" were works assigned by the French colonial administration. But it is not possible to separate the colonial argumentation in Charles Robequain's study, and the question of the agrarian overpopulation and development in Pierre Gourou's study, from the official discourses and debates on colonial development (Kleinen, 1996)[3]. These close relationships between the geography of Charles Robequain and

[3] John Kleinen's research work focuses on ethnographical praxis and on the image of the Vietnamese village during French colonialization. Kleinen observes in regard to Gourou's two major Indochinese works (Gourou, 1926, 1940), "Neither *Les Paysans* nor his *Utilisation du sol en Indochine française*, published in 1940, were policy studies commissioned or used by the French administration, but the dividing line between these studies and those written on contract remained quite thin" (Kleinen, 1996, p.29). This observation is also relevant regarding Charles Robequain's work entitled l' *Evolution économique de l' Indochine française* (Robequain, 1939). L'*Utilisation du sol en Indochine française and* l' *Evolution économique de l' Indochine française* are two complementary works in so far that Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou agreed to apportion the study of Indochinese economy according to their respective centers of interest. Charles Robequain looked at its modern aspects and Pierre Gourou at its traditional ones. These works are not regional monographs, but two studies including the economy of Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia and Laos. Both were translated into English under the auspices of the Institute of Pacific Relations (Robequain, 1944) (Gourou, 1945), with the titles *The Economic Development of French Indo-China* and *Land utilization in French Indochina.*

Land utilization in French Indochina investigates traditional land utilization in French Indochina from a socio-economic point of view. Pierre Gourou comments on the population distribution (part II, pp.89-225 in the 1945 English translation). He reports the regional complexity and economic diversity of traditional societies, with established and "subtle" agricultural rhythms and a multitude of small village industries and workshops in the regions of intensive agriculture. The final sentence of his book shows on the one hand how it is impossible to isolate Pierre Gourou's writings on Indochina from French colonial politics and on the other hand how Gourou disapproved of the French tendency to exalt its colonial future. Pierre Gourou wrote: "The problems raised by land utilization in Indochina are many and complex; the interests of the populations are quite often antagonistic. It behooves France to carry out a task of organization, progress and harmony. The difficulties are enormous but, when the improvement of the living conditions of 23 million human beings – most of whom live in extreme poverty – depends on the resolute efforts of those who represent the protecting country, is it necessary to be deluded by false hopes, in order to set to work?" (Gourou, 1945, p.587). ("*Les problèmes posés par l'utilisation du sol en Indochine sont nombreux et complexes; les intérêts des populations sont même souvent antagonistes. Il appartient à la France de poursuivre une œuvre d'organisation, de progrès et de concorde; les difficultés de 23 millions d'hommes, dont la plupart vivent à la limite de la misère, dépend des efforts persévérants de ceux qui représentent la nation protectrice, est-il besoin de se leurrer d'espoir pour entreprendre?*") (Gourou, 1940, p.443).

Pierre Gourou and the colonial administration consequently mean that immediate criticism of French domination, and of the political, economic and social disequilibrium and tensions which resulted from French domination and control (Suret-Canale, 1994, pp.158-161), are largely absent from their regional presentation of the Tonkin and Thanh Hoá. As Pierre Gourou stated in regard to the functionaries of the colonial administration (See Appendix H):

> It was sometimes me who told to them what they have to think about.
>
> … in general, all the administration was extraordinarily kind to me all the time. I never had any difficulty with it. Everywhere, I had a very nice welcome. People help me, as soon as they understood that I was not a journalist going by and about to tell things in a newspaper …. That went very well. The administration, it functioned very very well.

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's geography did not cast doubts on, or question, the established colonial authority and its presence because, belonging to the French National Education, they were also part of this French administration. It is only in a roundabout way that Pierre Gourou is critical of the consequences of the French action, and John Kleinen (1996, pp.31, 32) observes "Direct criticism of the colonial state is nearly absent in Gourou's work…" "Gourou nevertheless tackled the colonial administration when necessary, albeit in guarded terms".

Following the perspective of Paul Rabinow (1989), who argues that the colony can be considered as a privileged laboratory of modernity, it is important to investigate the various modern instruments produced and carried out in order to bring Indochina into the modern era using scientific methods, and observe how the geographers have or have not applied them in their geographical discourse. This is the object of the first part of this chapter (6.1). The two other parts of this Chapter (6.2, 6.3) focus more precisely on the logic of the geographical planning viewpoints of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou.

The Economic Development of French Indo-China analyzes "the changes effected in the economy of Indo-China as a result of the French occupation" (Robequain, 1944, p.VII). Charles Robequain explores the achievement of the French colonization and its limits. His geographical perspective cannot be separated from French colonial ideology and discourse (presented in Chapter 5). The book begins with the French occupation and in the first sentence Charles Robequain states: "French Indo-China was established during the second half of the last century. It is not necessary here to retrace the history of the countries it comprises, but only to recall the principal steps of the French occupation which brought with it sweeping renovations in the territory's economy" (p.3). He concluded (pp.344-348) "Whatever may be Indo-China's destiny, the establishment of French rule on her soil will always mark an important milestone in her history" (p.344) and "In the long run, colonization must have aims other than the mere balancing of accounts to truly justify it" (last sentence, p.348). See also in Chapter 3, footnote 88.

6.2 The Colonies and French Modernization

6.2.1 Cartographic and aerial reconnaissance work

The French colonization of Indochina was methodically accompanied and supported by the completion of a comprehensive cartographic and aerial coverage implemented by the French officers of the Army and the *Service géographique de l' Indochine*. Large amounts of geographical information were gathered in order to control, administer and supervise the territories and their populations, to assess the situation and draw up an appraisal of the resources, necessary to any preliminary work on the development/*mise en valeur* of the colonies and any large-scale irrigation conceived by the colonial authority. Hence, the objective was linked to the establishment of an exhaustive inventory of the physical characteristics, settlements and resources of the countries, to organize and prescribe colonial development and exploitation.

The *Service géographique de l' Indochine* was created in 1899 by the Governor-general, Paul Doumer, and controlled by the Army until 1925, before being placed under the direct jurisdiction of the governor-general. At an early stage, the *Service* established a 1/500,000 map (1cm for 5km), which was presented at the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1900 and was used by Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou in their theses. At the time when Pierre Gourou was working on his thesis, other Indochinese maps were produced on a larger scale. For example, the Red River delta was covered with 1/100,000 and 1/25,000 scale maps. Pierre Gourou grasped the methodical and systematic advantage these maps would give to his geographical argumentation and analysis. He writes in his bibliography (p.581) that the 1/100,000 and 1/25,000 maps "have been used as a basis in our works" and that the 1/25,000 map "is a magnificent instrument of work". Indeed, Pierre Gourou uses and reinterprets these topographical and hydrological maps as a background to his own cartographic work based on numerical material and distribution relating to population densities and activities and village areas (section 6.3.1).

The military aeronautical coverage of the major regions of Indochina was primarily to broaden the scope of these maps, but was also used by the two geographers. This stemmed from a desire, to show the configuration (whether diffuse or closed) of villages as well as the nature of their site (alluvium plain, fluvial terrace, sand-bar villages...)[4], and provide readers with a concrete image and an authentic documentation of the Indochinese regions.

[4] As we have seen in Chapter 3, this desire is not particular to the two theses and is a component of any French regional thesis.

This geographical investigation is related, in a more extensive context, to the incorporation of the modern techniques of the West, such as photography, into geographical practice, as we have mentioned in chapter 3 (section 3.3.2.). It is associated with a wish to ensure scientific or objective planning projects and strategies of development. This wish to be scientific is also linked to the ideology of rationalization and organization of the economy (Taylorism)[5] and territories prevalent in the 1930s. Theories on territorial planning were developed in Europe and the U.S.A., in association with the development of demographic census data and statistical practices.

6.2.2 A strategy of development sustained scientifically by census data, and statistical and economic investigations

In their ambition to organize a rational and modern *mise en valeur* of Indochina, colonial authorities encouraged reports on the distribution of agricultural areas, together with economic and exchange surveys to assess the state of colonial production.

Charles Robequain recognized how these statistical tools would benefit his regional investigation. For example, he bases his geography on the exchanges by using the statistics established by the customs administration (*Administration des Douanes et des Régies*) as well as on the railway statistics, in order to analyse the regional trade situation (pp.551-584) and the trade hierarchy of railway-stations (pp.569-570). Thus, Charles Robequain's argumentation appears to be established on precise facts, which allowed him to gauge the rising structures and tendencies of the regional exchanges.

Pierre Gourou also consulted the economic surveys carried out on Annamite activities, but his attitude towards the statistics established by the colonial administration is different from the positivist orientation of Charles Robequain, and is more affiliated with a neo-positivist and humanist philosophy. For example, in regard to agricultural products, Pierre Gourou quotes "the general statistics" such as the ones established in "Documents of Demography and Rice Cultivation, Agricultural Economy, the annual statistics of the agricultural Services". But he remained critical about the validity and utilization of these results, considering that "all these numbers are doubtful" (p.402) (see also section 6.3.1). As opposed to Charles Robequain (p.337) who gives an estimation of the average yield of the rice product, Pierre Gourou (p.405) asserts that this average yield was "impossible to establish". Hence, Pierre Gourou refuses to conclude

[5] See footnote 89 in Chapter 5.

that the Indochinese agricultural yield is very low compared with France and other Western countries.

Always aspiring to normalization, the *Service du Cadastre* co-ordinated the plans for the parceling of lands in the Tonkin villages and published maps about territories and boundaries of the communities, and statements on the distribution of the land. Pierre Gourou exploits these documents in his study of property ownership, and land parcelization (pp.350-374), and more fundamentally, uses them to calculate, analyze, graph and map the distribution of the density of the population (p.148, map n2, in annex).

The French authority organized official evaluations of the population for the end of the 19th century and, from 1926, ordered a population census every five years in order to have a quantitative understanding of the indigenous population. Thus, when Charles Robequain conducted his research, he had at his disposal colonial demographic estimations made before 1926 (Robequain (p.499) used the results of 1921), and the outcome of the first Indochinese census data of 1926. Although constituting the foremost demographic evaluations, these appraisals contained inaccuracies, and fell short of the quality of data achieved by the British authorities in relation to India. The various reasons for this are recounted by Charles Robequain (p.497). Through positivist reasoning, examining the facts and believing that only explicit and exact methods could constitute a real basis for reliable regional planning, Charles Robequain was aware of the necessity to organize such censuses. But he was critical of the lack of reliability of the results, asserting that even “if our residents have made laudable efforts, it is impossible for them to touch the truth; the sources of error are numerous...for fear of an increase in community taxes ...” (p.498). He is aware of the urgent need to have access to “serious census data” to “instruct” with discernment “the cogs and complex game of the general economy” and wrote:

> *… it is easy to see that a detailed census would give a firm foundation to the efforts of our administration, and regularly provide practical information concerning the success of our actions. In conjunction with the creation of a land register, the census would permit us to make a precise analysis of the resources of each village, and set the taxes at equitable levels. It would then be clear that in these apparently uniform deltas there are relatively rich areas, and relatively very poor areas, and it would be possible to find the real reasons for these differences and then attempt to reduce the gap between them. In times of scarcity one would know what quantities of aid to send to the affected areas, if the harvest exceeded local needs one could say by how much, and the value of exports could be calculated to a very precise degree. Thus the complex mechanisms of the general economy would at last be made clear: instead of vague opinions based somewhat shakily on a few isolated facts and proferred with a certainty in inverse proportion to the difficulty of verifying them, it would be possible to show, in general and in detail, the results of our policies, to show for each area the rise in the birth-rate, the lowering of mortality at various ages, the increase in longevity, the rise in average wealth, and the possibilities for emigration or immigration.*[6]. (pp.497-498).

Thus, Charles Robequain associated the need for censuses to an efficient planning activity (see Appendix F2, "Maps and the spatial representations of demographic statistics or trading activities").

When Pierre Gourou was writing his thesis, he had at his disposal the censuses for 1926 and 1931, and held the same critical views as Charles Robequain about the results and comments on the weaknesses in the methodological aspects of the printed questionnaires sent to each village (p.139). But Pierre Gourou was able to go much further than Charles Robequain into statistical analysis, using the census data of 1931. With Pierre Gourou, the geographical compulsion to treat and represent spatially the quantified information is methodically developed (section 6.3.1.). Both geographers integrate these new iconographic, cartographic and statistical tools into their geographical discourses, with some similarities, but also variations in the treatment of the information and their respective scholarly approaches.

The use of maps and statistics is not specific to these two geographers. Most French geographers were fundamentally map users, endeavoring to be precise in their descriptions and explanations. Paul Vidal de la Blache was particularly aware of and interested in the relevance to geography of the utilization of population census data that Western authorities were organizing systematically in their countries and their colonies (he studied the Indian experience to analyze

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[6] "*… il est aisé de voir quelle base solide un recensement sérieux offrirait aux efforts de notre administration, et quels renseignements pratiques il lui apporterait périodiquement sur la valeur de notre action. Accompagnant la rédaction d' un casdatre, il permettrait d' apprécier exactement les ressources de chaque village, et d' asseoir équitablement l' impôt. On verrait mieux alors que, dans ces deltas d' apparence uniforme, il est des zones relativement riches, d' autres relativement très pauvres; et on pourrait essayer d' atténuer ces contrastes, après en avoir démêlé les véritables raisons. En cas de disette, on saurait quel chiffre de rations envoyer aux zones éprouvées; si la récolte dépasse les besoins locaux, on dirait de combien, et on supputerait au plus juste la valeur des exportations. Ainsi seraient éclairés enfin les rouages et le jeu complexe de l' économie générale: au lieu d' exprimer de vagues opinions, mal appuyées sur quelques faits isolés, et émises avec d' autant plus d' assurance que leur vérification est plus difficile, il serait possible de présenter, dans son ensemble et ses détails, le bilan de notre politique, de constater et préciser ici ou là l' accroissement de la natalité, la diminution de la mortalité aux différents âges, l' allongement de la vie, l' augmentation de la richesse moyenne, les possibilités d' émigration ou d' immigration."*

its population). In the Indochinese context, these tools became more significantly developed and accessible to geographers.

It must be emphasized that Pierre Gourou benefited from more extensive information than Charles Robequain. The Tonkin region was subject to more attention and official inquiries than Thanh Hoá in view of its economic, demographic and political superiority, and important administrative material, data and cartographic works were published at seven years intervals between the publication of the two theses. For example, Thanh Hoá had not been entirely covered by 1/25,000 maps, and the district limits had not been charted when Charles Robequain was writing his thesis. At the time Pierre Gourou worked on his region, the entire Tonkin had been mapped and covered at the 1/25,000 scale, and new census data of the Indochinese population was published in 1931. This can partly explain the major application of these statistical and cartographic tools given by Pierre Gourou in his analysis of the peasant population (section 6.3.1).

6.2.3 Pacification and political order

From the colonial viewpoint, the strategy of 'pacification'[7] was considered a necessary preamble to the organization of the modernization of the country and the physical and intellectual 'development' of the indigenous people. Thus, from the end of the 19th century, 'progress' was introduced into the colonies through French 'pacification' and the search for a creative politics of *mise en valeur*. For example, Colonel Gallieni's[8] first duty when he arrived in Indochina in 1892 was that he "should prove to be the principal assistant of Monsieur de Lanessan[9] in this task of pacification and organization." (Gallieni, 1941, pp.VIII, IX). Later, in a volume entitled "Indochina" (*"Indochine"*) and with illustrations annoted by Charles Robequain, Albert Sarraut (1930) who was "Gouverneur général" of Indochina before he became Minister of the Colonies,

[7] Nowadays, this colonial terminology seems obviously controversial, if not nonsensical. But, in conformity with the French colonial ideology of the time, it was established that it was the duty of the colonizer to pacify indigenous countries because it would allow indigenous people to join for their benefit the modern civilization and to exploit their resources in a rational way. Its underlying intention was to control any subversive and anticolonialist movement.

[8] Colonel Gallieni was sent to Tonkin where he annihilated the "pirates" (the "pirates" were either authentic Chinese pirates called *"Pavillions-Noirs", "Pavillions-Jaunes" or "Pavillions-Rouges"* or Annamite rebels who fought against French occupation). He is famous for his "politics of races", which recognized the personality of each ethnic group, mainly in order to avoid the domination of one group over the others. He was made General in 1896 and, posthumously Marshal, in 1921.

[9] Jean-Marie de Lanessan was named Gouvernor général of Indochina from 1891 to 1894. He was a well-known scientist, Professor at the faculty of Medecine in Paris, convinced that French colonialization can improve Indochinese life by introducing "Progress" and modernizing the country.

expressed the same concern that the "civilizing work to which France has directed its effort"[10] must start "after having pacified the dissension which was tearing apart the various indochinese territories" (p.22-23, see Appendix F.1, "Albert Sarraut's version of the colonial achievement of France in Indochina", lines 5-8 in extract I). He exposed with emphasis his "faith" in the "progress" and the "protective" mission of France (p.24), establishing that "without France, there is no more Indochina" (Appendix F.1, "Albert Sarraut's version of the colonial achievement of France in Indochina", lines 8, 13-14 in extract II). This pacification task allowed the establishment of modern structures in the colony. As the Major Lyautey[11] wrote regarding Madagascar (Lyautey, 1920), "What am I doing for one year? Roads, bridges, rice-fields, schools ...".

Paul Rabinow notes about Colonel Gallieni's approach to Indochina (Rabinow, 1989, pp.148, 150).

> Gallieni's interest was infrastructural and instrumental. In village after village, he covetously and proudly noted every new bridge and road built; the French were spinning a growing spider's web of installations - and Gallieni was the spider.
>
> Roads were the key; without them there could be no movement of troops, no commerce, and ultimately no society. Gallieni was adamant that posts be constructed in durable materials, to demonstrate that the French intended to remain permanently ....
>
> The truest sign of pacification was the peaceful activity of roads and markets.
>
> If the sign of civilization was a busy road, the sign of modernity was hygiene ... Gallieni was no cultural relativist; his standards were universal. The general lack of hygiene, the negligence of the domestic, the refusal to separate humans and animals, were not tribal traits worthy of respect but simply indications of a lack of civilization.

[10] Albert Sarraut mentioned by way of illustration agricultural modernization, the elaboration of modern and quality colonial infrastructure (such as railway and roads networks) and social superstructures able to bring modern education, hygiene (hospitals, schools) and justice to Indochinese people.

[11] Louis Hubert Lyautey was Joseph Gallieni's chief of staff in Indochina and then Madagascar. He is considered as one of the greatest (if not the greatest) figures of French colonial history because he investigated the social mission of colonization (see also in Chapter 5, section 5.4.2). When he became Governor general in Marocco and modernized the country, he allowed most traditional institutions and Muslim religion to continue to operate alongside the French colonial institutions, aiming to associate Muslim culture with French colonialist enterprise. According to Rabinow (1989, p.289), for Lyautey, "the colonies constituted a laboratory of experimentation for new arts of government capable of bringing a modern and healthy society into being" (see also pp.106-125, 277-301 in Rabinow).

In the same stream of thought, Charles Robequain perceives the earlier duty of France as a task of pacification. Hence, with a non-ambiguous engagement and a definite bias toward the colonization *raison d'être*, using the same arguments as Joseph Gallieni or Albert Sarraut, Charles Robequain constructed his account of the Thanh Hoá region through its French occupation and pacification. He gave to France the role of a liberator who "purges the country" of "Chinese, Thai and Kha gangs, acts of piracy, pillaging groups, banditry" (p586). In this way, Charles Robequain's argument is a definite illustration of the imperial attitude, which suggests a barbarous and crude image of the indigenous countries that France is going to save by providing protection and safety, followed by technical and economic knowledge and expertise (Appendix F.1, "Charles Robequain's version of the colonial achievement of France in Thanh Hoá", lines 9-10, 38-40).

> *It is commonplace to affirm that the first of our gifts, the one that allows all the others, is security. However, it has still to be repeated, continually repeated ...*[12] (p.585)

> *And then, with order established everywhere, without the worry of being disturbed by hostile forces, we could undertake and bring about the advancement of economic development in the province*[13]*.* (pp.586-586)

In Pierre Gourou's discourse, the colonial logic of order does not appear in such strident terms. He refers more indirectly to the colonial repression and only in connection with the production of smuggled alcohol, promoting the idea that "in a modern state"... "the law must be applied" and "the collectivity can only decline by habitual and regular violations of the law". He takes an ambiguous position where he considers that (p.481):

> *This repression must be only reasonable and human, and must know how to distinguish between the occasional moonshiner, distilling for his own use, and whom we have no legitimate reason to pursue, and the industrial man of the village who must submit to the law or disappear*[14]*.*

> *The illicit fabrication of alcohol is an industry full of vitality, and proves that we can be confident in the future of the village industries in general*[15]*.*

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[12] "*Il est banal d' affirmer que le premier de nos dons, celui qui a permis tous les autres, c' est la sécurité*".

[13] "*Et ainsi, l' ordre partout établi, sans crainte d' être dérangés par des forces hostiles, avons-nous pu entreprendre et pousser déjà loin le développement économique de la province*."

[14] "*Il faut simplement que cette répression reste raisonnable et humaine et qu' elle sâche distinguer entre le petit bouilleur de crû, distillant pour son compte personnel, et que l' on a pas de motifs légitimes de poursuivre, et l' industriel villageois qui doit se soumettre à la loi ou disparaître.*"

[15] "*La fabrication clandestine de l' alcool est une industrie pleine de vitalité, et prouve que l' on peut avoir confiance dans l' avenir des industries villageoises prises en général.*"

Therefore, Pierre Gourou forges the development of Indochina based on a Western juridical principle emanating from the Greek tradition[16], subject to the protection of the law, which sets out what a society should do and what has to be respected to establish just and beneficial relationships. Pierre Gourou's juridical viewpoint is also tinted by his humanist outlook, inherited from the Renaissance where individuality was promoted. In this way, Pierre Gourou provides a more generous and confident image of the Annamite peasant than Charles Robequain[17].

However, as in Robequain's work, Pierre Gourou's discourse is built upon the French colonial paternalist logic of the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, where it is the French authority which legislates and which through protection, justice and development, supervises the Indochinese regions.

6.3 Robequain's Colonial Geography and Modernity

6.3.1 The connection between geography, data and cartography

With an aspiration to construct a scientific geographical discourse, able to present measurable and objective facts in human geography in a similar way to the exact sciences, Charles Robequain saw the need for a precise demographic analysis with utilization of statistical tools combined with reliable census data (section 6.1.2.) connecting geography, statistics, and cartography.

Because of the lack of reliability of the 1921 census, and the importance of an empirical approach where the knowledge has only value if it is based on experimentally proven facts, Charles Robequain organized his own inquiry in the villages. He quantified the distribution of the population by evaluating "the total of family chiefs and the other inhabitants", and comparing these numbers with the census numbers. He then outlined the district limits and areas of the province (p.499). He considered (pp.499-500) that the official numbers of the 1921 census

[16] In *The Politic* (1990), Aristotle demonstrates that "the politic" is, with the development of the State institutions, laws and the culture, the possibility to civilize and pacify the present day practices. For Aristotle, the state with its institutions and laws is the perfect form of human communauty because humans are by nature "political animals" and cannot live a "good life" unless they are citizens of a state (in Book I, Chapter 1). With Aristotle, social cooperation requires political organization. In *The Laws*, Plato (1970) demonstrates that the laws try to bring a compromise between the requirements of the theoretical Idea and the human reality. Plato sketched an ideal state in which every day life is organized by laws, but his approach introduces recognition of the diversity and complexity of human needs. Later, philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau [in *Du Contrat Social* (*Social Contract)*, first published in 1762], and French republican politicians recalled these principles of the authority of the law.

[17] But we must remember that the Thanh Hoá peasantry, regularly confronted to distressful natural disasters, is poorer than the Tonkin peasantry (refer Chapter 3, footnote 3.3.3).

underestimated the reality and must be multiplied by a coefficient of 1.25. He calculated the densities of the population (pp.502-503). He reported his results in the table in annex n.4 where the reader can see the areas, populations, and densities by canton. This introduces in Charles Robequain's geographical writings quantitative information as well as some critical approach to statistics, which help empower his regional report.

Moreover, Charles Robequain lets the reader visualize these estimations and results on a population density map (refer Appendix F.2, "Densité de la population [essai]"), connecting demographic data to the geographical analysis through regional distributions. This map of the density of the population of Thanh Hoá by cantons is set up in a new, abstract and spatially thematic way. Each district average density is represented according to a black and/or white graduation and plain colour, suggesting a hierarchy, expressed by the darkness of its figurative sign[18].

With a concern to improve this analysis of the distribution of the densities, Charles Robequain achieves a better understanding of the distribution than maps at a bigger scale (the communal scale) could bring. Yet, there is in Charles Robequain's geography a more skilled use of data and cartographic resources. But, considering the infancy of this type of information, the statistical material that Charles Robequain collected was very hard to integrate methodically into his regional problematic of Thanh Hoá.

6.3.2 A materialist approach to the problem of colonial development

Charles Robequain's positivist thought and confidence in the progression of the Western body of knowledge led him to believe that the major problems of starvation and misery of the Indochinese populations would disappear with the development of science and modern techniques. This conviction, jointly with a materialist and rationalist approach, was characteristic of the economic and liberalist conceptions[19] predominant in France from the end of the 19th century[20].

[18] The maps of the population in the other French regional theses published in the late 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s used dots of different sizes to represent the population of villages or towns in a particular area but did not present in a spatial way the regional population and its movements.

[19] There was a faith in the possibilities of improvement in existing social conditions, which is related to the idea of progress, which embraced the potentialities for developments in techniques, knowledge, and morality, from his western cultural referees.

[20] Such as the liberal conceptions of the philosopher, mathematician and economist Antoine Cournot, who used mathematical principles to study economy.

Following this logic, Charles Robequain uses in economic argument the terminology of the dominant capitalist doctrine (as Albert Demangeon did in his thesis, see chapter 3, section 3.1.4.3.), expressing the Indochinese economic and agricultural problems in terms of "crop yield", "output", "profitability" and "surplus". In the tradition of the colonial geography of Marcel Dubois (1894), Charles Robequain compiles a descriptive inventory of the various forms of French projects and enterprises whose aim was to achieve "a truly rational colonialization" (see quotation in chapter 5, section 5.6.1). He contemplates the achievement of France using the rational logic which assigns the regional population and production of Thanh Hoá to technical purposes, and which tests with experimental norms this ambition to rationalize the regional economy. Using the inductive reasoning practiced in the modern sciences of the end of the 19th century, and emphasising direct causalities[21], he considers that improvement in the techniques of production will generate an increase "of the resources of the province", a "profit (*plus-value*)", and the possibilities of export.

> *Our most urgent duty is to increase the resources of the province faster than the increase of population and to use rationally all these energies which are badly employed and badly remunerated.*
>
> *It was logical that, in the Delta, the extension and improvement of cultivation should support our strongest efforts*[22] (p.587).
>
> *A similar project to the one of Song Chu has been for a long time a study of the utilization of the water of the Sông Mã ... and we have clearly shown how the outlay of these expensive works was recouped very quickly by the surplus of the annual product*[23]*.* (pp.587-588).

In contrast with Marcel Dubois, who did not have experience of the colonial territories, Charles Robequain views were based on observation, the social realities and social obstacles to modernization. Thus he believes that

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[21] The inductive method was prevalent in experimental sciences such as medicine and approved by famous scientists such as Claude Bernard (1865), who established that: "*la médecine scientifique ne peut se constituer, ainsi que les autres sciences, que par la voie experimentale, c' est à dire par l' application immédiate et rigoureuse du raisonnement aux faits que l' observation et l' experimentation nous fournissent*" (Bernard, 1865, p.34). As well, various philosophers in other disciplines advocated the role of inductive reasoning with what is directed by the experience and observable facts in mathematical or even religious sciences. By way of illustration, we can cite Renan who affirms "*Dans l' ordre des faits, ce qui n' est pas experimental n' est pas scientifique*" (Renan, 1947 tome I, p.162).

[22] "*Notre devoir le plus urgent nous commandait d' augmenter les ressources de la province plus vite que n' augmente la population et d' utiliser rationnellement toutes ces énergies mal employées. Il était logique que, dans le delta, notre plus gros effort portât sur l' extention et l' amélioration des cultures*."

[23] "*Un projet analogue à celui du Song Chu est depuis longtemps à l' étude pour l' utilisation des eaux du Song Ma … et on a clairement montré comment l' amortissement de ces travaux onéreux était en réalité assuré très rapidement par la plus-value de la production annuelle.*"

But, one might say, must not we also … improve crop yield by hectare by modernizing agricultural processes? Sure, but it is a task singularly more difficult and lengthy than the construction of an irrigation network, no matter how vast it could be. … It is a question of renovating spirits hatched by very old habits, to accustom these routine-minded peasants to scientific conceptions which first dumbfounded them, to fight foot by foot with a hopeless deep-seated tradition[24]*.*(p.588).

His approach to development therefore was focusing not only on the peculiarities of the Indochinese physical environment, which could be improved by modern French techniques, but also on the limiting characteristics of Indochinese civilizations. His view was not exclusively naturalist, the endogenous, traditionalist aspects of the indigenous civilization being essentially responsible for what we now call regional "underdevelopment"[25]. In fact, the positivism of Charles Robequain allowed him to see exclusively in a very materialist way the Indochinese societies, and to associate what does not appear to him rational and efficacious, such as their "routine", their "heedlessness" (p.588, p.590), and their "nonchalance" (p.174) as obstacles to modernization.

Contact in the field allowed Charles Robequain to understand how important the rural craft industries were, similar to those in many French *pays*. Thus, considering their economic role, he was concerned about the dying out of the craft industries, even if they "seem to be menaced by an approaching bankruptcy", and endeavours "to find the ways of saving, by perfecting them, some of these curious industries, ignored by the passer-by" (p.465).

In conclusion, Charles Robequain does not suggest any theoretical model for agricultural and industrial development, basing his argument only on his concrete and definite observations and experience of the region. Compared to Marcel Dubois, Charles Robequain's colonial geography also addressed social issues.

6.3.3 Charles Robequain and the Thanh Hoá region as a "laboratory of modernity" (after Rabinow, 1989, p.9, p.289)

Following the perspective of Paul Rabinow, it can be established that, correspondently to Louis Hubert Lyautey and Joseph Gallieni (see above, footnote 11), Charles Robequain describes the creation of new forms of agriculture and the search for structures adequate for the development

[24] *"Mais, ne faudrait-il pas … augmenter le rendement à l' hectare en modernisant les procédés agricoles? Sans doute, mais c' est une tâche singulièrement plus difficile et plus longue que la construction d' un réseau d' irrigation, si vaste soit-il. Il s' agit de rénover des esprits noués par de très vieilles habitudes, d' accoutumer ces paysans routiniers à des conceptions scientifiques qui les ahurissent, de lutter pas à pas avec une tradition désespérément tenace."*

[25] According to the Dictionary of Human Geography, underdevelopment is "a barrier to or subversion of development and a consequently distorted, limited and increasingly marginal state of human being or process of becoming. Underdevelopment may thus be defined both by lack of a creative force or dynamic (or presence of destructive forces) and by the underdeveloped social conditions of existence which result." (Johnston, Gregory and Smith, 1986, p.503).

of a ‘modern’ region. In the long tradition of French political centralization, which began to be practiced in the 16th and 17th centuries, Charles Robequain believed the organization of communication routes by the French authorities would achieve total control of the colony. He considered the Mandarin Road to be of “national interest”, previously to the imperial political system of the Nguyên, and then to the colonial administration.

> *In short, the Mandarin road has been mainly built for the purpose of administrative centralization: it allowed the Nguyên emperors, living in Huê, to be informed of the Tonkin events in the shortest possible time*[26] *...* pp.513-514

Charles Robequain regarded the communication routes in terms of what we call nowadays the ship canals, railway and road ‘networks’. Hence, he (p.514) describes the traditional rivers and canal “networks” for ships as “the most efficient lines” of communication. He concludes by introducing the modern “recent transformations” that colonialization has brought:

> *It is true that nowadays, through the entire province, roads and railways substitute, and sometimes favorably, for the river lines*[27]*.* (p.516*).*

Charles Robequain reveals that the logic of the communication network is the development of what is referred to in more recent geographical terminology as a “hierarchy of links”, “axes”, and a concentration upon “growth poles”. In his argument on trade (pp.510-584), Charles Robequain regards the construction of railways and the improvement of the Mandarin Road and of some routes in the mountains, such as the Song Ma road, as major political and economic developments. He believed these communications were basic structures to open up Thanh Hoá to other regions of Indochina and to the world. He conjectured they were efficient means to organize and consolidate the regional harmony and unity through a hierarchy of “radiating communication routes ... themselves intersected by other roads” which would “link” villages to the administrative centers, trade points and the capital of the region (p.521). He writes further:

> *These roads allow easy and fast contact between the provincial capital and the district county towns: All these can be regularly reached by automobile in about three hours ...*[28] p.522.

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[26] “*En somme, la route mandarine avait été surtout construite dans un but de centralisation administrative: elle permettait aux empereurs Nguyen , résidant à Hue, d’ être renseignés dans un minimum de temps sur les évènements du Tonkin*”.

[27] *“Il est vrai qu’ aujourd’ hui, à travers toute la province, routes et chemin de fer suppléent, et parfois avantageusement, la voie d’ eau*”.

Therefore, for Charles Robequain, the hierarchy of communications was a major determinant in the regional economic and political organization, and the regional space was organized by individual network elements such as markets or centers located at the junction points of communications. This allowed Charles Robequain to show the structuring role of towns in the regional organization and to portray the urban structure of the province in a trade map of Thanh Hoá (refer Appendix F.2, "carte commerciale du Thanh Hoá"). In this map, he represents the geographic pattern of the transport network ("automobile roads" and "railway lines"). He symbolizes at its nodal points "the important markets" and "the large markets" as well as the convergent centers of the mountain trade (with arrows indicating the "direction of the traffic in the *arrière-pays*), drawing the development of a *réseau en étoiles* (a network with a star design). With a dynamic conception of the region, Charles Robequain conceives that the transport network has fundamental connections with the trade organization of Thanh Hoá and fundamental consequences in the economic planning development of the province. He describes the changing spatial organization, with the evolution and transformation of the hierarchy of the markets initiated by French action (pp.541-542)

> *... But what we notice first of all are the new markets which have sprung up along the edge of the hinterland, where products of the mountains and the plains are exchanged. The biggest of these markets are, from south to north, Cho Moc on the Song Yen (...) They are among the most lively in the whole province, but their trade is tending to lessen in favour of more distant, recently-created markets. This is yet another obvious result of our policy: as order was progressively established and roads were built through the valleys, so the trading centres moved upriver, to the advantage of both the enterprises of the traders from the plains and the indolence of the mountain-dwellers.*[29].

He also describes the resulting increasing trade, writing (p.540):

> *Cho Tinh has developed considerably, thanks to our efforts, as it is now close to the railway and at the centre of a road system which is constantly being extended and improved: the French administration has done more for this market than for anywhere else, by replacing the straw huts with a vast brick-built covered market which is no longer big enough to hold all of the goods piled up there six times a month, spilling out on all sides.*[30].

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[28] "*Ces voies permettent des relations aisées et rapides entre la capitale provinciale et les chefs-lieux de circonscription: tous ceux-ci peuvent être atteints régulièrement, en 3 heures au plus, par l' automobile … ".*

[29] "*Mais nous sommes d' abord retenus par une nouvelle série de marchés: ceux qui jalonnent la lisière de l' arrière-pays et où s' échangent les produits de la montagne et de la plaine. Les plus gros sont, du Sud au Nord: cho Moc sur le Song Yen …. Ils comptent parmi les plus animés de la province, mais leur trafic tend à décroître au profit d' autres marchés plus lointains, de création récente. C' est encore un des résultats évidents de notre action: à mesure que l' ordre s' affermissait et que les routes étaient poussées le long des vallées, les centres de commerce se déplaçaient vers l' amont favorisant à la fois les entreprises des négociants de la plaine et la non-chalance du montagnard*."

[30] "*Cho Tinh a pris aujourd' hui une belle avance, grâce à nos travaux; il est, en effet, à proximité de la voie ferrée, et au centre d' un réseau routier sans cesse étendu et amélioré: c' est pour lui que l' administration française a fait le plus de frais, remplaçant les paillotes par de vastes halles en brique; elles ne suffirent pourtant plus à contenir les marchandises qui s' y entassent 6 fois par mois et débordent tout à l' entour".*

A photograph of Cho Tinh (pl.XLV, B) allows the reader to visualize its modern central food market with its prosperous appearance.

The above quotation illustrates the fact that Charles Robequain considered the transport network as an agent of evolution and geographical change able to open up a landlocked mountainous country as well as the province, to the more dynamic Tonkin region. His perception of the social consequences of the modernization of the communication routes and lines remains embedded in colonial bias and caricatured images. For example, Charles Robequain suggests that the "nonchalance of the mountainous people" limits the potential importance of French planning. It also gives little credit to the competencies of Indochinese people and overestimates the ability of the colonializers.

Charles Robequain does not confine his views to the internal scale of Thanh Hoá. In terms of the larger regional context of the North of the Indochinese peninsula, he remarks that the railway was an opportunity for the region to "confirm year after year its links with the large North delta" (p.572). Charles Robequain's study of the regional communications precedes the contemporary analysis of the relationships between space and networks, where the transport networks reflect the societies with their social and spatial hierarchies.

Charles Robequain's search for structures suitable for the development of a 'modern' region also involves new agricultural forms of experimentation with the establishment of "agricultural stations" assisted by the support of the French administration. He also considered that the colonial practice of "*concessions*"[31] to be a worthy way to develop Indochinese agriculture. Using rational and positivist reasoning, combined with an utopian idealization of the progress, he describes the primary aims of the agricultural station of Yên Dinh (p.589):

[31] A concession was the authorization granted by French authorities to settlers or colonial societies to exploit a defined allotment of the colonial land, considered as 'vacant' or 'not used' by indigenous people. This practice was a way to develop and introduce modern agriculture (rice cultivation or commercial plantations, herd breeding) in the colonies. It was particularly important in the Tonkin protectorate, where the Arabica coffee concessions of Marius Borel that Charles Robequain referred to (p.594) were famous. Charles Robequain estimates that there were 23 European concessions in Thanh Hoá in 1928 and that there were 15 applications in progress (p.599). Vietnamese revolutionaries and Vietnamese peasants condemned this unpopular practice, where colonial institutions and French or rich Annamite individuals appropriated the indigenous land, and where Indochinese labour was employed. This has been a major obstacle to their expansion and efficiency (Ta Thi Thuy, 1993).

... whose mission was to study as well as to promote; it would perform experimentation in cotton cultivation, but also receive and classify the rice varieties cropping in the province, if needed acclimatize others, choosing which were best for the different types of soil, and the influence various fertilizers would have on them; it would distribute a selection of seeds, to show, by example, and convert the peasants, little by little, by the living spectacle of the results achieved, be an office of free information, spreading enlightenment around it ...[32]

Charles Robequain presents as an enlightening example the case of the *concession* of Yên Mý[33]. He indicates how it was promoting a rational and scientific exploitation of Indochinese red soils[34] through the development of a plantation economy, where *Arabica* coffee was cultivated in association with the farming of bovine livestock which provided manure beds to each coffee tree. With some heroic conceptions and established convictions on the beneficial power of the scientifically and technically advanced civilizations of Europe, Charles Robequain does not hide the difficulty of this type of undertaking. He describes them through their experimental, pioneering, courageous and defiant aspects and their hesitant moving forward. Of the concession of Yên Mý, he writes (pp.594, 595, 596, 597):

The first years were trial and error, troubles and reverses of all kinds ... the most appropriate technique was discovered with difficulty: the bush, lifted after 10 or 12 months in a nursery, is transplanted into a 50 to 80 cm hole ...[35]

In 1918, several hectares were damaged by a typhoon and, on the 21st September 1927, about 30,000 feet were broken or turned upside ... The late cold burns the buds: here, the coffee tree is very near the northern limit of its habitat ...[36].

... the cattle are indispensable to the cultivation of the coffee which, planted in a mattress of manure, still requires three large baskets each year. Hence, our colons have to create and extend the pastures as well as the plantations ...[37]

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[32] "*dont la mission était à la fois d' étude et de propagande; elle devait faire des expériences de culture cotonnière, mais aussi recueillir et classer les variétés de riz récoltées dans la province, au besoin en acclimater d' autres, rechercher quelles étaient les meilleures pour les différentes sortes de sols, et quelles influences pouvaient avoir sur elles les diverses quatégories d' engrais; elle devait distribuer des semences sélectionnées, prêcher l' exemple, convertir peu à peu le paysan par le spectacle vivant des résultats obtenus, être une agence de renseignements gratuits, répandre la lumière autour d' elle …*".

[33] This concession was hold by two French brothers, native from the Bourbonnais.

[34] The red soils are volcanic soils coming from the decomposition of basalt. They were mainly located in the plateaux of Annam, and, due to their fertility, were exploited by the French through plantations (tea, coffee, rubber).

[35] " *les premières années furent de tâtonnements, de difficultés et de déboires de toutes sortes …. La technique la mieux adaptée fut péniblement découverte: l' arbuste, arraché après 10 ou 12 mois de pépinière, est planté dans un trou de 50 à 80 cm. de diamètre …*".

[36] "*… en 1918, plusieurs hectares furent ravagés par un typhon et, le 21 septembre 1927 encore, 30.000 pieds environ furent brisés ou renversés*." … "*Les froids tardifs grillent les boutons: le caféier est ici tout près de la limite septentrionale de son habitat …*".

[37] "*Car le bétail est indispensable à la culture du caféier qui, planté dans un matelas de fumier, en exige encore, chaque année, 3 grands paniers. Aussi nos colons ont-ils dû créer et étendre les pâturages en même temps que les plantations …*".

It is a magnificent lesson this spectacle of those very clean and healthy plantations, these large avenues accessible to automobiles ….[38]

Charles Robequain supports his description with three photographs of the concession (Pl.XLVIII-A,B,C), representing the young coffee trees ("clean and very healthy"), a large and rectilinear avenue enabling traversing of the plantations by car, and the pastures. These awoke in Charles Robequain's mind some nostalgia for the bucolic French landscape (p.597). These photographs were the last ones to appear in the thesis and left the reader brought up in the French culture a view of most recent husbandry (with a rationally cultivated) as well as a familiar vision of the region (refer Appendix F.3, "Yên Mý concession").

The faith of Charles Robequain in the profits generated by the practice of a more scientific agriculture caused him to be critical of the lack of interest or confidence shown by colonial services in regard to these colonial experimental creations. He gives the example of the agricultural station of Yên Dinh, whose failure "is due to derisive credits, under the pretext that it must subsist by itself"[39] (p.589). Charles Robequain advocates "official action" to organize the "agricultural renovation" (p.591).

From a more social standpoint, Charles Robequain views new processes and methods as being able to go beyond the inertia of the traditional cultivation practices of the peasants. In this, he perceives the pilot program of the agricultural stations as a "thankless" formative "task" which is accomplished in order "to accustom these routine-minded peasants to scientific conceptions which first dumbfounded them" (p.588). From this viewpoint, the agricultural development of Thanh Hoá is linked with the development of the French modern educational system which "must be for the renovation of the indigenous masses and the progress, generously and soundly understood, of our influence, the most assured instrument" (p.612). Charles Robequain also sees as social progress the creation of a French official financial institution, the *Credit Populaire Agricole*, able to discourage the practice of usury and to prevent poor peasants "staying prisoners all their life in a network of debts" (p.590).

In fact, Charles Robequain's geographical practice is empirical, regional development being conceived through discernible tendencies and colonial experimental practices, without

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[38] *"C' est une magnifique leçon que le spectacle de ces plantations très propres et très saines, que trouent de larges avenues accessibles aux automobiles …"*.

[39] However, it was difficult for the French authorities to know precisely the actual situation of the societies responsible for or owners of the concessions. Their contractors returned their incomes only when they were confronted with some problems and could hope for some governmental help (de Dantès, 1996, p.272).

suggesting a hypothesis or theory connected with regional structures and planning. His geography remains descriptive and not theoretical, even though he models a sort of Asian archetype, where the region is idealized as a "harmonious", concordant body composed of distinct sections that "French colonialization" has "unified". As he writes in the last sentence, in which the emphasis and lyrical terminology of the colonial ideology transcends:

> *Moreover, it [the colonial achievement of France] has confirmed the unity of the province ... is it not a magnificent symbol of unification, this belt of concessions reachs heroically on still uncultivated and unhealthy lands, which separate the Muong from the Ammanite? It is by a solid overcast stitch of French colonialization that the overpopulated delta is nowadays sewn into its background country*[40]*.* p.613

We can observe that, in the context of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the wish "not to separate the mountainous region from the plain" is still of current interest "according to the principle of territorial complementarity" (letter from Lê Bá Tháo, 4 March 1996). Thus, the recent Vietnamese discourse in regard to territorial development has theorised the idea of regional complementarity and unity.

In summary, Charles Robequain considers his geography a science of the territory, dealing with the economic development, the planning and eventually with some conceptions of protection of the ecological environment and natural resources. For example, he is aware of the problem of the exhaustion of the wood from the forests and the disappearance of precious tropical species[41] (p.601). He regarded the potential of the regional economy from three aspects. First, technology, where French techniques are able to improve the economic potential, productivity and structure of the region. Hence, he described the French technological superiority of modern communication, and the dam projects and hydraulic achievements, as "the great irrigation accomplishments of France" (p.587). Second, science, where research on tropical plants in agricultural stations was undertaken in order to improve the quality and the yield per field of products or to introduce plantations. Third, education, to train the indigenous inhabitants in modern methods, in order to make relevant the regional modernization.

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[40] "*Surtout, elle [l' œuvre de la France] a confirmé l' unité de la province. …. Enfin, n' est-elle pas un magnifique symbole de l' unification, cette ceinture de concessions gagnées héroïquement sur des terres incultes et malsaines, qui séparaient le Muong de l' Annamite? C' est par un solide surjet de colonisation française que le delta surpeuplé est aujourd' hui cousu à son arrière-pays*."

[41] The question of the preservation of the forests is however a French tradition. In 1669, Colbert, the Ministre of Louis the XIVth, already regulated the exploitation of the French forests, and reinforced the competence of their royal administration in order to achieve a better economic management of the forest resources. It is, however, also an example revealing that the French took over the Vietnamese natural resources.

In conclusion, Charles Robequain's discourse in regard to the modernization of Thanh Hoá is mainly a manifestation of French imperialism, where Robequain conceives that the development of Indochina "can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependance" (Said, 1993, p.8). In fact, Charles Robequain's discourse corresponds to Albert Sarraut's in regard to the achievement of France in Indochina. Furthermore, these two discourses convey the colonial myths and thoughts exposed in chapter 5 and above in section 6.2 (see also Appendix E.3 "Three extracts from Paul Reynaud's speech at the Vincennes international colonial exhibition" and Appendix F.1 "Charles Robequain's and Albert Sarraut's imperialist perceptions of the achievement of France in Indochina").

6.4 Pierre Gourou's Discourse: A Modern Methodology Incorporating A Humanist and Classical Thought

The approach of Pierre Gourou is different. His idealization of the Annamite civilization and the conception of the Tonkin region as an inherited and accomplished entity required him to have a contingent, critical and limited opinion of the colonial project. For example, as opposed to Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou was critical of the French policy of concessions, which advantaged the large landowners and dispossessed the small landowners of their rice fields (pp.360-364). Furthermore, he advocated a policy of "agrarian law which confiscated, with some moderate compensation, large landholdings in favor of the small ones" which he argued "would cost less money than the hydraulic works [thought to be necessary to improve the rice product] and would give more advantage to the peasants" (p.364). He reports how the traditional Annamite government was aware of land abuses by wealthy or influential individuals and

"proscribed to public servants and rich individuals to take advantage of the poverty and scattering of the villages dwellers …" (p.361)[42].

However, the value of his thesis stems mainly from the way that he has been able to utilize to his advantage the abundant sources of information of the colonial administration.

6.4.1 Pierre Gourou's geography as a human science of space

With Pierre Gourou, the use of statistics with their cartographic interpretations became a basic geographical technique for understanding the regional landscape and the organization of space as an integral part of geographical discourse. Given the availability of statistical information developed and encouraged by the French administration (mainly the population census data of 1931 and the registered areas of the communities compiled at the *Cadastre*, the registry office in the villages), Pierre Gourou's first inovation was to treat these statistics

[42] This is also the opinion that the agronomist René Dumont (1995, pp.36-37) presented in his influential research work on *rice culture in the Tonkin delta*, first published in 1935. Both René Dumont and Pierre Gourou recommended the development of small peasant landownership and disapproved of big and expensive projects. They advocated gradual socio-economic reforms and were unconvinced of the value of disproportionate economic transformations. René Dumont's and Pierre Gourou's theses represent the two more enlightened discourses relative to rice cultivation in South-East Asia. Their novelty resides in the fact that they analyse the agricultural activity without isolating it from its human context. René Dumont's book was the first French work written on rice cultivation. Pierre Gourou quotes René Dumont's thesis in his section "agriculture: cultural methods" (p.389) and René Dumont quotes Pierre Gourou's thesis in his chapter "Study of the economic environment" (p.35). But the two researchers knew each other only from their works, not individually. Their personalities were remarkably different, and René Dumont refused any cooperation with French colonial authorities. Thus, he left Indochina in 1931 before the end of his work-contract because he disapproved of French colonialist methods. He wrote: "I felt I was morally obliged to leave a country to which I became more and more attached when in September 1931 in Vinh, an aviator warrant-officer of the colonial army said to me that he felt dishonoured after he was ordered to shoot at a column of unarmed peasants with a machine gun from his plane,. In this province of Nghê-An, home of Ho Chi Minh, these peasants were just seeking, after the drought, the reduction of their taxes that the previous Empire of Annam had given to them in such a situation" (Dumont, 1995, p.XIII). In *Agronome de la faim* (1974), he reported how he grabbed and threw into a pond the horsewhip of a French agronomist who used to lash the Annamite peasants with it when they strayed too slowly out of the way of his car, and how after this he was banned from any visit to experimental stations (see also the foreword of Igor Besson in Dumont, 1995, pp.XXXII-XXXIV).

René Dumont, contrary to Pierre Gourou, became after WWII, politically engaged in regard to the issues of the Third world, its millions of underprivileged peasants, the scandal of the starvation in the world, development problems and, the planet's ecological disequilibrium and dangers. In 1974, he became the first ecologic (green) candidate of the French presidential elections. He worked in Africa and, in *Pour l'Afrique, j'accuse* (Dumont, 1986), he analysed in depth the mechanisms of underdevelopment in Sahel. He charged (pp.256-258) the French governments, most of the African leaders, the managers of the French projects of cooperation and, the officers of the World Bank and the FMI with responsibility for the underdevelopment and the deepening of the regional desertification and "for having ignored, ruined and scorned African peasants…" (p.258). Compared to René Dumont, Pierre Gourou remained more academic and more distant from politics. In his later works on the tropical world and Africa, he was only implicitly critical of politics when evoking the backwardness and poverty of tropical countries (Gourou, 1982, chapters 26 to 28 pp.350-416, in pp.378-90, p.402, 409 for example) and the "scandal" that famine represents in Africa (Gourou, 1991). In fact, from his thesis on, Pierre Gourou expressed his reserves about the effects of colonial or capitalist interventions on the traditional societies in tropical countries (Gourou did not use the expression "Third World" to characterise their economies) claiming his preference for local actions as opposed to big and pretentious enterprises and disruptive changes. But he never questioned openly the legitimacy of these interventions. Contrastingly, René Dumont identified countries with dependent economies, heavily indebted and with the large majority of the population living in poverty and starvation as belonging to the "Third World"; and he denounced and condemned categorically their exploitation by the leaders of the world economy and the rich countries.

René Dumont died the 18th of June 2001. He was 97 years old.

arithmetically. On that account, he calculates the average density, and classifies the types of density according to this average, with the densities lower/higher or equivalent to the average (pp.152-153), refining the typology of the distribution of the densities (p.153). By this practice, he injects a scientific rigor into his study of the population, considering a human group in an abstract and quantitative way. Thus, he uses and analyses demographic statistics and submits at the end of his Chapter entitled "The growth of the population" a projection of the demographic evolution until 2001[43] (pp.197-198).

This scientific rigor is tempered by taking into account the human condition. Pierre Gourou introduces these demographic methods in a less formal way than is done in the demographic sciences. In discussing the realities in the Tonkin, the specificity of the Annamite culture and the human deficiencies in the collection of the census data, he counterbalances the mathematical results. He draws the reader's attention to the ill-conceived aspects of the forms of the questions in the census. He argues that these did not consider Annamite cultural conceptions or whether the Annamites recognized the terms used in the questionnaires (p.139), which were not written in Vietnamese (that is to say in quòc ngù[44], Annamite transcribed in Latin characters p.140). Pierre Gourou underlines the authorities' lack of interest in the census as well as the deficiencies of the registry office (*l' état civil*) (pp.177-179), and cultural obstacles and complications, such as the peasants' suspicion in regard to French questionnaires and the Annamite tradition of not registering births (p.178). He also criticizes the official "general statistics" and those published in "Documents of Demography and Rice cultivation", "Agricultural Economy" and the annual statistics of the agricultural services (pp.400-402). In addition, and such as Charles Robequain did, along with his personal investigations and

[43] Gourou made his estimations according to a growth rate of 10 per 1000 each year, reaching a total of 13,117,000 habitants in 2001, with a density of 860 habitants by square kilometre. In the first sentence of his thesis, Gourou states that the delta corresponds to an area of 15,000 square kilometres with 6,500,000 habitants and a density of 430 habitants by square kilometre. At the time, this appears to him an "inconceivable situation" (p.197). In fact, the actual population of the Red River delta now exceeds these estimations, with a population of 15,000,000 in an area of 16,000 square kilometres in the late 1980s. As Nguyen Trong Dieu notices quoting and translating to English page 577 of Gourou' s thesis: "Average population density here is more than 800 people per square kilometre … In 1936, when the delta only had a density of 430 people per square kilometre (in an area 10,000 square kilometre) P. Gourou was already writing: "it seems one cannot improve significantly the fate of the Tonkinese peasantry, as a too high demographic density is a disaster that cannot be avoided. It is very difficult to give a worthwhile income to a rural people that has lived with a demographic density of 400 people per square kilometre. These peasants have extracted from the land almost the maximum that the land can give them, and agricultural hydraulics and technical improvements cannot raise production sufficiently to change material living conditions" … After the August 1945 Revolution, demographic density gradually increased, virtually in direct proportion to population growth, 600 in the early sixties, 700 in the early seventies, and 800 in the early eighties. This trend is continuing although at a lower rate, people's material and intellectual lives have improved and chronic famine has been eliminated. However, according to nowadays Vietnamese scholars, "demographic pressure continues to constitute a serious threat to the people of this fertile delta" (Nguyen Trong Dieu, 1995, p.105).

[44] The quòc ngù is a type of writing with roman characters created by European missionaries and more specifically Alexandre de Rhodes, in the 17th century. It is now the unique written form of Vietnamese language.

inspections in the field, Pierre Gourou checks the results of the census and the registry office by inspecting the population of several villages (pp.142-143, p.402).

Because of the increasing availability of cartographic tools and material (enabling the use of topographic, geologic, climatic, and hypsometric maps), Pierre Gourou's second original insight was to devise a systematic cartographic interpretation of the data through the representations of the concentration of their distribution and the calculation of percentages and rates thus relating two significant data series. Pierre Gourou's creativeness was to work out density maps (population density, density of handicraft activities, of the land parcelling). Hence, the reader has a visual and spatial representation of the inert numbers and series via a gradation of intensities of colors and their relationships with the other geographical conditions. Fundamentally, Pierre Gourou examines and explains the relationship between the spatial facts by compiling cartographic referential documentation in a series of maps attached in appendices. Chiefly, was a population densities map by district at the scale 1/250,000 where the distribution of the population is arranged in order by a hierarchy of 17 classes, each with its own shade of color (map number 2)[45]. Other maps put in relationship village and district areas (map number 5), the population density and the village agglomeration (map number 6), the average number of agricultural allotments by hectare and district (map number 7), the number of craftsmen and the district area (map number 8) or the number of craftsmen and the district population (map number 9). They all support the construction of Pierre Gourou's argument. These maps, because of their large format, are presented in the Appendix in fold out pages, but the others are inserted in the chapters along with Pierre Gourou's text (see for example in Appendix F.2, "Delta tonkinois Densité de la population, carte thématique").

Each map constitutes an essential starting point of his discourse[46], which is constructed out of his commentary on the map. Pierre Gourou analyses the correlation or the absence of correlation with other maps. He asks the reader to compare or juxtapose these maps in the same way that Paul Vidal de la Blache, who, in the preface of his Atlas (Vidal de la Blache, 1894), wrote that maps can complement each other, and that their connection constitutes the geographic explanation of a region. For example, Pierre Gourou writes at the beginning of his section "The Population distribution" (pp.148-149):

[45] It was not possible to scan this map because of its large format and its colors. Compared to Charles Robequain's map of the population density, which is established as an outcome of his inquiry about the population, Pierre Gourou's map constitutes a starting statement for the understanding of the Annamite peasantry.

[46] Maps are the starting point of any explanation together with photographs, description of the landscape or questionnaires.

> *We express the results of the 1931 census data in the appendix map of the densities, at the scale 1/250,000 …A simple way to control the exactitude of our maps of the densities is to study the relationship between the village areas themselves and the district area; in this end, we drew up a map (appendix n 5) where we have expressed this ratio for each district with an appropriate color. This map reflects in a way the hypsometric map and in a far more obvious way the map of the densities …*[47].

In his cartographic work, Pierre Gourou provides a visualization of the spatial differentiation of the regional organization. The maps become not only a work of location of the places and sites[48], but also a way to represent, reflect and characterize the spatial structure. He tries to identify the conditions in which the Tonkin space is organized, and his geography becomes less empirical and more centred on the regional structures, where the village communities are seen and understood as an entity where each element is contemplated in its relation with the others. This cartographic basis also gives a unity to the discourse, as it provide the concrete, definite, actual and determined support of the relationships between the regional space and the densities.

6.4.2 The extension of Albert Demangeon's method of geographical survey by questionnaire

Pierre Gourou employed the questionnaire technique proposed by Albert Demangeon (1909) for the study of peasant industries. He accomplished this with the assistance of "French administrative and indigenous administrative authorities", and other colonial institutions such as the *Office du riz* (the Rice Office). Thus, Pierre Gourou examined the significance of the craft industries of the Tonkin delta by sending "close to seven thousand questionnaires" to the villages, in order to produce systematic information and gain an understanding of these activities and their distribution. Pierre Gourou adapted his questions to the prevailing colonial condition by avoiding any questions which could seem compromising to the Annamite craftsmen and women. He wrote:

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47 "*Nous avons exprimé les résultats du recensement de 1931 dans la carte en couleurs hors texte des densités, à l' échelle du 1/250.000 … Un moyen simple de contrôler l' exactitude de notre carte des densités est d' étudier le rapport entre la superficie des villages proprement dits et la superficie des communes; dans cette fin nous avons dressé une carte (hors-texte n 5) où nous avons exprimé ce rapport pour chaque canton par une teinte appropriée. Cette carte reflète dans une certaine mesure la carte hypsométrique et de façon beaucoup plus évidente la carte des densités*".

48 Some of Pierre Gourou's maps are just maps locating the villages (number 3 in his appendix) or the names of villages quoted in the thesis (number 4 in his appendix). They are required for the location of places which are analyzed in the text.

A printed questionnaire, written in quoc ngu, was sent to each village; I asked the villages authorities to note on the questionnaire the number of individuals engaged in a village itself in an industrial work, or practicing outside an industry or a business (in this case, I asked where the workers and traders were going); to be sure to have simple and clear answers, I did not ask any question on the conditions of fabrication and sale, on the cost price and the selling price; actually, the Tonkin villager does not think about these problems, and tackles them with clumsiness when we speak directly about them: all the more so would he have been clumsy to expose them in writing. Otherwise, we did not want to awake his apprehension, and an indiscreet question concerning the cost price, the selling prices the benefices could have let him believe it was a tax inquiry, he should avoid, for fear of compromising himself, to give the most harmless details. ... I gave in the questionnaires a list as complete as possible of village industries: I knew, thanks to some polls undertaken beforehand, that, by themselves, peasants forget to indicate important industries, because they appear to them commonplace and without interest (such as the common basketwork, the hang sao industry) ...[49].

He recognized the necessity to verify the results personally, in the case of some villages (pp.451-452). As with his analysis of the population census data, Pierre Gourou treats the data spatially, and in relationship to the problematic of density. Beside the referential maps of his appendix, he elaborates complementary schematic maps of the population density (Figure 31, refer Appendix F2 in this thesis, "Delta tonkinois Densité de la population carte thématique"), of the percentage and distribution of the industrial population (Figure 119), or of the importance of a craft group (Figures 120, 121, 122). Moreover, the reader can locate each quoted village easily on the maps by referring to two detailed indexes (alphabetic indexes of villages names quoted in the text (pp.603-622), and an administrative index of the village names quoted in the text (pp.624-646) specifying the villages administrative position with the province and the phu or huyen to which each belongs) which point to the exact position on the maps and the page(s) and chapter(s) where each village is cited. A third index indicates the themes and subjects treated in the thesis with their page numbers.

For Pierre Gourou, the quantitative and cartographic approach to demographic and economic facts, as well as the questionnaire method and the composition of detailed indexes, became basic methodologies for use in geographical research works.

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[49] "*Un questionnaire imprimé, rédigé en quoc ngu, fut envoyé à chapque village; je demandais aux autorités villageoises de noter sur le questionnaire le nombre d' individus se livrant dans le village même à un travail industriel, ou exerçant au dehors une industrie ou un commerce (en ce cas je demandais en quels lieux se rendaient les ouvriers et commerçants); pour être sûr d' avoir des réponses simples et claires, je n' avais posé aucune question sur les conditions de fabrication et de vente, sur les prix de revient et les prix de vente; en effet, le villageois tonkinois ne pense guère à ses problèmes, et les aborde avec maladresse quand on lui en parle directement: à plus forte raison eût-il été malhabile à les exposer par écrit. D' autre part il ne fallait pas éveiller son inquiétude, et une question indiscrète sur les prix de revient, les prix de vente, les bénéfices lui faisant croire à une enquête fiscale, il eût évité, par crainte de se compromettre, de donner des détails les plus anodins. Afin d' éclairer la religion des autorités villageoises, j' avis donné dans le questionnaire une liste aussi complète que possible des industries villageoises: je savais, par quelques sondages entrepris auparavant, que d' eux-mêmes les paysans omettent d' indiquer des industries importantes, parce qu' elles leur paraissent vulgaires et sans intérêt (comme la vannerie commune, l' industrie des sang sao) …*".

6.4.3 Colonial development and Pierre Gourou's concern towards the Annamite entity

More generally, through the use of the colonial administration and other sources of colonial information, Pierre Gourou's geography was an "active" one, involved in the debates of the time. For instance, at a time where the *mise en valeur* of the colonies began to be tackled in terms of "problems" (chapter 3, 3.3.2), Pierre Gourou questions the "industrialization of the colonies" in his chapter on the village industries and the *"surpopulation"* (overpopulation)[50] in the concluding pages of his thesis.

Pierre Gourou views the question of overpopulation in a multidimensional way, quite different from Charles Robequain's belief that all that matters is the rationalization of the material conditions of human life (see quotation above in section 6.3.1, from Charles Robequain's thesis page 587). Not only does he examine the condition of the basic needs provision of the population, but also the problem of employment/unemployment and the well-being of the peasant, asking the question:

> *Is the country too populated in regard to its needs in labor-work? In another way, is it carrying more inhabitants that it can feed? (*p.570*)*

Besides his pessimistic view in regard to this problem (in the last sentence of his thesis, he wrote about "a likeable and irreversibly miserable people", p.578) [51], Pierre Gourou's answers are conditional. He considers always the quantification of facts (such as the duration of work necessary for the exploitation of the land or the quantity of the rice produced) in relation to the qualifying factors characterizing the Annamite techniques and society. He presents detailed and complex information, but without putting forward a real resolution and formal expression to the "problem of overpopulation". He does not consider the regional modernization of the agriculture and transport with the same confidence as Charles Robequain, and conceives them as well as agents of social disruption in a society where traditional methods of cultivation necessitate "an extraordinary expense of labour" which offers a job to all the population where the majority of

[50] As we noticed in chapter 3 (3.3.2), this so-called problem of the "overpopulation" was not specific to the Tonkin delta, and, in the 1930s, the writer and diplomat Paul Claudel also points out the problem of the "surpopulation" in Japan (APHG, n.342, p.108).

[51] According to Charles Fourniau (Fourniau, 1989), the dead–end social and alimentary situation was mainly related to the inadequacy or insufficiency of the colonial achievement of France. He writes (p.279): "In 1945, and before the destruction of thirty years of war which were going to arrive, the Vietnam which became independent was a very under-developed country because of the colonial deficiency". Pierre Gourou (see below) also considered this critical point of view in regard to the achievement of France.

the peasantry has no financial means to modernize their agriculture (p.572)[52]. In fact, Gourou's regional prospective is viewed throughout the dilemma of established tradition/modernity:

> *The very labor-intensive ways of working demanded by traditional Tonkinese culture are the reason why an average population of 430 inhabitants per square kilometre is still no more than is needed, even during the most important activities, where the bearers make slow and very difficult progress with far from heavy loads; similarly, a lot of time could also be saved if machines were used for threshing, winnowing and drying the paddy; and irrigation would be easier with motor-pumps. The Delta would have an excess of labor, even at peak times, if the human effort was aided by improved access roads permitting the use of more economical means of transport and agricultural machinery. But we cannot expect any improvement in this domain in the near future, because the peasants are too poor to buy pumps or threshers. Moreover, are such changes even desirable, given that they would reduce the work available to the peasants and eliminate the wages of workmen whose only recourse would be to lie down and die quietly?*[53].

His analysis of the village industries reinforces his skepticism regarding rapid economic modernization. It ends with a prospective view of their "future possibilities" (pp.536-538), which suggests, at least implicitly, the controversy surrounding the industrialization of Indochina which animated colonial politicians and technocrats in the 1930s. After the World economic depression. French policies in regard to the industrialization of Indochina were based on the conception that Indochina was producing and exporting raw and agricultural products, and France producing and exporting manufactured products. In the 1920s the liberal strategy was that, due to the development of a modern transport network and modern exploitation, Indochina exported great quantities of rice, maize, anthracite and rubber. But after the world depression, exports became very restricted. At the beginning of the 1930s, the autarchic strategy aimed to protect French industries by introducing custom taxes. Indochina was importing French manufactured products such as cotton fabrics and exporting its agricultural and mine products to France. But this strategy created situations of conflict and delayed any modernization. Although without questioning French economic imperialism, Pierre Gourou appeared quite circumspect towards these strategies, and advised that:

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[52] In the same stream of thought, Gourou remains critical towards French irrigation achievements and writes (p.105): "However, the aim of the colonial irrigation waterworks must not be to reduce the peasant work, but to insure to this work a more abundant and regular payment".

[53] "*Seule la dépense extraordinaire de main-d' œuvre qu' exigent les méthodes culturales tonkinoises permet de concevoir comment une population moyenne de 430 habitants au kilomètre carré n' est pas supérieure aux besoins de main-d' œuvre, même au moment des principaux travaux. Par exemple, pendant la moisson, on pourrait économiser beaucoup de temps si les voies d' accès étaient meilleures, si elles étaient autre chose que des diguettes glissantes, coupées de fossés, où le porteur avance lentement, avec une charge médiocre, et pourtant au prix de gros efforts; on pourrait aussi gagner beaucoup de temps sur le battage, le vannage et le séchage du paddy en employant des machines; l' irrigation coûterait moins d' efforts si l' on utilisait des pompes à moteurs. Le Delta disposerait d' une main d' œuvre tout à fait surabondante, même au moment des gros travaux, si le rendement de l' effort humain était accru par l' amélioration des voies d' accès, permettant l' emploi de moyens de transport plus économiques, et par l' usage de machines agricoles. Mais il ne saurait se produire d' ici longtemps d' évolution dans ce domaine; le paysan est trop pauvre pour acheter des pompes ou des batteuses. D' ailleurs faut-il souhaiter pareille évolution, qui réduirait le travail des paysans, et supprimerait les salaires d' ouvriers qui n' auraient plus qu' à mourir discrètement*?"

In this field of small industries, the [colonial] State should consider the establishment of subsidies more than export taxes" p.537.

When he was working on his thesis, a third controversal strategy was proposed by fervent partisans of the industrialization of the colonies (of the theory of the "colonisation industrialisante", industrializing colonialization) such as Paul Bernard, polytechnician, engineer and administrator of the "Credit mobilier indochinois", and Henri Brenier, specialist in Indochina trade. In two basic works written after the world crisis about the Indochinese colonial economy, Paul Bernard (1934, 1937) described how the industrialization of Indochina could partly solve the problem of the so called "overpopulation", and reinforce the "intellectual, moral, technical and financial" relationships between France and Indochina and resolve "the capital problem of the integration of the Annamite elite in the French environment" (Bernard, 1937, p.174). He favoured to the development of a complex colonial economy, in order to develop the interior market, where the various economic activities could be evolved, however with some precautions taken that would not undermine the metropolitan industry.

In fact, another important segment of the elite brought another vision of the economic development and of the Indochinese problem of overpopulation. The Governors General Pierre Pasquier and later Jules Brévié, like the Minister of the colonies Marius Moutet, along with their cultural idealization of the traditional Annamite civilization and its quintessential aspects, were more interested in the development of rural handicrafts than industrialization. They found there a world rich by its complex and elaborate traditional society, which they wanted to preserve under cover of a paternalist principle of modernization (Chapter 5, 5.3). Pierre Gourou was also interested in the development of the rural and craft industries of the villages and remained more confident in the development of a peasant and family handicraft industry than in the development of a modern industry where an urban proletariat would create "a fluctuating population, detached from its environment, fluctuating in its morals, unhappy and demoralized". He was also considering that the big industry, with its expensive equipment, the lack of flexibility of its mass product and the uncertainty of its trade outlets, was out of place in a country like Vietnam (pp.537-538). In fact, having established the peasant life as the focus point of his investigation, Pierre Gourou's logic, underpinning his French colonial understanding, remained critical towards any economic scheme which was not integrated with the Annamite society. His discourse became a discourse of integrated geography, where the problems or characteristics of a region were in constant interaction with the society which occupies its territory.

Certainly, Pierre Gourou called on more established or historical systems such as "Colbertisme"[54], to encourage the export of quality craft products (p.537) rather than new economic theories. In general, his discourse on the development of the Tonkin region is marked by his regard towards historical civilizations such as the Chinese and Annamite. According to this view, radical ruptures and disruptions of the rules and inherited practices of the traditional societies could not achieve any progress or modernization. Therefore, the colonial institution must preserve "the perfect relationship which is established between Man and nature" over centuries (p.575), and develop strategies able to maintain the traditions and social equilibrium as well as ameliorate the economic position of the region. Pierre Gourou assigned a cultural meaning to the region. It had a patrimony and a social environment to manage and preserve, a patriotic sense, and was almost consonant with a 'sacred' place because of its apparent perfect cohesion and solidarity (see in Chapter 4, section 4.3.3.2, the quotations from the pp. 576 and 578).

Pierre Gourou's appreciation of the Annamite society explains his protective attitude towards village handicraft industry as well as his reticence in respect of the proletarianization of the Annamite peasant. In fact, Pierre Gourou's argument connects the "strategy of rural development" with "the politics of the peasantry" ("*Politique du paysannat*") planned by the colonial administration[55] (Brocheux & Hémery, 1994, pp.270-271). Charles Robequain wrote, as many French intellectuals and journalists wrote, regarding the greatness of French colonial achievements which he illustrates in photographs (refer photos of the irrigation dams built by France in Appendix F.4, extracted from Charles Robequain's thesis p.313, Pl.XX and from the magazine *l' Illustration* p.188). However, Pierre Gourou brought a critical point of view, where he presents the physical and human limitations of the politics of colonialization organized by the French administration (p.218) and the inadequacy of vast enterprises, such as hydraulic achievements, in meeting the interests of the peasant (pp.107-108, and Appendix F.4, "Extract from Pierre Gourou's chapter "the physical environment: irrigation networks"). He introduced a new understanding and a new grasp of overseas regional development. As a priority, it took into

[54] The "Colbertisme" is an economic 'pre-industrial' system formulated by the economic and financial Minister of Louis the XIV, Colbert, in the late 17th century. It encouraged exports (preferentially high value products, such as high quality silk fabrics, tapestries or porcelain, through privileges delivered to the manufactures producing them) and discouraged imports (through heavy taxation). It is a form of mercantilism.

[55] This political economy was characterized by an ambition to increase the rice production by hydraulic works and reduce the demographic pressure with a policy of peasant transmigration, without disrupting the social structures of the Annamite society.

consideration the peasant life and refers to its ability. It was based on the idealization[56] of the Annamite society, where the problem of regional modernization cannot be addressed and understood only from a Western standpoint. In essence, Pierre Gourou's discourse implicitly takes into account the complexity, contradictions and social problems inherent in the adaptation of modern techniques to the Annamite environment and the sagacity and knowledge of the peasants[57]:

> *There has without doubt been an increase in production, but we are afraid that it is not as great as previous writers have often said, basing their arguments on the high prices before the crisis and on the particularly favourable example of the Kep network, created in a region which before irrigation was poor and very unproductive. Costly projects such as the Son Tay network have added to the debt burden of a country whose budget has no room for manoeuvre, since these works are paid for by loans taken out in France: we heard a native of the country who had some doubts about their efficacity (he was speaking about the Day barrage) expressing the ironic hope that some day Tonkin, like so many other countries, would be freed of its external debts, and that these over-burdonsome projects would ultimately cost it nothing*[58].

[56] This idealization is expressed through the descriptions of the peasant attitudes, where Pierre Gourou often emphased his "humble" contentment and happiness in response to his poverty. He wrote, for example, "Like this other aspects of the economy, trade provokes in the peasant community frantic efforts to secure the most modest of profits, and a humble acceptance of badly remunerated tasks. " (p.553). ("*Comme les autres aspects de la vie économique, le commerce fait apparaître parmi ces paysans une recherche effrénée du bénéfice le plus modeste et l' humble acceptation d' une tâche peu rémunératrice*.")

[57] Correspondingly, Pierre Gourou does not tackle the complexity, contradictions and social problems inherent to the Annamite society of the time, as present Vietnamese intellectuals have noticed.

[58] "*Il n' est pas douteux qu' il y ait une augmentation de la production, mais nous craignons qu' elle ne soit pas aussi considérable que l' on l' a souvent écrit en s' inspirant des hauts prix d' avant la crise et de l' exemple particulièrement avantageux du réseau du Kep, établi dans une région pauvre et très peu productive avant l' irrigation. On augmente par des travaux coûteux comme le réseau de Son Tay la dette d' un pays dont le budget manque d' élasticité, car ces travaux sont payés par des emprunts contractés en France: nous entendions exprimer ironiquement par un indigène, qui avait quelques doutes sur leur efficacité réelle (il s' agissait plus précisément du barrage du Day), l' espoir qu' un jour ou l' autre le Tonkin se débarasserait comme bien d' autres pays de la ccharge de sa dette extérieure et que ces travaux trop onéreux ne lui coûteraient finalement rien*."

What has been achieved is interesting, what is still to be accomplished is considerable. It will be most beneficial to the peasants if we succeed in not forgetting that this is a country which is already intensively cultivated, where the problems are complex and often vary from one village to the next; that before projects are planned it is necessary to acquire a profound knowledge of the characteristics of local agriculture, which are diverse and sometimes difficult to elucidate; that localised improvements, based on a detailed study of the relief, the availablility of water and the agriculture of the locality being considered will often achieve more than vast undertakings; that it is advisable, when possible, to carry out provisional projects which can be transformed into permanent projects when experience shows them to be valid. We have no intention of criticising past projects, which are proving useful and in many ways remarkable: we simply wish to express some obvious truths and, in a way, the peasant's point of view[59]*. (pp107-108).*

Pierre Gourou remains quite unspecific when evoking the colonial work of modernization in his conclusion (see in chapter 5, 5.4.2.2, the quotation of page 577). He considers the technical progress and its introduction to Indochina as an "irresistible movement" (p.577, see quotation in chapter 5, section 5.4.2.1) but not with the confidence of Charles Robequain, and considers it also a potential agent of social disequilibrium. He recognizes the fact that the problem of regional development must be linked with the socio-demographic and cultural conditions of a specific society. Thus, the evolution of the region is less a question of introducing a Western model of "methodical development of resources and the improvement of the indigenous life in a country placed under the domination or guardianship of a modern nation" (Hardy, 1933, p.24) and more a dilemma of regional socio-cultural identity (chapter 7, 7.3).

The paradoxical character of any position aiming to sustain the social inherited know-how and culture, which can mainly be manifested when what is defended begins to disappear, must be emphasized. This ambiguity appears in Pierre Gourou's argument, where no regional perspective and no solutions to the demographic and poverty problems arise.

However, it does not appear that the material fate of the Tonkin peasant can be markedly improved: the excessive density of the population is damaged beyond remedy[60]*.* (p.577).

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[59] *"L' œuvre réalisée est intéressante, l' œuvre à accomplir est considérable. On la ménera à bien de la façon la plus conforme aux intérêts du paysan si l' on veut bien ne pas oublier que l' on est dans un pays déjà intensément cultivé, où les problèmes qui se posent sont complexes et varient souvent de village en village; que, dans l' étude des projets, la connaissance profonde des réalités agricoles, diverses et parfois difficiles à dégager, doit précéder toute étude des travaux à réaliser; que des améliorations locales, réalisées aux prix d' un examen serré des conditions spéciales au point de vue du relief, du régime des eaux, de l' agriculture, de la petite région envisagée, rapporteraient souvent plus que de vastes entreprises; qu' il est bon, quand on le peut, de faire des ouvrages provisoires que l' on transformera en ouvrages définitifs lorsque l' expérience en aura démontré l' utilité. Nous n' avons pas la prétention de critiquer ici les travaux déjà réalisés, qui sont très utiles et par bien des points remarquables; nous avons simplement voulu exprimer quelques vérités banales, et en quelque sorte le point de vue du paysan."*

[60] *"Pourtant il ne semble pas que l' on puisse beaucoup améliorer le sort du paysan tonkinois: l' excessive densité de la population est un mal sans remède*".

Paul Bernard condemned Pierre Gourou's "skepticism towards progress" (Bernard, 1937, p.161) and particularly the concluding part of his thesis, that he qualifies as "disconcerting" and "disappointing", asking the question "can we deny the laws of technical progress"?

6.5 Conclusion

Compared to other French regional theses, it must be underlined that, because of the colonial context inside of which the two theses were inevitably connected, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's writings conveyed more practical discourses and arguments. They suggest and discuss the problems of regional development, using the "latest" and most modern tools and sources of information, usually supplied by the colonial administration. These were more disseminated in Indochina than in France, with an active cartographic and statistical programme which occured with French colonialization, for strategic reasons and, theoretically, to bring modernity and wealth to the Far-East part of the French Empire for the benefit of France and Indochina. Their geography was ultimately implicated in the colonial problems of the times. They model new types of geographical discourse on colonial regions, where the question of

regional development emerges and is analyzed more and more through the specificity of the regional and human structures[61].

The understanding of these structures requires as well that Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou consider their socio-cultural components. This is what we are going to investigate in Chapter 7.

[61] In this respect, the French geographer whose geographical discourse appears the closest to Robequain and Gourou is Weulersse (mentioned in chapter 5, section 5.4.3.1). He did his thesis on the Syrian peasantry (Weulersse, 1946), when Syria was a mandated territory covered by France under the cover of the *S.D.N.(Société des Nations)*. In the same way that Robequain and Gourou used the resources of the E.F.E.O. and the colonial administration, Weulersse used those of the *Institut français de Damas*, as well as the publications and reports of the various commissions of the *S.D.N.* and the cartographical documentation of the *Bureau topographique des troupes du Levant*. He also questioned some of the repercussions of French policy on the peasant life. Further, Weulersse created a representation of Middle-East peasants similar to Gourou's in his concern for the peasant civilization and the intensity of its social life, writing with emphasis and compassion in regards to the fellah, dedicating his work to these fellahs with whom he shared his esteem ("To all these unknown fellahs I met for a moment walking along trails or passing over the mountainous tracks, with whom we shared bread and leben and often a few words or exchanged a glance in a common feeling of human dignity" "*à ces fellahs sans nom côtoyés le long des pistes ou croisés dans les sentiers de montagnes, chez qui nous avons partagé le pain et le leben, avec qui nous avons souvent communié d' une phrase ou d' un regard, dans un même sentiment de dignité humaine*"), (Weulersse, 1946, p.13). But his geographical work was terminated with his death in 1946. Gourou (1997) wrote in *Geographers, Bibliographical studies*: "Jacques Weulersse would have become one of the world's foremost geographers of decolonization and his death created an abrupt void which gives the measure of his importance and scope" (p.109).

CHAPTER 7

INDOCHINA AND THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF DISCOURSES

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5 it was seen how the discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou could not be understood without recalling the charm, fascination, affinity and curiosity that the Far-East civilizations aroused in France, as well as the prevailing scientific and cultural mission of the E.F.E.O. The cultural dimensions of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourses, along with the ethnographical substance[1] of Charles Robequain's arguments and the focus by Pierre Gourou on village life, could not be understood outside the seductive feeling induced by the Far-East and its encouragement by the E.F.E.O. and other colonial institutions promoting scientific and cultural research on Indochina. This chapter examines how in their theses Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou dealt with the role of culture and, in particular, Indochinese cultures. On that account, it explores how they conceptualized the influence of culture, what aspects of culture they selected for analysis, what preconceptions they brought with them as colonial French scholars, and the ideas or approaches that influenced them. Beyond, it investigates to what extent Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou overcame these preconceptions.

Furthermore, in this inquiry the two geographical discourses will be related to the ways that other social science disciplines questioned non-European societies. On one hand, despite its descriptive confines, Charles Robequain studied "primitive" societies and classified them within domains of "civilization" similar to French ethnologists such as Marcel Mauss (Febvre, Mauss and Weber, 1930)[2]. On the other hand, Pierre Gourou's ethnographic interest towards the village environment, its rich political and social life and its deep humanity resonates with more

[1] Ethnography is the descriptive study of ethnic groups, in opposition to ethnology, which is related to the study of their linguistic, economic, social and religious unity.

[2] Marcel Mauss (Febvre, Mauss and Weber, 1930) understands civilization both as an area and a form, analysing it in its extension and in its knowledge. Marcel Mauss rejects giving a restrictive meaning to the concept which would denigrate societies with an inferior level of techniques and social organization.

contemporary discourses, and more especially that of Paul Mus[3]. Like Pierre Gourou, Paul Mus understood Vietnam through its rich and complex society and was aware of the equivocal character of French domination. It is also possible to establish a parallel between Pierre Gourou and Georges Condominas[4] in the way that both the geography of Pierre Gourou and the ethnology of Georges Condominas aimed to give a lively and real insight of Vietnamese and Mnong Gar social life. Both men were receptive to the preoccupations of people and concerned about their happiness or the precariousness and contingencies of their life. They wrote with warmth about Vietnamese and Mnong Gar society respectively.

Using Michel Foucault's terminology (Foucault, 1970), it will be shown that Charles Robequain's viewpoint was related to the "order" of the late 19th century discourses, where non-European civilizations were considered primitive or backward compared to French civilization which was erected as the model to follow (section 7.3). Pierre Gourou's discourse illustrates how French colonial thought perceived, in the 1930s, that this previous "order" was not necessarily universal and how French culture therefore encouraged new theories and interpretations.

7.2 Colonial Institutions and the Promotion of Cultural Research

French researchers undertaking scholarly works on Indochina had at their disposal a substantial documentation due to colonial institutions such as the *service du dépôt légal d'*

[3] Paul Mus (1902-1969) graduated from the *Langues orientales* and the E.P.H.E.. He did his thesis on Borobudur and the political and religious aspects of Indian Buddhism. He was permanent member of the E.F.E.O. from 1927 to 1937 and became "a very close friend" of Pierre Gourou (Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou). Like Gourou and most of the researchers of the E.F.E.O., Paul Mus gave a great importance to the practice of direct observation in the field and contributed to constructing a better perception of the ethnological and socio-historical characteristics of Asian civilizations. After WWII where, like Pierre Gourou, he was a resistant, Paul Mus wrote works for general public, in order to give the French readers a better knowledge of Vietnamese culture and colonial misunderstanding. His most famous work, *sociologie d' une guerre*, pointed out that "the crucial problems in Vietnam cannot be clarified until they can be drawn from the village communities" ("*on ne peut voir clair dans aucun des problèmes capitaux du Vietnam…tant qu' on ne les a pas dégagés au niveau des communautés villageoises*") (Mus, 1952, p.13). He became professor at the *collège de France* where he lectured on the Far-east civilizations (from 1946 to 1969), while Pierre Gourou lectured on the tropical world (from 1947 to 1970). Later, reiterating the expression of Elisée Reclus (1883), Paul Mus described the position of the South East of Asia as at an "angle" at the crossroad, contact and limits of the major Asian civilizations (Mus, 1977).

[4] George Condominas (born in 1921 in Vietnam) attended Pierre Gourou's and Paul Mus's lectures in Paris in the late 1940s to become an ethnologist. He lived a long time among mountain ethnic groups (the Mnong Gar). He was himself a metis, and, consequently, experienced the disdainful behaviour of colonial people towards the Vietnamese population. Confronting two different cultures, French and Vietnamese, he wrote "*Nous avons mangé la forêt de la pierre-génie gôo*" and "*l' exotique est quotidien*" (Condominas, 1957, 1965, 1980) in praise of the mountain communities and in order to locate his own identity. Later, he promoted the concept of "social space", which includes all the kinds of relationships among a society, its geographical environment and its mythical one. George Condominas and Pierre Gourou were correspondingly aware of their respective works, and reviewed with honour each other's publications, surveying and recognizing the equivalence between ethnology and geography. For example, Pierre Gourou reviewed "*Nous avons mangé la forêt de la pierre-génie gôo*" noting "A very remarkable description under the form of a chronicle has just been dedicated to a Moï village… If the regard of the author is concentrated above all on religious facts, the techniques of production are however recorded with an accuracy and a subtlety rarely reached" (Gourou, 1958). Recently, George Condominas (2000, p.8) paid tribute to Gourou's "lucidity, hard work, curiosity… generosity and concern for honesty".

Indochine[5] which itemized any published work concerning Indochina, and the E.F.E.O. which owned a library (section 7.2.1). More specifically, Charles Robequain and Charles Gourou had available a bibliographical work recording the publications on Indochina until 1914, *Bibliotheca Indosinica*. Furthermore, Pierre Gourou could consult another major bibliography, *Bibliographie de l' Indochine française*, published in 1929, which listed published Indochinese works from 1913 to 1926 selected by its authors, Boudet and Bourgeois. From 1927, annual supplements were published by the *Bulletin of the E.F.E.O.* where the new works were registered. Pierre Gourou quotes the two volumes and supplements in his bibliography (p.581).

The *Bibliography de l' Indochine française* was selective and its aim was to deliver to researchers and readers "a choice of the most useful works" (Pasquel Rageau, 1996, p.241). This choice was connected with the great interest of French thought in history and the traditional aspects of the Chinese and Indian civilizations (section 5.4.3 in Chapter 5). This privileged historical works more than contemporary analysis or matters produced by Vietnamese intellectuals[6]. Consequently, part of the bibliographical frame within which Pierre Gourou was working was more focused on documents dealing with Indochinese heritage and ethnic traditions and culture than on contemporary Vietnamese concerns, which may have been critical of French colonization. This may partly explain the fact that Pierre Gourou, like other French researchers, constructed his discourse through the perspective of traditional village life.

More generally, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's bibliographical selections confirm this tendency to emphasize an historical and ethnographical comprehension of Indochinese regions. Both of them quote Henri Maspéro. Henri Maspéro undertook archaeological and ethnographical missions in Indochina during the period 1908 to 1920 when he was member of the E.F.E.O. His conception of the superiority of Chinese civilization[7] constitutes a major statement in Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's theses. On this basis, the regional unity of Thanh-Hoá and the Tonkin delta are connected with the superior character of the Annamite civilization, which inherited its features (its rice cultivation techniques, political organization, its philosophical thought) from Chinese civilization (as we have mentioned in

[5] The *service du dépôt légal d' Indochine* was organized within the *Service des Archives et Bibliothèques*

[6] The Bibliography quotes a few Vietnamese authors. But their texts were dealing only with Vietnamese customs, traditional codes or with translations of classical literary works that were not polemic topics.

[7] More exactly, Henri Maspéro suggested the existence in ancient times a common culture between Chinese and Indochinese populations such as the Tay (Maspéro, 1971)

Chapter 5, section 5.4.1.2). Pierre Gourou even quotes Henri Maspéro to illustrate the fundamental repercussions of the Chinese occupation in the Annamite country (p.132):

> *"The Chinese influence was felt indirectly in the country from the middle of the II th century before Christ, and was directly practised from the expedition of Ma Yuan (52 AD), which was a fundamental point in the history of the Tonkin; quote here M.H.Maspero who knows the importance of this event: Until now treated only like a protectorate...it became a truly Chinese province. If the Annam, after its liberation, has been able during centuries to resist the power of China, when all its neighbouring countries...succumbed little by little, it is because, alone among them, during centuries submitted to the regular Chinese administration and that this, broke the particularist institutions and the local groupings, and introduced the Chinese ideas and social forms, giving to it a cohesion and a form which was always missing in its neighbours*[8] (p.132).

Pierre Gourou used particularly Henri Maspéro's works with regard to the history of Vietnam (Maspéro, 1916, 1918), where he compared old Chinese sources concerning Annam to the Vietnamese Annals, and consequently, to some extent, created an historical geography of Vietnam. Like most of the researchers of the E.F.E.O. Henri Maspéro's writings emphasise his curiosity about Asia and the French wish to reconstitute Vietnamese history.

Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou mentioned also authors such as Léonard Aurousseau[9] or Emile Gaspardone[10], who tried to reconstitute part of the history of Annam, or Lieutenant-Colonel Bonifacy[11], who undertook ethnological studies on Indochinese ethnic

[8] *" L' influence chinoise se fit sentir indirectement sur le pays dès le milieu du II siècle avant notre ère, et s' exerça directement à partir de l' expédition de ma Yuan (42 après J.C.) qui fut un point capital de l' histoire du Tonkin; citons ici M.H.Maspéro qui a su définir avec bonheur l' importance de l' évènement: "Jusque-là traité en simple protectorat … gardant ses institutions et ses mœurs, il devint une véritable province chinoise. Si l' Annam, après s' être libéré, a pu pendant des siècles résister à la puissance de la Chine, alors que tous les états voisins … ont peu à peu succombé, c' est parce que, seul d' entre eux, il avait été pendant des siècles soumis à l' administration régulière chinoise et que celle-ci, brisant les institutions particularistes et les groupements locaux, et introduisant les idées et les formes sociales chinoises, lui donna une cohésion et une forme qui manquèrent toujours à ses voisins*."

[9] Léonard Aurousseau learned Chinese at the *Ecole des Langues Orientale,* and the *Collège de France* before he went to Indochina. He taught the history and archeology of Annam at the E.F.E.O. and became director of the school in 1925-1926.

[10] Emile Gaspardone was a permanent member of the school from 1927 to 1936, and became professor of Indochinese history and philology at the Collège de France from 1946.

[11] Lieutenant-Colonel Bonifacy was an autodidact researcher who, like Father Cadière, established his life in Vietnam. Similar to Cadière, his work was recognized by the E.F.E.O. and his papers published in the *Bulletin de l' E.F.E.O* (the B.E.F.E.O). As Louis Finot (1931) wrote in Lieutenant-Colonel Bonifacy's obituary "unlike many autodidacts, Bonifacy had a way of thinking mainly scientific and a clear sense of the technical conditions for a good work. Thus, it is not surprising that, hardly settled in Tonkin, the E.F.E.O. welcomed his visit and his offers", (quote in Dartigues, 2001).

groups. The works of these researchers were sanctioned by the E.F.E.O.[12] which printed them or published many of the authors' articles in its review, the *Bulletin de l' E.F.E.O* (B.E.F.E.O).

7.2.1 The multidisciplinary emphasis of the E.F.E.O.

The E.F.E.O. welcomed to its membership archaeologists, philologists and historians[13] as well as Vietnamese scholars, or geographers such as Edmond Chassigneux[14] and, later, Charles Robequain (see Introduction, Section 1.1). Generally, permanent members or correspondents of the school were chosen from among the scholars of the *Ecole des Langues Orientales* (Langues' o) or the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*. Often, they attended the lectures of Edouard Chavannes and, then, Sylvain Lévi (see in Chapter 5, section 5.3) at *the Collège de France* in Paris. But this was not systematically the case and the geographers Edmond Chassigneux, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, along with some missionaries such as Father Léopold Cadière or French autodidacts such as Bonifacy, did not attend any of these orientalist academic events. None were 'specialists' of the Far East when they arrived in Indochina[15]. This probably had an impact on the originality of Pierre Gourou and Léopold Cadière's approaches to the Annamite peasantry (section 7.2.2).

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[12] From 1920 to 1926, when Charles Robequain did his research, and from 1928 to 1929, when Pierre Gourou arrived in Hanoi, Louis Finot was the directeur of the E.F.E.O. Louis Finot was an orientalist, graduate of the E.P.H.E., student of Sylvain Lévi in 1894, and studied Lao literature (Finot, 1917). In 1920, he held the first chair of "Indochinese history and philology" that the "Gouvernement général de l' Indochine" created at the Collège de France. Louis Finot welcomed at the E.F.E.O. orientalist researchers as well as French autodidacts who devoted part of their life in Indochina to studying Indochinese cultures. From 1929, George Coedès succeeded Louis Finot. He also graduated from the E.P.H.E. He investigated the history of Indochina and religious meanings of Khmer or Asian societies influenced by Indian civilization. Louis Finot's and George Coedès' writings express the French colonial regard and curiosity in respect of Indochinese traditional cultures and rich past. Pierre Gourou refers to George Coedès' work on the Greek and Latin sources concerning the Far East (Coedès, 1910), when he mentions the messengers of the Emperor Marc Aurèle landing in 226 in Tonkin (p.134).

[13] See Finot's quotation in chapter 5, section 5.4.2.1.

[14] Edmond Chassigneux was termed "pensionnaire" (permanent member) of the E.F.E.O. by the order of 3 September 1908, until November 1910. His mission was to study the hydromorphology of the Tonkin Delta and Nord Annam. Charles Robequain (pp.260, 267-69) and Gourou (pp.48, 85) referred to his theoretical reflexion relating to the formation of the Tonkin delta. Eventually, Pierre Gourou rethought Edmond Chassigneux's conceptions (p.68-69, where Pierre Gourou wrote in opposition to Edmond Chassigneux: "The delta suffers far more of the excess than the deficiency in water"). Edmond Chassigneux supplied the chapter called "geography of Indochina" in the general book about Indochina published by the brother of Henri Maspéro, George Maspéro (Chassigneux, 1930). His commentary presents a unity of view with Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, where the physical and human contrasts between the deltaic plains and the hinterland constitute the framework of the discourse. But most of his other works sank in a boat coming back from Indochina to France which was torpedoed by a German submarine in 1917. Edmond Chassigneux was back in France when Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were in Indochina. Edmond Chassigneux became professor of history of colonialization at the Collège de France from 1939 to 1946.

[15] Besides, this overture towards non-orientalists researchers was not exempt from suspicion by the other members of the school, and the orientalist Paul Demiéville wrote in regard to Charles Robequain: "The fellow is a history-geography *agrégé*, specialised in this later study; he is ignorant of orientalism; it is a bit of a pity to send to the school people like that, all the more since he could have been detached to the geological service" quote in (Singaravélou, 1999, p.117). Nonetheless, Paul Demiéville and Charles Robequain became friends! In fact, Louis Finot encouraged the recognition of autodidacts (see footnote 11).

Nevertheless, the school opened its library to 'orientalists' working in the Far East as well as any researcher, such as Pierre Gourou[16] (1982, p.19) who writes:

> The "Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient" welcomed me generously; the richness of its library allowed me to go through all the existing publications on the Red River Delta.

Despite the E.F.E.O. interest in Indochinese culture and history, this open-mindedness was however relative, in that none of its publications, such as the *Bibliographie de l' Indochine française*, exposed critical views towards French colonialization[17]. Furthermore, there were not many Vietnamese scholars publishing articles, and more French authors than Vietnamese ones wrote about Vietnamese villages and customs, language, and religious thought. Some Vietnamese intellectuals were working at the school, but as assistants to French researchers. According to Nguyen Van Chinh, the magazine of the School, *le bulletin de l' Ecole Française d' Extrême Orient* (B.E.F.E.O), brought about a "new and better understanding of Vietnamese culture". It published between 1901 and 1945 (in http://www.vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn August 1999, stories/06.htm)

> 88 individual pieces of research, either in book or press article forms. Out of those 88 works, 12 were by Vietnamese scientists and one third written on the ethical problems, customs and habits of Vietnamese people.

However, the library of the E.F.E.O. was considered an indispensable source for any substantial work and offered to researchers such as Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou publications and references on a range of subject matters, which were essential information and formed the basis for their writings.

Besides the authors mentioned above, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou made extensive use of the works and articles of Father Léopold Cadière[18] which were available in the collection of the library. Both stressed the importance of these references. Like Charles

[16] Pierre Gourou was not a "pensionnaire" (permanent member) of the School. But he became a correspondent, and it is the School which paid for the imprint of his thesis.

[17] As Nguyen Khac Vien notices about realist writers in the 1930s: "However, the drastic censorship considerably limited the field of action of realist writers. They could criticize the mandarinal regime, but not touch the colonial regime. This is why besides the published literature, there existed a clandestine literature …" (Nguyen Khac Vien, 1993a, p.220). This censorship was conducted not only towards the realist writers, but in the direction of any publication.

[18] Father Cadière was correspondent of the E.F.E.O. from 1908. He was termed "pensionnaire" of the E.F.E.O. by order of the 28 October 1918, for two years, in order to become independent from the Catholic religious authorities, who were suspicious about his interest in the Annamite culture and his writings. He spent most of his life in Vietnam from 1895 to his death in 1955 in Huê. For several months, he was a prisoner of North Vietnamese troops.

Robequain and Pierre Gourou, Léopold Cadière worked and went on field investigations with enthusiasm in order to gather cultural information. None of these authors questioned through their writings the superiority of French civilization. But, in Léopold Cadière and Pierre Gourou's work, the wish to understand the life of Annamite people allowed French readers to perceive Vietnam through its daily culture and society in all its humanity and not only through the act of French colonialization, even if it is through that prism that they represented Vietnam.

7.2.2 The novelty of Léopold Cadière's discourse

Father Léopold Cadière was a priest of the *Missions étrangères de Paris.* He was a very prolific author. He wrote numerous articles for the Bulletin of the E.F.E.O. but also for the review he created in 1914, *the Bulletin des amis du Vieux-Hué*, and other contributions. He investigated the situation in Asia through direct contact with the rural populations[19]. One of the important research works of Léopold Cadière quoted by Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou is related to the Annamite archives and history. It recognizes the richness of Vietnamese historiography despite the fact that "from the writings of the past centuries, only a few things remain" (Cadière and Pelliot, 1904, quoted in Gourou, p.113).

Another original aspect of Léopold Cadière's work was his study in depth of the peasant culture and society through Annamite historiography, language, traditions, customs, religions, magic practices and the distribution of dialects (Cadière, 1915; Cadière, 1918, 1919) (see also Gourou's bibliography pp.594-595). His work was singular among ethnologists[20] who, until World War Two, studied mainly "primitive" societies considered to be without "writings" and "history"[21]. Unlike them, Léopold Cadière studied the Annamite culture and how the Vietnamese

[19] As John Kleinen (1996) notices, "Ten years before Malinowski expounded, in his famous introduction of *the Argonauts*, the task of the field worker, Cadière had already defined a methodological approach which we now recognise as "*participatory observation*" (p.19). Bronislaw Malinowski studied the structures of Melanesian societies in Papua New Guinea. Living in a tent among the people of the Triobriand Islands in the process of being a "participant-observer", Malinowski gave a dynamic representation of their rituals and the cycles of their exchanges (Malinowski, 1963).

[20] Actually, Father Cadière was just a savant amateur, autodidact but his long life among Vietnamese people, his respectful concern to penetrate Vietnamese thought and religious practices and his great work (more than 250 titles), have made him one of the most famous ethnologists of Vietnam.

[21] In France, the works of Marcel Mauss, quoted in Robequain's bibliography, represented the ethnology of the primitive societies.

people constructed the world[22]. He questioned Annamite notions relative to the cosmos, cardinal points, and elements at the surface of the soil such as trees or stones[23]. Pierre Gourou refers largely to Léopold Cadière's analysis when he mentions the Annamite "beliefs which influence village appearance, and consequently, geography" (p.312) and took note of his works regarding "magic" or "geomantic" practices (pp. 312-313). Like Léopold Cadière, Pierre Gourou aspired to give to the reader a lively idea of Annamite thought by reviewing popular dictums, describing "religious considerations" (pp.255-257), customs and practices (pp.270, 314) and "the religious and magic influences" (pp.312-313). He resorted to help from his school students and their village relatives to penetrate the village life. Léopold Cadière derived his sense of purpose from Christian Humanism, and Pierre Gourou was inspired by his geographical education which was more empiricist and less spiritual (see 5.3.3.2). Accordingly, Léopold Cadière's writing is influenced by his mystical and symbolic religious thought, whereas Pierre Gourou's argumentation, which excludes metaphysical thinking and remains realistic,[24] can be related to the positioning of French geographical practice and its opposition with French sociology. But both of them present the Annamite peasant culture through a more social and popular approach than an academic one, where the moral and social interests of the Annamite remain more crucial than any political, economic or material change in their ethics or life (Chapter 5, section 5.3.2)[25]. They wrote with warmth relating to the common peasant and village philosophy, not the scholarly one. Hence, similar to Léopold Cadière, Pierre Gourou gave attention to popular dictums because they reflect social behaviour, guidance or traditions (section 7.4.3.3). As

[22] Father Cadière relied more on Annamite people than on Annamite scholars or aristocrats in his work, even if he did not reject the knowledge of the latter. As Laurent Dartigues (2001, p.215) notes: "Léopold Cadière very frequently reveals his immersion in the activities of people, what his life style and his practice of the Vietnamese language attest. For example, he relates a journey by boat and profits from it -'to charm the boredom' while having a chat with the rowers on spirits; on religious facts, he doesn't hesitate to interrogate the women who go to the market when he travels on the ferries, or he questions the minders of buffalo, soldiers, guards of tombs and women about the presence of spirits close to the Gia-Long father's tomb." ("*Léopold Cadière témoigne très fréquemment de son immersion dans le quotidien des gens, ce que son mode de vie et sa pratique de la langue vietnamienne attestent. Par exemple, il relate un voyage en barque et le profit qu' il en tire - 'pour charmer l' ennui' - en causant avec les rameurs sur des esprits; sur les faits religieux, il n' hésite pas à interroger les femmes qui se rendent au marché, lorsqu' il passe les bacs, ou bien il questionne les gardiens de buffle, soldats, gardiens de tombeaux et femmes à propos de la présence d' esprits près de la tombe du père de Gia-Long*.").

[23] As noticed by Bui-Quang-Tung (1959, p.656), Léopold Cadière taught that the Annamite religion and practices were not found in academic books about Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, but "in the cult of spirits which are living everywhere, particularly in trees, hillocks, stones…"

[24] Pierre Gourou wrote about fengshui beliefs (p.313): "It is not our subject-matter to treat deeply".

[25] Léopold Cadière and Pierre Gourou were close friends, and Gourou wrote in regard to Léopold Cadière: "Sure, Father Cadière was, by far, one of the best specialists of Vietnam, and what he wrote is bearing the stamp of deep sympathy in regard to the Vietnamese people" ("A coup sûr, le Père Cadière était de loin l' un des meilleurs connaisseurs du Viet Nam, et tout ce qu' il a écrit est frappé en coin d' une sympathie profonde pour le peuple vietnamien"), personal letter, 19 september 1996.

pointed out in chapter 5 (section 5.4), Léopold Cadière and Pierre Gourou's interpretations of Annamite culture are representations, and, as Edward Said suggests (Said, 1978, p.272)[26]

> because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer.

For example, when Léopold Cadière, Pierre Gourou or Charles Robequain spoke about "magic" influence or practices[27], they pointed out that it was "magic" according to their Western culture, but not according to the Annamite conceptions and philosophy. Furthermore, when Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou try to evoke "geomancy", their French language does not adequately convey the Annamite significance of fengshui. The word "geomancy" has a different significance in the French language than *fengshui* in the Vietnamese one. Geomancy is formed from two Greek roots, from *gê* meaning earth and *manteia* meaning divination. Consequently, in French thought, it was considered as a divination science or "a pseudo science" constructed on superstitious beliefs. In the Vietnamese language, *fengshui* comes from the Chinese where "*fong*" ("*feng*") means wind and "*thay*" ("*shui*") which means water, and represents dual principles. Vietnamese people consider that *fengshui* lets them choose the best site on which to build their house, where there is an harmonious equivalence between the building and the dual elements of the environment and universe[28]. There is a fracture between the French and the Asian "épistémé", and French language cannot manage the reflective content of fengshui. French writers, despite their openness and their inclination to understand and learn about the Asian world, cannot decode the Annamite thought and world without a lengthy initiation into Vietnamese and Chinese experience. Léopold Cadière, like Gourou, was quite aware of the

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[26] Edward Said was writing in regard to Louis Massignon, who was a thoughtful man devoted to the Catholic church but greatly open to the Muslim religion and culture.

[27] For example, Pierre Gourou writes p.312: "A path or a watercourse in a straight line has a nefarious influence, so the main house must not face them; neither is it advisable to have any part of the house encroach on the path. As this is difficult to avoid in all the cases, they protect themselves by erecting a magic obstruction, generally a stone dog that is driven into the soil" ("*un chemin et un cours d' eau en ligne droite ayant une influence néfaste, il ne faut pas que la maison principale se tourne vers eux; il n' est pas bon non plus qu' une partie quelconque de la maison soit dans le prolongement d' un chemin. Comme il est difficile de l' éviter dans tous les cas, on se protège en dressant un obstacle magique, généralement un chien de pierre que l' on enfonce dans le sol.*").

[28] The French researchers of the E.F.E.O., Pierre Huard and Maurice Durand, defined "geomancy" as "a pseudo-science, sister of astrology and alchimie", (Huard and Durand, 1954, p.70). More fundamentally, they specified that "all construction is never conceived separately but in function of a landscape to which it links up closely. The ethic creates an aesthetic. Thus, geomancy is the science of the influences of the earth or of the laws of Nature" (p.71). Nowadays, the French language defines geomancy as the "divination by the earth, dust, stones or points inscribed by hazard and put together to form figures" (dictionary *Le Robert Langue française*, 1989, volume 4, p.892). But in 1974, the term *sitologie* from "site" and "logy" has been officially introduced in the language by *l' Académie française* to designate "the study of sites and the means to protect them when constructions are going to be initiated" (*Le Robert Langue française*, 1989, volume 8, p.795) and is often substituted for "geomancy". See also footnote 119.

difficulty of understanding a culture in which conceptions are different and divergent from the French one. Pierre Gourou's hesitation to write about *fengshui* matters has already been mentioned (above and in 5.3.3.2)[29]. As well, Léopold Cadière wrote with some ethnocentrism about the Annamite spirit (Cadière, 1915):

> The Annamite spirit lost in the complexity of the external or internal life phenomena, could only see there forces and influences, but could not reach this marvellous unity that the western philosophy has found.
>
> We experience, in order to understand the cosmological system of Chinese philosophers, the same difficulty when we want to give an account of the most simple ideas, but almost as well confuse, which are current among Annamite people, relatively to the human nature, to the world nature[30]…(p.102).

7.2.3 The contribution of Vietnamese writings to Pierre Gourou' s thesis

Through his thesis, Pierre Gourou relied on papers and chronicles written in French by Vietnamese scholars more than Charles Robequain did. A few of them were working at the E.F.E.O. and "participated in the most fortunate way" to the "scientific activity" of that institution (Finot, 1921, p.2)[31]. Pierre Gourou wrote in regard to one of them:

> One of its distinguished mandarins, M. Nguyên Van Khoan, taught me the rudiments of his mother tongue and allowed me to do a study on the distribution of the family name (Gourou, 1982a, p.19).

Nguyên Van Khoan was an assistant at the E.F.E.O. and is often cited in Gourou's footnotes as a source about Annamite history and village life (pp. 176, 256, 261, 270-71, 277). Nguyên Van Khoan's research on the *dinh* was considered "majestic" by Pierre Gourou (pp.261, 270-271).

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[29] Pierre Gourou said in 1995: "To describe these cultural differences gave me worries without being convinced that I had said exactly what had to be said, because it is very difficult" (Refer to Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou). This reserve forces Pierre Gourou to depict the human environment more than to conceive the Annamite space.

[30] "*L' esprit annamite, perdu dans la complication des phénomènes vitaux internes ou externes, n' a su qu' y voir des forces, des influences, mais n' a pas su arriver à cette merveilleuse unité qu' a trouvé la philosophie occidentale … Nous éprouvons, pour comprendre le système cosmologique des philosophes chinois, la même difficulté que lorsque nous voulons nous rendre compte des idées plus simples, mais tout aussi confuses, qui ont cours parmi le peuple annamite, relativement à la nature de l' homme, à la nature du monde*".

[31] In this long article which celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Journal of the school, the Bulletin of the E.F.E.O., Louis Finot described the activities of the E.F.E.O. from its origins. In this quotation, he cites Claude Maître, who was a correspondent and worked for the Ecole at the beginning of the 20th century.

Pierre Gourou refers also to other Vietnamese scholars who were not members of the E.F.E.O. such as Nguyen Van Vinh. This intellectual wrote many articles concerning Annamite culture, traditions and language in a revue called *l' Annam nouveau*, that Pierre Gourou mentioned (pp.116, 178, 257, 266-267, 269, 371, 426, 499, 529)[32]. He also used the works of other Vietnamese who published articles connected with agriculture in the *Bulletin Economique de l' Indochine* (pp.391, 393, 404, 529). Generally, Pierre Gourou described the Vietnamese reality he could perceive in the Tonkin delta and referred in footnotes to Nguyên Van Khoan or Nguyen Van Vinh's interpretations or explanations. Thus, Pierre Gourou kept some circumspection in his writing about Vietnamese culture, relying for meanings and understanding on other French or Vietnamese scholars. Pierre Gourou also received the help of some of his Vietnamese students who were able to introduce him to their native villages[33] (refer to Appendix H, PierreGourou' interview 29-8-95).

The presence of Vietnamese scholars and mandarins and the support of his Vietnamese students when visiting villages brought authenticity to Pierre Gourou's descriptions and analysis of the village. It acquainted the reader with Vietnamese culture, but in a limited way because Pierre Gourou was not living with Vietnamese people in the villages (unlike Léopold Cadière, for example) and because the Vietnamese scholars with whom he discussed were only the ones who agreed to work with French colonizers[34]. Their published works were written in French in

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[32] Nguyen Van Vinh also published a Vietnamese edition of *les fables de la Fontaine* and a revue called "Indochinese revue".

[33] One of them, whom Pierre Gourou considered "excellent", "intelligent" and "clear-sighted" was Vo Nguyen Giap, who became later General in Chief of the Viet-Minh Army and the winner of the major battle at Dien Bien Phu. He did some work in Annam (in the Vinh province, from where he originated) for Pierre Gourou concerning his complementary thesis, *Esquisse d' une Etude de l' Habitation Annamite* (Gourou, 1936b). Gourou was his history and geography professor in the equivalent of year 11 and 12, when Giap left prison, after he conspired against colonialization. Pierre Gourou taught him how to use a knife and fork. When Pierre Gourou was sent on a mission to Dalat in 1946, where a Franco-Vietnamese conference was organized, he met Giap for the last time. Giap was representing the Communist party. Pierre Gourou said in regard to him and his fellows that they were "very nice fellows", but added "completely communist, that is to say no more Vietnamese …" Refer to Appendix H on Pierre Gourou's interview 29-8-95.

This conference was Pierre Gourou's last political engagement, apart from during the Second War World, when Pierre Gourou was engaged in the Resistance against nazism and became, in August 1944, the Vice President of the Departemental Committee of the Liberation of Gironde.

[34] This does not mean that these scholars accepted French colonialization. But, generally, they considered that, momentarily, France could help with the modernization of the country. However, the Vietnamese population was generally suspicious of these Vietnamese scholars working for French institutions. We can guess this suspicion in Nguyên Van Khoan's writings, when he notes about village geniuses (Khoan, 1930): "Maybe the villages preserve in their archives the legends of these geniuses; but in this case, they hide them jealously, and the informants, who collect in the provinces, for the E.F.E.O, the legends of geniuses, came always up against categorical refusals from these villages. 'Our papers have been lost ' they answer; 'and it is so old that we have lost the memory of it." ("*Peut-être les villages conservent-ils dans leurs archives les légendes de ces génies; mais en ce cas, ils les cachent jalousement, et les informateurs, qui recueillent dans les provinces, pour l' Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient, les légendes de génies, se sont toujours heurtés à des refus catégoriques de la part des ces villages. 'Nos papiers ont été perdus' répondent-ils; 'et c' est tellement ancien que nous en avons perdu le souvenir' "*) (p.117).

the colonial periodicals. They conformed to French colonial thought and did not express conflicting viewpoints in regard to French representation of Vietnam. For example, the articles written by Vietnamese authors quoted in Pierre Gourou's bibliography concerned mainly the traditional Annamite laws and legislation, communal institutions and village organization, specific villages feasts, Annamite idioms and expressions, and traditional agricultural or handicraft knowledge[35]. All these themes were appreciated by French orientalists and intelligentsia (see above in Chapter 5).

This points out the ambiguousness of French colonialization. There was cultural interaction and relationships between French and Vietnamese scholars, in order to bring a better understanding and knowledge of the Annamite culture[36]. Furthermore, Vietnam was constructed jointly by Vietnamese scholars and French researchers who developed concurrently the idea that the Annamite peasantry exist as a society of villages where each "village community continues to enjoy a large autonomy" symbolised by its "bamboo edge" (Robequain, p.470; Gourou, pp.226, 250). Pierre Gourou wrote:

> *At the same time as protecting against the external perils, the bamboo border is a kind of sacred limit of the village community, the sign of its individuality and its independence*[37]*.*(p.250)*.*

This assimilation of Vietnam as a society of villages was and is still accredited by most Vietnamese and French intellectuals[38]. In the foreword of a recent work concerning the traditional village in Vietnam, it is said that

[35] Pierre Gourou quotes also Vietnamese articles written in Vietnamese concerning the geography of various provinces of the Tonkin delta (p.583).

[36] This cultural interaction is the manifestation of French Oriental humanism mentioned in Chapter 5, footnote 65.

[37] "*En même temps que protection contre les périls extérieurs la haie est une sorte de limite sacrée de la communauté villageoise, le signe de son individualité et de son indépendance*".

[38] Generaly the social life in the village was seen and understood by French intellectuals in the same way the famous historian of the end of the 19th century, Fustel de Coulanges, interpreted the social life of the "Antique City". Annamite families and the villages social life were considered to resemble a microcosme of the greco-romane society (with the ancestors altars, the incense which is burnt or the paternal authority in Annamite houses, the families and village festivities for example). This parallelism occurs for example in Charles Robequain when he describes the Annamite dwelling with " the honor room keeping the souls of the family ancestors…" p.494). If this affinity with greco-romane Antiquity was criticised by a few French and Vietnamese intellectuals, the village remained, however, one of the major features of the French geographical representations of Vietnam.

> The village, the basic peasant community, shaped in the course of struggle against natural calamities and foreign invaders, was in the course of history the cell of our rural society. Besides being an economic unit and a cultural community, it was also a defensive system within its thick bamboo hedge. In many cases, a village also played the role of a commune, the basic administrative unit under the feudal then the colonial regimes. Without an adequate knowledge of the village one cannot understand the structure of Vietnamese society and civilization, as well as the national traditions which were carefully preserved in village life (Phan Huy Le Tu Chi and Nguyen Duc Nghinh, 1993, p.5)[39].

The question is to inquire about the cultural and political limits of this actual partnership, by establishing to what extent Pierre Gourou's regional interpretation is more a French construction rather than an authentic (i.e Annamite influenced) representation of Annamite reality.

Pierre Gourou's cultural considerations and investigations in regard to Indochinese societies can be contrasted with Charles Robequain's discourse. This is partly due to their two different regional frameworks. First, the choice of a contrasted human framework has constrained Charles Robequain to analyze the region through an ethnographic approach (section 7.3), describing the characters of each of the various ethnic groups of Thanh-Hoá (the specificity of their respective costumes, social organizations, habitat, agricultural and craft techniques). Second, by contrast, Pierre Gourou's homogenous and historical Annamite region has led him to focus on the socio-cultural significance of the Annamite village and peasantry (section 7.4).

7.3 Charles Robequain's Cultural Discourse and its Ethnographic 'Order'

What are the concepts chosen by Charles Robequain to identify the human and cultural personality of the Thanh Hoá region? On which logic is his socio-cultural argumentation about the Indochinese societies positioned? In other words, does the Indochinese context allow Charles Robequain to develop a particular cultural approach?

7.3.1 The formulation of Indochinese society in terms of "ethnic groups"

In the Indochinese context, where ethnic differences are essential, Charles Robequain investigated the human problematic in terms of "ethnic groups". This was in keeping with the logic of the Vidalian opposition between mountain people and people of the plain, or between sedentary and nomad societies. He begins his human presentation of Thanh-Hoá by determining "the main ethnic groups" (pp.93-142). He opposes the minority mountain ethnic groups (in his

[39] See also below, in section 7.4.2.2, the quotation of Lê Bá Tháo (1997, p.327).

first volume) with the Annamite living in the Delta plain (in his second volume). He compares the various mountain ethnic groups and societies, the Mu'ô'ng and the Thai (pp.113-131, 143-222) and the Man and Mèo (pp.222-238).

7.3.1.1 A comparative approach to ethnic groups

Charles Robequain brings a comparative, interethnic approach to the study of Indochinese groups. In this way, he focuses on the ethnographic specificity of the geographical approach. The distinctive criteria differentiating between the ethnic groups were the various material and technical aspects (traditional costumes, habitat, agricultural techniques) of the ways of life and the impact of these techniques and aspects on the social order (eg. regime of landownership, social hierarchy). Charles Robequain does not root ethnic differentiation in linguistic differences such as the differences established by the linguists and ethnologists of the time between the Thai, and the Annamite and Muong languages[40]. He does not fix them either on cultural aspects such as the values, or the myths representing the structures of customary understandings of each ethnic society that the sociologists of the time analyzed. For example, although Charles Robequain quotes in his bibliography (p.625) two eminent French ethnologists, Marcel Mauss and Lucien Lévy-Brühl, who try to understand the social life of primitive societies through their various cultural meanings, he does not apply their ethnological approach to the Thanh Hoà ethnic groups he was studying. Marcel Mauss, in his work about exchange and the obligation to offer and donate in primitive societies[41] (Mauss, 1989), advanced the notion of the totality of social phenomena (*"fait social total"*). With this notion, all the aspects of social life are coordinated through the cultural accomplishments and behaviour of the group. In his work in regard to "mental functions in inferior societies" Lucien Lévy-Brühl (1922, p.625) analysed the specificity of the mentality of "primitive societies" compared to the rational thought of "civilized" societies. Compared to these ethnologists, the cultural aspects of the geography of Charles Robequain are not related to the symbolic, mythical or spiritual organization of the group. Using a more materialistic interpretation, they are associated with the organization of the

[40] Charles Robequain refers in his bibliography to articles of Henri Maspéro published in the Bulletin of the E.F.E.O. (see p.621) or other more general studies, such as the works of Meillet and Cohen (*Les langues dans le monde*, Société de Linguistique de Paris, 1924), where the Thai language is distinguished from both the Muong and Annamite ones, according to phonetic criteria.

[41] Charles Robequain refered to Marcel Mauss's famous work, "*essai sur le don*" (see also his footnote 2 p.549. "*Essai sur le don*" was first published in 1923-1924, just before Charles Robequain started his thesis. But Charles Robequain did not mention in his thesis the paper Marcel Mauss gave in 1902 at an International conference in Hanoi in on the study of the Far East, where "he made a presentation about a research program on indigenous ethnic groups in Indochina" (Nguyen Van Chinh, Modern ethnology in Vietnam started with French School, http://www.vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn , Monday, August 9, 1999).

environment by the society, through its agricultural techniques (section 7.3.3.2), its exploited resources and its tools, its type of constructions and habitat, and other discernible aspects such as the costumes[42].

> *The Mu'ô'ng does not appear at all as an intermediate dialect between the Annamite and the Thai. The Mu'ô'ng and the Thai are dissimilar, and we go suddenly from one to the other; the linguist must clear here a large gap.*
>
> *But not the geographer. In fact, this very distinct border does not correspond to a sudden transformation of the ways of life ... We do not go in crossing it from a mode of culture, from one mode of habitat to another[43]..*
>
> *The Mu'ô'ng and Thai costumes are both more opposite to the costume of the Delta than they are distinguished from each other. With the appearance of the huts on piles[44], new clothing informs the traveler that he is leaving Annamite country, p98[45].*

His university training also influences the ethnic approach of Charles Robequain where the geographical studies were associated with historical ones. Traditionally, the French historical sciences highlight the contacts and interpenetration between civilizations and seek understanding of societies through epochs: the Antiquity, Middle Age (or Medieval Age), the classical time, and the Contemporary[46].

7.3.1.2 A socio-historical approach to ethnic communities.

Throughout chapter III of his first volume, "the social organization and the ownership of mountain people", Charles Robequain refers to the feudal society of the Medieval Occident.

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[42] In the anglo-saxon world, similarly to French ethnologists, in the thirties, Robert Redford studied the Indian culture in Mexico, then conceived an ideal primitive society, the "folk society" (Redford, 1940), and analyzed how tribal or peasant societies change under urban influence, introducing the concept of acculturation. If Robert Redford's notion of acculturation is present in Charles Robequain's writing when he considers that "it is the mountain people who change through the contact of a superior civilization" (p.141), it is restricted to only tangible aspects (language, clothes, and huts).

[43] *"Le Muong et le Thai accusent de grandes dissemblances, et on passe brusquement de l' un à l' autre; le linguiste doit franchir ici un large fossé. Mais pas le géographe. En effet, cette frontière si nette ne correspond nullement à une transformation soudaine des genres de vie…On ne passe pas en la franchissant d' un mode de culture, d' un mode d' habitat à un autre."*

[44] The mountain habitat, with its huts on piles distinguishes it from the Annamite habitat, where the houses are built directly on the soil.

[45] *"C' est ainsi que les costumes muong et thai s' opposent beaucoup plus tous les deux au costume du delta qu' ils ne se distinguent entre eux. Avec l' apparition des cases sur pilotis, celle d' un habillement nouveau avertit le voyageur qu' il quitte le pays annamite."*

[46] At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the referenced academic historians were Ernest Lavisse, Fustel de Coulanges (mentionned above) and Henri Pirenne. Fustel de Coulanges and Henri Pirenne renew the history of France, Fustel de Coulanges through the analysis of French historical institutions and society, and Henri Pirenne through the primacy of economic factors in the understanding of history. But the most popular historian was the republican Ernest Lavisse who reinforced the idea of the excellence of the republican model. However, all of them submit to an evolutionist division of history in periods where medieval feudal society was presented as an outdated order.

Since the French Revolution, this period has been associated with the idea of an outdated political order characterized by the domination and the privileges of the lords of the land, this seignorial authority being considered as antipathetic to human liberty[47] (Michelet, 1952, p.VIII, vol.2).

Thus, Charles Robequain analyzes the main ethnic groups living in this "*arrière-pays*" (hinterland country) through the social organization of the two main ethnic groups, the Muong and the Thai, comparing them to a feudal society of the same type as occurred in the occidental Middle Age. The Asian words are translated into the French Middle Age vocabulary ("*Tho ti"* into *seigneurs*). Hence, Charles Robequain inserts his explanation of the mountain society into the model of the occidental medieval rural system, organized via the lord' s domains and seigniories. Those were divided into two parts: the *reserve*, that the Lord keeps for himself, and another that the Lord concedes to the peasants living there in return for various taxes, services and seignorial obligations. On that account, according to Charles Robequain, the Muong and Thai territories are divided into geographical areas called *mu'ô'ng*, analogous to the domains where a *Tho ti* ("the unique landowner and the absolute master" p.142, equivalent to the Lords) has hereditary powers. He rules the people who live on it, and "reserves for his own personal consumption the most beautiful rice-fields"[48] (p144). His subjects owe taxes, dues, and corvees to him similar to the medieval peasant charges. We may also note that to analyze this society, Robequain uses the work of mainly French writers; there are only three references to Vietnamese or Asian works in his bibliography[49], and eighty french ones (pp.619-622). In fact, Charles Robequain (like Pierre Gourou) did not speak or read the Vietnamese or other Indochinese languages, and had to rely on translations and translators. Thus, Charles Robequain's interpretation of Indochinese societies has a French more than a Vietnamese structure.

In summary, Charles Robequain's ethnographical approach is characterized by French evolutionist assumptions. French civilization is erected as the norm and model and Charles Robequain considered that the Muong and Thai societies have only reached a level of

[47] Nowadays, French historians of the Middle-Age (such as George Duby, Robert Fossier, Jacques Le Goff, Régine Pernoud or Philippe Contamine) give a quite different version of this period, insisting on its enlightments and the refinements of its arts and civilization. Other historians of the Asian civilizations think about the ambiguities and ambivalences of the French historical concepts when they are applied in non-European contexts. See also below, footnote 51.

[48] "*Le Tho Ti, théoriquement maître du sol, se réserve, pour sa consommation personnelle, les plus belles rizières"*.

[49] One of them was in fact translated in French: Ma Touan Lin, "Ethnographie des peuples étrangers à la Chine". The two other were in Vietnamese and published by Nam Phong in Hanoi, Nguyen Van Ngoc, "Nguoi Muong" (Les Muong) and Dien Quach "Hoa Binh quan lang su luoc" (Histoire sommaire des seigneurs de Hoa Binh).

development comparable to the Western medieval world. According to Mrs Thanh Tâm Langlet[50], these concepts of feudality and seigniories "are not at all applicable or plausible in the Vietnamese context...and lead to deviations in the interpretations. The feudal order, as Charles Robequain presents it, does not exist in ancient Vietnam" (Personal communication, 13 September 1995)[51]. In addition, (personal communication, 21 August 2002), Mrs Thanh Tâm Langlet underlined that "concepts which are used in Western history such as feudality are not transposable in ancient Vietnam, even if circumstance may sometimes suggest some similarities". She considers that the notion of of feudality in Sino-Vietnamese history is based on different realities compared to the western notion.

From that recent perspective, and using Edward Said's terminology, the Indochinese societies were "misrepresented" by Charles Robequain. As well, we can argue in the same way as Marie-Louise Pratt that this classification is a form of colonial authority which displaces the histories of Indochinese communities and "reinvents" them through the "imperial eyes" of France (Pratt, 1992).

According to Vietnamese scholars, Charles Robequain's French way of thinking brings him to write with colonial misunderstanding about the functioning of the mountain societies and people:

[50] See footnote 46 in Chapter 4.

[51] In fact, nowadays, in the context of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam with its marxist terminology, intellectuals such as Nguyen Khac Vien (1993a, b), Dong Truong Phuong and Lê Bá Tháo (see above), speak about "feudal regime" to designate the unequal order of the Annamite society before the communist Revolution, where mandarins, notables and landowners were "exploiting" the peasants.

But in the Indochinese societies such as the ones described by Charles Robequain, the social organization has a Confucian inspiration, such as in traditional China, quite distinct from the Western feudal social and political inspiration. As George Duby (1985, vol.7, p.874) noticed: "Feudality must be explained as a particular aspect in the evolution of the civilization in Western Europe in which it characterizes a definite period. A similar juridical, economical and social entity cannot be found in the Antiquity, in Asian history or today in the structures of some african societies, merely just a few elements of this whole can be noticed. Only one country, Japan, had types of relationships comparable with Western Europe…Although a characteristic of Western Europe is missing in Japonese feudality: Japan ignored the reciprocity of the mutual responsibilities which united a particular vassal with a particular Lord [in Western Europe]…"

The thð ti, theoretically the master of the land, reserves for his personal consumption, the most beautiful rice fields... All the inhabitants bring to him, in well-determined cases, fixed dues, in nature or in cash... The people owe him tribute for the wedding of his children, for the death of his nearest and dearest... They build his vast hut in lim[52] *and other well-chosen woods, and he has always his part, and the most beautiful, of the hunting...outside these precise obligations, he can require extraordinary services. The delegate of Bái Thu'o'ng saw still, in 1910, all tribute " going to cut pieces of lim in the forest in order to pay the debts contracted in Hanoi by its Lord", and, this work being not sufficient, it must sell also its buffalo. To the intervention of the administrator, these people answer "that it was their affair, that they were happy to sacrifice themselves for their Lord, and that nobody complains".*

*In fact, it is a traditional organization and perfectly adapted to the mentality of these peasants: they can recognize its abuses, but they believe it is necessary to their happiness and look at it as the condition of their very existence. They address, in 1909, to the same delegate of Bái Thu'o'ng, a significant request: "Although simple spirit, we know that children must always respect their parents, even if they are unworthy; so, even oppressed, we must behave as we ignore it; so, even unhappy, we must behave as we ignore our misfortune". (*pp.144-145*)*[53]*.*

This French influenced approach is also present in Charles Robequain's description of the Annamite communities, where the French Republican references and values of equality and democracy underpin his critical argumentation (see in Chapter 5, section 5.4.1.2, quotation from Charles Robequain's page 470).

7.3.2 A folkloristic interpretation

The description of the material and cultural aspects of the different communities of Thanh Hoá are presented with detail and precision through a 'folklorist' interpretation[54]. The distinctive cultural marks like the specificity of the habitat and of the clothing are examined through their links to foreign traditional and pre-industrial societies, which belong to neither the French civilization nor the Occidental world. The notion of contrast, the feeling of exoticism, archaism, anachronism or unrefinedness often rise to the surface in Charles Robequain 's writing. In contrast, the norms of French culture appear implictly superior.

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[52] Lim is a Vietnamese high quality wood, able to resist humidity.

[53] "*Le Tho ti, théoriquement maître du sol, se réserve, pour sa consommation personnelle, les plus belles rizières…on lui doit un tribut pour le mariage de ses enfants, et surtout de son fils aîné, pour le décès de ses proches…on lui construit une vaste case en lim et autres bois choisis, et il a toujours sa part, et la plus belle, des produits de la chasse…Le déléghé de Bai Thuong voyait encore, en 1910, toute une tribut "allant couper des pièces de lim dans la forêt afin de payer les dettes contractées à Hanoi par son seigneur. A l' intervention de l' administrateur, ces gens répondirent "que c' était leur affaire, qu' ils étaient heureux de se sacrifier pour leur seigneur, et que nul ne se plaignait"*.

"En effet, c' est une organisation traditionnelle et parfaitement adaptée à la mentalité de ces paysans: ils peuvent en connaître les abus, mais ils la croient nécessaire à leur bonheur et la regardent comme la condition même de leur existence même. Ils adressaient, en 1909, au même délégué de Bai Thuong, une requête significative: "quoique simples d' esprit, nous savons que les enfants doivent toujours respecter leurs parents, même s' ils sont indignes; aussi, bien que malheureux, nous devons nous comporter comme si nous ignorions notre malheur".

[54] Folkloric means in this instance the specific traditions and customs of the ethnic group which are depicted by Charles Robequain.

7.3.2.1 Clothing as an essential factor of ethnic identification.

The costumes are carefully described in that they are a major element of the identification of an ethnic group and its degree of originality.

> *To say the truth, the review of the clothing of Men has very little significance ... But, following the general law, the female costume is much more characteristic. The peasant woman of the Delta dresses, as her Delta fellows, with a tunic going generally to the knee, closed by a belt; this tunic opens in a triangle on the breast, revealing the "cái yêm", simple piece of material which covers the breasts and holds to the neck with attaches (pl.XXIX,A). Underneath, the skirt juts out ... Except the 'mamillaire', with often questionable white colour, and the belt... everything has the brown colour of cu nâu, with infinitely diverse nuances - saffron, Tabai, dead leaves - following the treatment of the material, the age of the cloth and the fate of the patching, but always neutral, colourless, sad and so well melted with the loam waters of the rivers and the soil of the reaped rice field*[55]*...(*p.99*).*

We find also in the last sentence, through the association of the colours of the clothes compared to the colours of the natural environment, a connection with the idea of harmony and adaptation (see above in Chapter 5, section 5.3). The style and words used in the description could also suggest curiosity and unfamiliarity more than a cultural blessing of the ethnic group. For example, about the Man ethnic group, Charles Robequain writes, "the women have all kept their special and curious getup..." (p.224). Thus, the description of ethnic groups perceived as archaic by Charles Robequain become occasionally tinted with exoticism, where traditions, social practices, and organization of the household are described now and then with negative connotations.

7.3.2.2 Social practices and the organization of the household.

The picturesque description of dietary practices and rural dwellings accentuates the folkloristic alignment of the argument. For example, Charles Robequain (pp.332-333) describes the Annamite ways of cooking, eating, and using the rice in the Delta plain:

> *It is, in fact, braised cooked in half water of its volume, hot and still steamed, each grain going separately from the other, and distilling a delicate aroma, that it (the rice) is the most ordinary consumed*[56] *...*

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55 "*Mais, suivant la loi générale, le costume féminin est bien plus caractéristique. La paysanne du delta se vêt, comme ses congénères du Tonkin, d' une tunique descendant généralement au genou, fermée par une ceinture; cette tunique ouverte en triangle sur la poitrine, laisse voir le 'cai yem', simple pièce d' étoffe qui couvre les seins et retenue au cou par des attaches (pl.XXIX, A). Par-dessous, dépasse la jupe, tombant jusqu' à mi-mollet…sauf le mamillaire, d' un blanc souvent douteux, et la ceinture d' un tissu parfois éclatant, tout a la teinte brune du cu nau, aux nuances infiniment diverses – safran, tabac, feuilles mortes – suivant le traitement de l' étoffe, l' âge du vêtement et le hasard des repiéçages, mais toujours neutre, terne, triste, et se fondant si bien avec les eaux limoneuses des fleuves et la terre des rizières moissonnées*".

56 "*C' est,en effet, cuit à l' étuvée dans la moitié de son volume d' eau, chaud et fumant encore, chaque grain se détachant des autres et dégageant un arôme délicat, qu' il est le plus ordinairement consommé*".

Charles Robequain depicts the plan of the habitat (Appendix G.5, "Annamite hut at Trunh Thon") not only in a functional way (such as in Albert Demangeon's thesis pp.300-371), but also including cultural facts relative to the Asian context. He writes about the interior of the Annamite home:

> *...The (Annamite) type-house, the most frequent in all the regions, joints together two parts in a square (pl. XXXII, B): the partitions of bamboo, that the harder wooden columns setting on platforms reinforce, divide it in 3 or 4 compartments, on hard packed surface. The bigger occupies the centre (fig.33): it is the room of honour taking cover of the souls of the family ancestors, attached to wooden steles setting on a shelve...In front of the altar, a camp bed, covered by the best matting, welcomes the travellers; on the partitions hang, calligraphied in big black or gold letters on red paper, the "parallel sentences" borrowed from the Chinese moralists; imprinting display, in clashing and vivid colours, heroic attitudes, grimacing or merciful figures of the spirits, of historical or legendary characters. It is there, in front of the cups of "nep" and in the smoke of the sticks of incense, that are accomplished, for the anniversaries, for the weddings or the major feasts like the Tet, the traditional rites, provided by the family chief, and necessary to the happiness of the people dead and alive*[57]*...* (p.494).

By opposition, the Man and Meo habitat is outlined in more negative terms, Charles Robequain mentioning "the miserable altar of the ancestors" or that "dirty covers and wooden trunks lay on the ground in huge disorder" (p.226).

Compared to other French geographers, such as Albert Demangeon or Raoul Blanchard, his descriptions of dwellings are more attentive to the ethnic groups in their daily homelife. The people and particularly the women or the children are more visible, and described in greater detail in their various daily routines than in other French regional theses. Charles Robequain stressed the hard agriculture tasks that women achieve in a joyful mood. He wrote (pp.371-372):

[57] *"La maison-type, la plus fréquente dans toutes les régions, assemble deux corps en équerre (pl.XXXII, B): des cloisons de bambou, que renforcent des colonnes de bois plus dur sur les socles, la divisent en 3 ou 4 compartiments, au sol de terre battue. Le plus grand occupe généralement le centre (fig.33): c' est la pièce d' honneur abritant les âmes des ancêtres familiaux, attachés aux stèles de bois dressées sur une étagère, et où se superposent les caractères de leurs noms. Devant l' autel, un lit de camp, que couvrent les meilleures nattes de la maison, accueille les visiteurs; aux cloisons pendent, calligraphiées en grandes lettres noires ou or sur fond de papier rouge, les "sentences parallèles" empruntées aux moralistes chinois; des gravures étalent, en couleurs heurtées et vives, les attitudes héro?ques, les figures grimaçantes ou miséricordieuses de génies, de personnages historiques ou légendaires. C' est là, devant les bols de 'nep' et dans la fumée des baguettes d'encens, que s' accomplissent, aux anniversaires, pour les mariages et lors des grandes fêtes comme le tet, les rites traditionnels, assurés par le chef de famille, et nécessaires au bonheur des morts et des vivants…"*

The rice transplantation is almost always left to women: skirt or trousers rolled high up on thighs, legs in water until the calf, they thrust in the wet earth, with a regular gesture, and tiny bundles, the rice shoot … they often work in groups in the big rice fields, moving forward all together: hard work, because they are bending through the heavy heat, under the diffuse light which is reflected by the water, causing ophtalmies and conjunctivitis, getting up from time to time getting back their breath, and laughing happily to the passer by who calls them, despite their tiredness …[58].

His descriptions were tinged with moral sensitivity towards women and children. He was shocked, for example, by the heavy burdens, hard physical tasks and work done by the Muong women, while the Muong men have their "arms dangling ... ", "continue to hang about ... ", or "go to bed ... " (pp.198-199). This is also partly related to the French standard discourse about women, women being considered physically weaker than men. It was assumed that women were in need of being protected by their husbands and only turned towards domestic tasks while the husband worked on tasks requiring more physical strength. Thus, Robequain's ethnographical discourse expresses occasionally his personal feelings and moral sense, which are to some extent affected by French ethics. His approach was more descriptive than the conceptual discourses of French sociologists. Charles Robequain did not introduce in his regional geography specific ethnogeographical methods or theories. The traditions, customs and beliefs appear in his writing, but he did not reconstitute the cultural or religious perception that the ethnic groups assign to space or life. Consequently, impregnated with French positivist philosophy, Charles Robequain recorded the role of geomancy in the habitat. But he did not institute it as a central or a substantial criterion in the Indochinese conception of habitat. He gave greater emphasis to "common sense" or rationalist aesthetics than to cultural metaphysical interpretation, often associated with the idea of superstition.

58 "*Le repiquage est presque toujours laissé aux femmes: la jupe ou le pantalon haut relevé sur les cuisses, les jambes dans l' eau jusqu' au mollet, elles enfoncent dans la vase, d' un geste régulier, et par faisceaux menus, les ma, dont les bottes ont été préalablement réparties sur la surface à couvrir; elles travaillent souvent par groupes dans les grandes rizières, avançant toutes à la fois: travail pénible, car elles restent courbées dans une chaleur lourde, sous une lumière diffuse et que l' eau réverbère, mère des ophtalmies et des conjonctivites , se relevant parfois pour reprendre souffle, et rire joyeusement, malgré la fatigue, au passant qui les hèle …*"

The limits of the properties, which cover a square or rectangular surface, have been complicated with reddens, the way successive exchanges and purchases developed. This often winding network of lanes, inside the Annamite village, and for the explanation of which we must not give only superstitious and geomantic reasons, the wish to make the access to the houses difficult to the pernicious breath. It is still wrong that the hut is always orientated in the same way. We could not discover some regulation about that, and, when the chief of the family calls the geomancy man before building his hut, the specialists advice agree almost invariably with the the common sense observations. These religious preoccupations are more noticeable in front of the rich houses, of which the principal door is hidden by a screen of masonry or pruned small shrub, and anyway it would be proper not to exaggerate them. This obstacle to the bad influences does not turn out to be essential, and is often only a pattern of ornament[59]*.* (p.497).

More generally, for the French reader, Charles Robequain's interpretation of geomancy reveals some skepticism in regard to Annamite beliefs, despite the fact that he recognized their importance to geography (as we have mentioned in Chapter 5, section 5.3.3.2). We can read, for example, about the wealth of the market of Cho' Ban

*It is more difficult to explain the prosperity of Ch**o**' Ban (pl.XLIV), located in the huyên of...The indigenous pretend, without laughing that it is due to the rarity of flies: I could not verify the assertion. This advantage, they add, is supported by the excellence of the geomantic situation: the market occupies a position similar to the mouth of a toad, of which the 4 paths represent the 4 legs; the toad looks at the moon and swallows the flies. As weird as the explanation appears, it is probable that this belief in the geomantic value of the space is at the origin of the wealth of the market. And we think that we would find, in Annam like in China, many examples of these correlation which appear to us puerile and ridiculous, but which, however, because they are objects of faith, have enslaved the masses. We can however imagine, with some likelihood, that the mandarin founder of Ch**o** Ban was clever enough to conciliate the geomancers, and to make them proclaim the virtues of the site*[60] *...(*p.540).

In summary, through a detailed description, Charles Robequain provides a picturesque and exotic description in which the ethnic groups are enclosed by their folklore and traditions. As with most ethnologists of his time, his discourse presents the mountain groups and their folkloric aspects, from the perspective that they belong to a bygone time, and describes the traditional aspects of the ethnic groups as destined to disappear. His discourse is also

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59 "*Les limites des propriétés, qui couvraient primitivement une surface carrée ou rectangulaire, se sont compliquées de redans, au gré des échanges ou des achats successifs: de là, ce réseau souvent tortueux des ruelles, à l' intérieur du village annamite, et pour l' explication duquel il ne faut pas invoquer seulement les raisons géomantiques ou superstitieuses, le désir de rendre l' accès des maisons difficiles aux souffles pernicieux. Il est faux encore que la case soit toujours orientée de la même façon: on ne saurait découvrir de règles à ce sujet, et, lorsque le chef de famille fait appel au géomancien avant de construire sa case, les conseils de ce spécialiste s' accordent presque invariablement avec les observations du sens commun. Ces préoccupations religieuses sont plus apparentes devant les maisons riches, dont la porte principale est souvent masquée par un écran de maçonnerie ou d' arbustes taillés; et encore convient-il de ne pas les exagérer: cet obstacle aux mauvaises influences ne s' avère pas indispensable, et n' est souvent qu' un motif d' ornement*".

60 "*Il est plus difficile d' expliquer la prospérité de cho Ban (pl.XLIV), situé dans le huyen de Yen Dinh, à peu près à égale distance d Song Ma et du Song Chu, près du village de Trai Thon (t. Trinh Xa). Les indigènes prétendent sans rire qu' elle est due à la rareté des mouches: je n' ai pas pu vérifier l' assersion. Cet avantage, ajoutent-ils, tient à l' excellence de la situation géomantique: le marché occupe comme la bouche d' un crapaud, dont 4 sentiers représentent les 4 pattes; le crapaud regarde la lune et avale les mouches. Quelque baroque que semble l' explication, il est probable que cette croyance en la valeur géomantique du lieu est à l' origine de la fortune du marché; et nous pensons qu' on trouverait, en Annam comme en Chine, maints exemples de ces corrélations qui nous paraissent puériles et ridicules, mais qui néanmoins, parce qu' elles sont objet de foi, ont asservi la foule. On peut cependant imaginer, avec quelque vraissemblance, que le mandarin fondateur de cho Ban fut assez habile pour se concilier les géomanciens, et leur faire proclamer les vertues du site*".

underpinned by the colonial myth of different levels of civilization, the Man and Meo being described as belonging to inferior civilizations compared to other mountain ethnic groups and the Annamite.

7.3.3 Charles Robequain 's evolutionist conception of civilization

7.3.3.1 The Evolutionist influence

The evolutionist influence could be seen in the comparison of the Mu'ô'ng inhabitants and children. In that account, society was conceived through the metaphor of the human organism reproducing the same stages as the individual who moves along the path towards human development. It is a similar means by which the English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer[61] explained the evolution of human beings through his theory of "organicism" (Spencer, 1955). The Mu'ô'ng and Thai and other mountain ethnic groups are considered to be still in childhood, that is to say behind the times compared to the occidental world. The Annamite civilization was considered superior, but still backward compared to the colonial country of France. The Mu'ô'ng and Thai societies move forward toward the Annamite one, seen as superior because of its more democratic organization, its sedentary and intensive agriculture, and its complex way of life. But France was seen as improving and refining it, and able to do so because of its "superiority" (pp.611-612). The concept of superior civilization that we developed in chapter 5, section 5.4.1.2 is clearly applied here.

> *With this study of Thanh Hoá, we see at least how the Annamite population achieved such remarkable fortune in the oriental Indochina, and continues to grow at the expense of the neighbouring peoples. All around the Delta, the mountain people mixed with the peasants of the plain...little by little, these mountain people, giving up to the pressure of a powerful nation, strongly organized, and constantly enterprising, are transformed... It is the mountain man who changes, through the contact with a civilization superior to his own one*[62]*...* (pp.140-141).

Charles Robequain's description also considers the specificity of the socio-cultural and juridical conceptions of the Indochinese communities. Charles Robequain investigated the social

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61 Herbert Spencer was a British philosopher and sociologist. His philosophy, where human life is perpetuated thanks to the continuous adaptation of human organisms to the changing environment, is labelled "evolutionist". Herbert Spencer underlined the analogies between individuals and societies as well as some selective differences between them. He demonstrated that social evolution depends upon the submission of the interests of the less qualified socio-economic functions to the superior ones (Wiltshire, 1978).

62 *"A cette étude du Thanh Hoá, on voit enfin comment le peuple annamite, parvenu à une si remarquable fortune dans l' Indochine orientale, continue de s' accroître aux dépens des groupes voisins. Tout autour du delta, les montagnards se mêlent aux paysans de la plaine; peu à peu, ces montagnards, cédant à la pression d' une nation puissante, solidement organisée, et constamment entreprenante, se transforment…Mais c' est le montagnard surtout qui change, au contact d' une civilisation supérieure à la sienne".*

and economic life of mountain societies. He shows the equilibrium reached by the so-called Indochinese feudal system through the regime of possessions and the social life of its inhabitants. He drew out evolutionist and comparative dimensions between the occidental and the Indochinese societies and between Asian societies:

> *It is quite difficult to fix the conceptions of the mountain people in clear regulations or law principles. Among them, in fact, there is not, strictly, private property other than of the personal estates: money, clothes, tools, furniture, domestic animal, harvest, and the hut. As regard to the landownership, as the eminent rights of the Lord meet with the one of the tribe, and offers, depending on the circumstances, various characters*[63]*...(*p.148*).*

> *All in all, this regime of landownership is so confusing, so poorly defined, escaping any systematization, reveals itself, with practice to have regular functioning. Clashes of interests are rare in the tribe, harsh arguments remain exceptional. The power of the Lords explains only partly this general harmony, which is not only due to the resignation of people. We must see here also the result of the relative abundance of lands... on the other hand, the extension and the multiplication of the rây have no other limits than the physical energy of each. At least, mutual aid is universally accomplished: when a hut is about to be ruined, all the habitants of the village without major occupation participate in the rebuilding of a new home... The cutting of the biggest trees in the rây, the planting and the rice harvest are also done all together ... In these mountains, we do not meet, as in the Delta, starving people or mendicants: a family with a deficit harvest will always find among its neighbours those who will give it rice and corn.*[64]*..(*p.150*).*

> *When the mountain man loses his tho ti, he loses at the same time his costume and his own customs, he becomes Annamite*[65]*. (*p.151).

The comparative approach relies on the research of the origin of the customs and social character over a long history, which lets Charles Robequain search for common origins to social characteristics and customs present in different societies. Charles Robequain's cultural geography is partly embedded in diffusionist philosophy (chapter 3, section 3.1.1.2, and in this chapter the examples below extracted from pp.101-102 in Robequain's thesis). For that reason, Charles Robequain believed that the Annamite people were subjugated to the same feudal

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63 "*Il est bien difficile de fixer les conceptions des montagnards en règles aussi nettes que celles de nos codes. Chez eux, il n' y a, strictement, de propriétés particulière que celle des biens meubles: argent, habits, outils, mobilier, animaux domestiques, produits des récoltes, et celle de la case même. Quant à la propriété du sol, comme les droits éminents du seigneur se confondent avec ceux de la tribu, elle offre, suivant les cas, des caractères divers*".

64 *En somme, ce régime de propriété si confus, si mal défini, qui échappe à toute systématisation, se révèle, à la pratique, d' un fonctionnement très régulier. Les conflits d' intérêts sont rares dans la tribu, les discussions âpres restent exceptionnelles. La puissances des seigneurs n' explique qu' en partie cette harmonie générale, qui ne tient pas seulement à la résignation du peuple. Il faut y voir aussi l' effet de l' abondance relative des terres: si on ne trouve plus à transformer en rizières irriguées de très vastes étendues, on peut cependant accroître encore, surtout dans le Sud de la province, la superficie cultivée régulièrement; d' autre part, l`extension et la multiplication des "ray" n' ont d' autres limites que les forces physiques de chacun. Enfin, l''entr'aide est universellement pratiquée: quand une case menace de ruine, tous les habitants du village qui n' ont pas d' occupation urgente participent à la construction d' une nouvelle demeure…L' abattage des plus gros arbres dans les ray, le repiquage et la moisson du riz irrigué se font également en commun…Dans ces montagnes, on ne rencontre pas, comme dans les deltas, d' affamé ou de mendiant: une famille dont la récolte est déficitaire trouvera toujours parmi ses voisins qui lui donnera du riz et du ma?s…".*

65 *"Lorsque le montagnard perd son tho ti, c' est qu' il perd en même temps son costume, sa langue et ses coutumes propres, c' est qu' il devient annamite".*

regime, before Chinese domination. He analyzed also the similarity in customs between the mountain ethnic groups and the Annamite, such as the custom to keep corpses a very long time before burying them:

> *It seems that the Muong and Annamite essential conceptions are not irreducible to each other. Thus, this custom to keep the coffin in the hut a long time - which appears to be original – was previously a habit of the plain … The rituals which circumscribe the birth and wedding ceremonies seem to indicate also a substratum of common beliefs*[66].(pp.107-108)

As we mentioned in Chapter 3, (3.1.2.2), Charles Robequain created a hierarchy of ethnic groups by establishing their location in the more global breadth of civilization, conceived as a body and a standard of social and technical characteristics.

More precisely, within the Indochinese context, the elements of civilization presented by Charles Robequain were related to Indochinese socio-cultural meanings and facts. For instance, Charles Robequain evoked the traditional social organization (feudalism...), attitudes and values (sorcerer, legends, customs), the forms of communications (language, writing), along with the common constituents (rice production, elements borrowed from dominant or marginal civilizations) and the differences between the various Asian groups.

> *...Here are two groups distinguished clearly by their language, and also their writing: the Thai have, indeed, characters close to the Laotian and Burma alphabets, while the Mu'ò'ng use, like the Annamite, Chinese type characters. But the other elements of the civilization seem common, or anyway not very different; could we know which group has imposed on them?*

> *There is, among the countries with the Mu'ô'ng language, a region which seems to have been better conserved than any other: it is the Thach Bi...Surrounded by high mountains, which have kept it relatively protected from peaceful infiltration and violent invasions, it keeps still today its feudal organization, its legends and antique customs. It has among the Mu'ò'ngs of North Indochina ... a very special repute: its sorcerers are reputed to be the best and we speak about them only with veneration. This emanates as a mysterious perfume of pure tradition and old glory; it looks like the true heart of the Mu'ô'ng country, and around it seems crystallized a kind of patriotism Mu'ô'ng. Is not it that has shined forth on all the high Thanh Hoá?*

66 *"Il semble que les conceptions essentielles des Muong et des Annamites ne sont pas irréductibles les unes aux autres. Ainsi, cette coutume de garder longtemps le cercueil dans la case - qui passe pour originale – fut jadis une habitude de la plaine: au XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe siècle, les cadavres sont encore conservés un ou deux ans dans la maison des riches Annamites. Les rites qui entourent les cérémonies de la naissance et du mariage semblent indiquer aussi un substratum de croyances communes"*.

But, on the other hand, this mountain civilization is found again ...among the populations with the Thai language...Towards the N.E. and the S.W, ...as the ancient society breaks up, the ancient customs become obliterated and contaminated with borrowings from the Annamite civilization[67]*.* (pp.101-102).

Charles Robeqauin related particularly the primordial place of rice cultivation within the Indochinese and Far East civilizations:

The civilization of the the mountain people is essentially an agricultural civilization, and like in the totality of Indochina, it is based overall on rice[68]*.* (p.152).

We know the primordial place of this cereal in the Far East. It constitutes often, apparently, the 7/10, or even the 8/10 of the subsistence of an Annamite peasant. Early on, the mother stuffs her child with it, whose belly inflates in a funny way under its short skirt; and the old man without teeth digests it still without difficulties[69]*.* (p.332).

And Charles Robequain explains in a footnote that "eating", in the Annamite language, is said as "ãn co'm", or eating rice.

Among the elements of civilization noted by Charles Robequain, the introspective kind are more often evoked than analyzed, while the societal, technical and economic ones are largely developed through the different chapters (specifically the social organization and the agricultural techniques of the mountain ethnic groups and of the Annamite). It gives to Charles Robequain's human argumentation a technical and factual orientation similar to many other Vidalian discourses, rather than providing a 'geo-cultural' understanding of Indochinese societies. Like most French geographers, Charles Robequain focuses on the spatial distribution of agricultural

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[67] *"Ainsi voici deux groupes se distinguant nettement par leur langue, et aussi par leur écriture: les Thai ont, en effet, des caractères qui se rapprochent des alphabets laotiens et birmans, tandis que les Muong utilisent, comme les Annamites, les caractères de types chinois. Mais les autres éléments de civilisation paraissent communs, en tout cas bien peu différents; peut-on savoir quel groupe les a imposés à l' autre?*

Etendons notre enquête hors de la province. Il est, parmi les pays de langue Muong, une région qui semble avoir conservé mieux que toute autre son originalité: c' est le Thach Bi, le "Muong Bi", correspondant au canton de Lac Thien, dans le Chau de Lac Son et la province de Hoa Binh, faisceau de vallées évidées dans une boutonnière de schistes tendres, juste au Nord de laa chaîne frontière et du plateau de Lung Van. Environné de hautes montagnes, qui l' ont tenu relativement à l' abri des infiltrations pacifiques et des violentes invasions, il garde encore aujourd' hui son organisation féodale, ses légendes et ses antiques coutumes. Il jouit parmi les Muong de l' Indochine du Nord, et en particulier ceux de Hoa Binh et de Thanh Hoá, d' un renom tout spécial: ses sorciersont réputés les meilleurs, on ne parle de lui qu' avec vénération, il en émane comme un mystérieux parfum de tradition pure et de vieille gloire; on dirait le vrai cœur du pays muong. N' est-ce pas lui qui aurait rayonné sur tout le Haut Thanh Hoá?

Mais, d' autre part, cette civilisation montagnarde se retrouve à peine altérée, semble-t-il, parmi les populations de langues thai … Vers le NE et le SO, ce trait s' efface peu à peu … en même temps que l' ancienne société se désagrège, les vieilles coutumes s' oblitèrent et se contaminent d' emprunts à la civilisation annamite"

[68] *"C' est une civilisation essentiellement agricole que celle de ces montagnards, et comme dans l' Indochine entière, elle est fondée avant tout sur le riz".*

[69] *On connaît la place primordiale de cette céréale, en Extrême-Orient. Elle constitue souvent, semble-t-il, les 7/10, ou même les 8/10 de la subsistance d' un paysan annamite. La mère en bourre tôt son enfant, dont le ventre se gonfle drôlement sous la courte robe, et le vieillard édenté le digère encore sans peine"*

techniques, dwellings or customs. Indochinese ways of thinking and acting are not considered in terms of cultural, social and spatial representations and conceptions. This has to be connected to the fact that, at this time, French geographical curiosity was bounded by its desire to remain objective and was written only in terms of the material and measurable aspects of a society (chapter 3).

Charles Robequain applies the notion of civilization to totalities corresponding to different spatial distributions. There is the mountainous country, where the various mountain ethnic groups are described as “mountain civilizations”. There is the Annamite civilization that Charles Robequain labels “a delta civilization”, (p.94), the “Chinese civilization” from the Chinese Empire, the “Laotian civilization” on “the banks of the Mekong” (p.103). His study includes the analysis of the contacts established between civilizations and their cultural diffusion, which give to each civilization a dynamic, as well as the process of individualization of the ethnic groups. Like the position of Marcel Mauss, the geographical position of Charles Robequain excludes a strictly evolutionist definition which would keep the term for only cultures considered as superior by their degree of social complexity, their techniques and scientific knowledge, separating their civilized populations from the supposedly other non civilized populations.

This evolutionist conception of Asian civilizations appears distinctly in the analysis of the agricultural techniques and ways of life.

7.3.3.2 Agricultural techniques and the evolutionist perspective

The mode of agriculture is one of the determinant characteristics of Indochinese civilizations according to Charles Robequain, who classifies societies according to their agricultural techniques. This concern for the technology is actually a characteristic of the time and more generally of scholars from the Western industrial countries (chapter 3, section 3.2). It is the basis of the distinctions between the mountain and the Annamite civilizations and as well differentiates between the mountain ethnic groups. This hierarchy is constructed, as in many anthropological or biological theories, by associating agriculture with phases of evolution. All modes of rice cultivation were supposed to pass through these. It was embedded in the assumption that nomad practices and temporary fields are signs of archaic and primary civilizations, which have not yet achieved human control of the natural environment. The vocabulary expresses particularly these tendencies and conceptions. The “*ɬay*” is presented in

negative terms in a kind of disapproving way, whereas irrigation and sedentary practices are presented in words evoking the rationality of western values. Thus, Charles Robequain opposes the nomad minority mountain ethnic groups practicing the *ray*, considering it "a disordered and destructive exploitation" to the "regular and permanent product" (p.192) of the Mu'ô'ng or the Annamites. He argues that there are several steps to go from the *ray* to the higher standard of irrigated rice fields (pp.165-166; p.192). He describes the Annamite intensive agricultural practices noting the periodicity of the agricultural work "which require from the soil a product without rest" (p.376).

As we mentioned in chapters 2 and 5 (section 5.3), authors construct their argumentation through some tacit archetype influenced by the culture to which they belong. On that account, Charles Robequain mixes his geographical approach with some implicit norms of French culture, describing the rationality of the agricultural technique, the rate of the crop yield and valorizing the profitability and the intensiveness of the cultivation. Therefore, about the *ray*, Charles Robequain writes:

> *Once the plantsare in the soil, they grow as they can, with the wild vegetation; they are barely protected from being prematurely asphyxiated The indigenous does not seem convinced that a continuous weed-killer could improve the crop yield, and his natural nonchalance keeps him alive in this illusion: why go to a lot of trouble to work on a land that will be abandoned soon...This rice, this corn, this manioc produced in ray fields*[70]*, nevertheless if we eat a bit less, as long as we eat somehow; the bush, which grows again immediately, taking also advantage of the burn field technique, will not have however, the time to ruin completely the yield*[71]*.* (p. 174).

More systematically, Charles Robequain constructs around the nomad character or the sedentary character of the mountain civilizations two models of civilizations, in a heuristic approach conditioned by French thought and conceptions of societies. This encourages the reader to implicitly classify them as part of a hierarchy. The sedentary groups practicing irrigated rice cultivation with a dense population are associated with positive images of stability and equilibrium, and with a sense of the aesthetic. The more itinerant ones, practicing an extensive cultivation with low densities, are considered negatively, as unstable with primitive and

[70] The ray is a temporary field, without irrigation (see below).

[71] "*Une fois les plantes confiées au sol, elles pousent comme elles peuvent, en même temps que la végétation sauvage; c' est à peine si on les défend contre un étouffement prématuré. L' indigène ne semble pas persuadé qu' un désherbage continu augmenterait le rendement, et sa nonchalance naturelle l' entretient dans cette illusion: à quoi bon se donner de la peine sur une terre qu' on abandonnera bientôt, et qui redeviendra par la suite d' autant plus féconde que la forêt l' aura mieux recouverte? Ce riz, ce ma?s, ce manioc de ray, peu importe qu' on en mange un peu moins, pourvu qu' on en mange; la brousse, qui repousse aussitôt, en profitant elle aussi des brûlis, n' aura certainement pas le temps de ruiner entièrement la récolte; et la forêt voisine fournira, en tout cas, le complément de nourriture*".

precarious ways of life and habitat[72]. Thus, Charles Robequain describes the technical or material aspects of Indochinese civilizations from the perspective of his French convictions. Because he does not interrogate the principles and the beliefs that underpin and provide spirit to the Indochinese societies and their relationship with their environment, his regional description is reduced to the French way of considering Indochina.

> *The Thai is more nomadic than the Mu'òng ...* (p.196)
>
> *On the contrary (to the Thai), the Mu'òng, almost all grouped at the East of the Thai, in a lower region, less harsh, do not know this incessant nomadism, which is apparently incoherent...they stay more attached to their irrigated rice fields, to their tribe and their lord, to their native village. These nuances are expressed pretty clearly in the habitat.... fences of bamboo carefully tressed with various interlacing surround each hut and its garden ... Lanes, intersected regularly, with right angles, dispatch between widely spaced huts...:It provides an impression of already ancient life, of slow and reasoned adaptation, with stability, that we find still certain rich Thai valleys ...* (p.197)
>
> *However, these last ones (the rich Thai valleys) offer already ...some new aspects...the whole offers a disordered aspect: the huts are built at very unequal intervals, on a bare soil...covered with rubbish and garbage of all kind, still prickly with bent piles of old huts[73]...* (pp.197-198)

Charles Robequain does not link this hierarchy to naturalist interpretations based on race but to naturalist interpretations based on his determinist conception of the environment.

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[72] In his later book concerning the Malaysian world which was published after the Second War World, Charles Robequain became considerably more assertive about Asian types of cultivation. In regard to the practice of agriculture on temporary burned fields (called ladang in the Malaysian world) he wrote that this culture "is not very primitive. It shows a patient adaptation, often unknown to the foreign passer-by, to the natural environment. The succession of the cultivated plants is not random" ("*La culture de 'ladang' n' est pas tellement primitive. Elle témoigne d' une adaptation patiente, souvent méconnue du passant étranger, au milieu naturel. La succession des plantes cultivées n' est pas laissée au hasard*") (Robequain, 1946, p.113).

[73] "*Il reste vrai que, dans l' ensemble, le Thai est plus nomade que le Muong …* (p.196)

Au contraire, les Muong, groupés presque tous à l' Est des Thai, dans une région plus basse, moins âpre, ne connaissent pas ce nomadisme incessant, d' apparence incohérente: le ray n' étant chez eux qu' un appoint négligeable, il restent beaucoup plus attachés à leurs rizières irriguées, à leur tribu et à leur seigneur, à leur village natal. Ces nuances s' expriment assez nettement dans l' habitat…des palissades de bambou tressé soigneusement en entrelacs divers entourent très souvent chaque case, et son jardin complanté d' aréquiers et d' autres arbres fruitiers … Des ruelles, se coupant régulièrement, à angles droits, se déploient entre les cases largement espacées …Tel est l' aspect de presque tous les hameaux muong … il s' en dégage une impression de vie déjà ancienne, d' adaptation lente et raisonnée, de stabilité, qu' on retrouve encore dans certaines riches vallées Thai …

Cependant, ces dernières offrent déjà … quelques traits nouveaux … Sans doute arrive-t-il encore, comme à B.Pung (t.Quang Chieu, x.M.Pung), que les cases orientées normalement à la ligne de la plus grande pente, s' allongent toutes parallèlement au cours de la rivière; mais, même dans ce cas, d' ailleurs rare, l' ensemble offre un aspect désordonné: les cases sont construites à des intervalles très inégaux, sur un sol pelé, jaune et poudreux en saison sèche, fangeux en été, couvert d' ordures, de détritus de toutes sortes, hérissé encore des pilotis tordus de vieilles cases (pl.XII,D)".

> *In this nomadism, characteristic of the Thai country, we must see, rather than a racial sign, an effect of the geographical situation of this linguistic group. The Mu'ô'ng, who has immigrated among the Thai, is much more mobile than they are. These perpetual moves underline the hardness, the rawness of this region, they correspond to the narrowness of the valleys, between the high abrupt and wooded slopes where the abundance of the ray impoverish continually the forest*[74], (p.175).

Consequently, the regional geography of Charles Robequain is based on a predominant morpho-functional problematic where the predominant relationships between nature and Man limit the role of the social, cultural and ideational structures. As Mrs Thanh Tâm Langlet notices: "Charles Robequain's thesis shows more people working in their natural environment than a vital entity 'Nature-Man' " where, from a more "cosmic" perspective, "Nature is alive, autonomous, cooperative or destructive and people cannot systematically tame or defeat her" (personal communication, 21 August 2002). Charles Robequain environmentalist discourse is typical of Vidalian geography (Chapter 3). In the context of Indochina, it suggests that the mountain ethnic groups belonged to 'archaic' or 'primitive' societies[75], while, in the delta, the Annamite society is more 'advanced'. From this discourse on the Thanh Hoá region, Charles Robequain tends to generalize this opposition between the rice cultivation practices and *genres de vie* in the mountain regions and those in the deltaic plains, through a possibilist discourse which acquires the logic of a law in regards to Monsoon Asian countries[76]. Through this course of thought, physical determinism is reduced, and these two types of genres de vie "don't correspond always accurately to the natural conditions; they assert also the persistence of ethnic traditions and historical circumstances on the settlement progression" (Robequain, 1935, p.76).

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74 "*Dans ce nomadisme, caractéristique du pays Thai, il faut y voir, plutôt qu' un signe de race, un effet de la situation géographique de ce groupe linguistique. Le Muong qui a émigré parmi les Thai est aussi mobile qu' eux. Ces déplacements perpétuels soulignent la rudesse, l' âpreté de cette région, ils correspondent à l' étroitesse des vallées, entre les hautes pentes abruptes et boisées où l' abondance des ray appauvrit sans cesse la forêt*".

75 Vidal de la Blache comments in his *Principles of Human Geography* that "direct observance of forms of life closely in touch with their environment is a recent result of systematic observation of the most isolated and backward families of the human race" (Vidal de la Blache, 1926, p.12), "*La vision directe des formes d'existence en étroit rapport avec le milieu (" milieu physique "), telle est la chose nouvelle que nous devons à l'observation systématique de familles plus isolées, plus arriérées de l'espèce humaine*".

76 In his book relating to French Indochina, Charles Robequain generalizes this opposition between hinterland/deltaic plains (Robequain, 1935).

While Pierre Gourou refers to Charles Robequain's statements on ethnicity and opposition (pp. 200, 284, 311, 433, 438, 446 and 500), it is only in a limited way and mainly in his footnotes because his discourse approachs Indochinese society from a different angle[77].

7.4 The Socio-Cultural Argumentation of Pierre Gourou

Pierre Gourou reversed the logic of the causal relationships between the natural environment and societies and distances himself from Vidalian possibilism. He apprehends his region through the understanding of the humanized landscape, and bases his argument on this concept, which becomes de facto a key geographical tool. In this way, his geography is more cultural, with some common threads with the Berkeley school of Carl Sauer. It describes and explains the humanized landscape, instead of the natural one, with a focus not only on the material aspects of the Annamite culture, but also the social ones. For Pierre Gourou, the Tonkin Delta is worthy of interest and high regard because it is a very humanized region, or as he said it is "saturated with humanity". His geography is before all a human geography, and it is this humanized character that he wanted to understand and decipher, by describing the daily agricultural and social life of the peasant throughout the year.

Pierre Gourou wrote a humanist work, where the Annamite peasant, through the village community, was at the centre of discourse. In this way and because of the Indochinese context, the discourse of Pierre Gourou was more open to the cultural characteristics of the Annamite peasantry which were inherited from their ancestors, insisting more specifically on the perfecting of the Annamite techniques and the important role of social life

> *In such a country, man counts above all else, and it is him that the geographer must study with the greatest care, if he wishes not only to account for human facts, but even for the landscape and physical aspects*[78].(p.110).

[77] Despite their differences, Pierre Gourou and Charles Robequain were good colleagues and worked together on some articles published in the geographical chronical "Asie" of the *Annales de géographie* (Gourou and Robequain 1937, 1938). They even took advantage of their different standpoints. In the late thirties, they worked in collaboration in the publication of two books where they share the study of the various aspects of the social and economic life of Indochina (see footnote 3 in Chapter 6). Thus, despite their differences, they valued each others work and wrote laudatory reviews of their respective theses (Robequain, 1936a, b), (Gourou, 1928).

Pierre Gourou has explained clearly his differences with Charles Robequain's point of view (see in Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou).

[78] "*Dans un tel pays, c' est l' homme qui compte avant tout et c' est lui que le géographe doit étudier avec le plus grand soin, s' il veut non seulement rendre compte des faits humains, mais encore du paysage et de l' aspect physique*".

7.4.1 The cultural significance of the rice techniques

One of the particularities of Pierre Gourou was to stress "the very big development of the agricultural techniques of the Tonkin peasant not only to highlight the intensive character of the agriculture of the delta, but also to show that the very high density of the population is necessarily linked to the intensity of agriculture"(p.394)[79]. Pierre Gourou records the clever and subtle methods applied by the Annamite to produce their means of existence (in the third part of his thesis) and fundamentally rice (chapter 1 of this third part), asserting their "perfection":

> *To give an idea of this perfection, it is good to examine a few aspects of the rice-growing techniques. There are at least three hundred varieties of rice grown in the Delta, two hundred of tenth-month rice and one hundred of fifth month rice...each one of them has qualities which are appreciated in particular circumstances: resistance to the droughts or to the contrary, aptitude to deep depths of water, acceptance of poor soils or resistance to torrents, more or less important earliness, tolerance to brackish water, preference for heavy or slight soils. These qualities are known well by the peasant ... the Tonkin peasant draws from the planting all the possible advantages, thanks to a very tactful adaptation he manages to achieve with this technique to the conditions of the environment.*[80]*....* (p.388)

He describes in detail, as in other French regional theses, the agricultural calendar and the rice agricultural technology achieved by the Annamite peasant, which was judiciously adapted to the natural and human conditions. Moreover, going even further than Paul Vidal de la Blache's interpretation of the forms of property (chapter 3, section 3.1.4.3 and footnote 32), Pierre Gourou stresses the geographical significance of the intensity of the techniques by putting them in relationship to the density of the population[81], through a more problematical investigation. For example, his third part, "the means of existence of Tonkin peasants", starts with the following questions (p.350):

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79 "*Nous avons longuement insisté sur le très grand perfectionnement des techniques agricoles du paysan tonkinois, non seulement pour mettre en valeur le caractère intensif de l' agriculture dans le delta, mais aussi pour montrer que la très forte densité de la population est nécessairement liée à cette intensité de l' agriculture*".

80 "*Il est bon de donner une idée de ce perfectionnement en examinant quelques aspects de la technique rizicole. Il existe au moins trois cents variétés de riz dans le delta, deux cents de riz du dixième mois et cent du riz du cinquième mois. Ces variétés ne sont pas employées sans discernement par le paysan; chacune d' entre elles a ses qualités qui la font apprécier dans des circonstances particulières: résistance à la sécheresse ou, au contraire, aptitude à supporter de grandes épaisseurs d' eau, acceptation de sols pauvres ou résistance à la verse, plus ou moins grande précocité, tolérance à l' égard des eaux saumâtres, prédilection pour les terres fortes ou les terres faibles. Ces qualités sont parfaitement connues du paysan … Le paysan tonkinois tire du repiquage tous les avantages possibles, grâce à une adaptation très délicate qu' il a su faire de cette technique aux conditions du milieu*" (pp.388-389).

81 This is also the approach of René Dumont (see footnote 42, chapter 6). Like Pierre Gourou, René Dumont has incorporated in his study of the rice cultivation the demography and economy of the Tonkin (Dumont, 1995, pp.31-63).

What are the means of existence of these peasants and how can such pressured human masses find their subsistence? Here are the questions we have now to answer.[82]

Pierre Gourou connected the Tonkin delta with the Chinese "alluvial plains" which "have initially a high density of population" and with the Chinese civilization which "served as a model to the Annamite people", (p.9). He states in the introductory paragraph of "the agricultural techniques":

In all their agricultural works, the Annamite peasants use extremely judicious methods, with many nuances, adapted to various milieux ... They inherit a very ancient technique, a rich experience coming from Prehistory, and they know how to adopt new cultures, work out processes which ensure success in the environment where they have been implanted[83]*.* (p.387)

Therefore, Pierre Gourou's geographical discourse acquires a cultural dimension, where the understanding of the region and its agricultural techniques is not only dependent on the ecological adaptation of a society to its natural environment, but also its cultural and trans-cultural inheritance.

Pierre Gourou discusses the social aspects of rice cultivation describing the gender division of the agricultural tasks. Like Charles Robequain (see above, section 7.3.2.2), he underlined the importance of hard working and courageous women[84], and their key role in rice cultivation (pp.382-385):

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82 *Quels sont les moyens d' existence de ces paysans, comment des masses humaines aussi serrées peuvent-elles trouver leur subistance? Voilà les questions auxquelles il faut maintenant répondre.*

83 "*Dans tous leurs travaux agricoles les paysans tonkinois emploient des méthodes extrêmement judicieuses, très nuancées, s' adaptant à des milieux divers. On se tromperait en les considérant comme des cultivateurs négligeants et barbares; bien au contraire, ils travaillent avec acharnement et finesse. Ils sont les héritiers d' une très ancienne technique, riche d' une expérience qui remonte à la préhistoire, et ils savent adopter de nouvelles cultures, mettre au point les procédés qui assureront leur réussite dans le milieu où elles sont implantées*".

84 Pierre Gourou underlined also women's aptitude considering them as "equal to men". He said: "Very hard working and very skilful women, as hard-working and as skilful as the men. They are a very sympathetic people. I remember these young country-women who walked in large ponds, assembled on the back of a buffalo which swam and they stood up with the horns of the buffalo to direct them. That continues, because a Vietnamese man who writes to me from time to time and who lives in Paris has returned to Tonkin and photographed that, where I saw it, girls of 12-13 years old up on a buffalo …. They are equal to men". Refer to Appendix H, Gourou's interview 29-8-95.

From the month of December … in the low lands, where the excessive deepness of the water level has not permitted the harvest of the rain season,(peasants) hurry to transplant the rice of the fifth month: in these low rice fields, rice has to ripen at an early stage, as soon as the fourth month if possible, to avoid the summer rains which provoke floods and drown the rice. It is a hard labor for the women whom transplant, - for this work is done entirely by women -, who spend ten hours a day virtually motionless, with cold water up to their knees[85], (p.382).

The month of June is a period of hard work...the women working under a relentless sun made more intolerable by the reflection of the water, are often plagued with leeches[86]*...*(p.384).

The month of July is almost as heavily burdened with work....as we saw in the preceding transplanting, it is the women who work; they remain ten hours a day bent over, and this effort is more painful than that of the harvest[87]*...*(p385)

But Pierre Gourou expanded Charles Robequain's discourse acknowledging the competence of the Annamite peasantry and integrating rice production with the body of techniques and social organization, which originated in the Annamite civilization, and providing the reader with an appreciative representation. Because of these close relations that Pierre Gourou establishes between these intensive agricultural techniques, the Annamite historical, social and demographical conditions, and the Tonkin rural life, he constructed a structured image of the Tonkin Delta.

All the intensity of the techniques and practices with their "prodigious waste of labour", (pp.381-394, p.387), the peasants' social conditions (such as the very narrow sizes of the field and the extreme parceling of the property, pp.352-381) and the rural life (Pierre Gourou notes "we will not understand the rural life of the Tonkin Delta if we do not know the chronological succession of the cultural acts", p.382) are all connected together, and linked to the high density of the population. For example, Pierre Gourou wrote:

This peasant, who lives on too narrow land, exploits the soil with intensity...(p.350).

This intensity of the culture is marked also by the fact that almost all the lands carry two harvests per year, so that there is not a moment in the year where we do not practice some agricultural works...At any season, we will see the peasants digging, harrowing, bedding out, irrigating, harvesting[88]*.* (p.381)

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85 "*Dès le mois de décembre … dans les terres basses, où la trop grande épaisseur de la couche d' eau n' a pas permis de faire la récolte de saison des pluies, on se hâte de repiquer le riz du cinquième mois: il faut, dans ces rizières déprimées, que le riz mûrisse de bonne heure, autant que possible dès le quatrième mois (mai), si l' on ne veut pas que les premières grandes pluies de l' été provoquent des inondations et noient le riz. Dure besogne que celle des repiqueuses – car ce travail est entièrement executé par les femmes, - qui passent dix heures par jour à peu près immobiles, avec de l' eau froide jusqu' aux genoux …*"

86 "*Le mois de juin est une période de dur travail … les ouvrières sont persécutées par les sangsues, sous un soleil de plomb que la réverbération de l' eau rend plus insupportable encore*".

87 "*Le mois de juillet est presque aussi chargé de travaux … Les hommes arrachent les ma, et comme pour le précédent repiquage, ce sont les femmes qui travaillent; elles restent courbées dix heures par jour, et cet effort est plus pénible encore que celui de la moisson*".

Prodigious charge of labor force, which is explained only, as we are going to see, by a perfect agricultural technique and the waste of human work[89]*...*(p.387).

Consequently, Pierre Gourou's regional discourse brings, at least implicitly[90], a coherent interpretation and synchronous insight into the Tonkin peasantry. More than in Charles Robequain's discourse, it leads to an "explanatory synthesis" (Loi, 1985) where the concept of civilization emerges through the conclusion. It is this notion of civilization where the intensive agricultural methods regulate the Annamite society and its density of population, which constitutes the tacit matrix of Pierre Gourou's rhetoric. The autonomy of his discourse relies on this human social and cultural assumption[91].

In due course, the Tonkin region is characterized not only by its intensive agriculture and its skillful peasantry but also its poor but intense rural life. This poverty of the peasant population, however, it is not associated with peasant despair, as we can find in French historical interpretations of the French peasantry before the French Revolution. Pierre Gourou finds the answer in the intensity of the village life.

7.4.2 The focus on the villages

Pierre Gourou uses the basic Vidalian approach, focussing on the distribution of the rural habitat in the Tonkin Delta, its location and its forms (pp.237-249). But his originality is evident in his approach to the village community, through the description of "the elements" and of "the life in the village" (pp.249-272, 309-331). His logic is established not only as in any regional thesis on physical and socio-economic conditions, but also through his emphasis on the functioning of the inherited local and municipal organizations, and on accounts about Annamite beliefs. It promotes the cultural reality of the Annamite region, where the distribution of the habitat and village life are not only dependent on the natural and agricultural conditions, but also on the elaborate village society.

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88 "*Cette intensité de la culture se marque aussi par le fait qu' à peu près toutes les terres portent deux récoltes par an, si bien qu' il n' est pas un moment de l' année où l' on ne se livre à quelque pratique agricole; chaque mois, on pourrait dire chaque semaine, a ses travaux. En quelque saison que ce soit on verra des paysans labourer, herser, semer, repiquer, irriguer, récolter*."

89 "*Prodigieuse dépense de main-d' œuvre, qui ne s' explique, comme on va le voir, que par une technique agricole très perfectionnée et le gaspillage du travail humain*".

90 For example, it is up to the reader to guess the causal relationship between "the too narrow land" and the intensive exploitation of the soil, because it is not explicitly elucidated in the text (Loi, 1985, p.122).

7.4.2.1 Pierre Gourou's cultural interpretation of the village space and its limits

Pierre Gourou concentrates on the population in the villages and considers the "social conditions" to be one of the major geographical contingencies able to explain the concentration and the density of the Annamite population, rather than "rational explanations" like the constraints of the relief or the concern for security

> *What is the reason for this concentration (of the population)...The relief of the land has certainly exercised an important influence...But besides, this concentration has been affected by a concern for security...But perhaps we should not insist too much on these rational explanations which, in this country no more than in other countries, produce a true picture of human facts; the social conditions, inherited from a millenial past, are dominating the village institution...The commune, is forming a very coherent religious and political grouping, and the intense social life which animates it could only be manifested with the favor of the concentration in village*[92]*. (*p.226)

This is a reminder of the long historical cycles attributed to societies by the historical School of the *Annales*, conducted during Gourou's time by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch (chapter 3, 3.1.1.2 and above), and, later, Fernand Braudel[93]. Like Marc Bloch when he analyzed the agrarian life and the different form of French rural landscapes (pp. 31-78) (see Chapter 2),

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[91] Pierre Gourou achieved this assumption in his book about *Land and Man in the Far East*, where he wrote: "*La forte densité de la population: donnée de civilisation et non pas produit inévitable de conditions naturelles. Il a fallu tout un complexe structuré de techniques agricoles intensives et de techniques d' encadrements efficaces pour accumuler de telles masses humaines*" (Gourou, 1972; p.35).

[92] "*Pourquoi cette concentration, qui est un des traits géographiques les plus nets du Delta? .Le relief a certainement exercé une forte influence … Celle-ci a d' autre part été déterminée par un souci de la sécurité … Mais peut-être ne faut-il pas trop insister sur ces explications rationnelles qui, dans ce pays pas plus que dans d' autres contrées, ne rendent bien compte des faits humains; les conditions sociales, issues d' un passé millénaire, dominent certainement l' institution villageoise. La commune forme un groupement religieux et politique très cohérent et la vie intense qui l' anime ne peut se manifester qu' à la faveur de la concentration en village*".

[93] The historian Fernand Braudel adopted the direction of the *Annales* in 1956. He became a very close friend of Pierre Gourou, when both of them were Professors at the *Collège de France* in the late 1940s. Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel shared with Pierre Gourou the same concern for civilizations and contemplated them as cultural areas, related to the past as well as to the present. Lucien Febvre did the commentary on the article where Pierre Gourou wrote not only regarding the Annamite peasantry, but in a more general way relating to the Far East civilization that he conceived as the civilization where material life rests on the use of resources coming from the vegetal world while animal and mineral resources are neglected (*La civilisation du végétal*, (Gourou, 1948). Pierre Gourou underlined in this article the prominence of the civilization in the understanding of a human landscape (opposed to the physical elements) and Lucien Febvre considered Pierre Gourou's interpretations as "elements of a totally new theory and conception of human geography" (Febvre, 1949, p.77). Later, in the beginning of the 1970s, Fernand Braudel did the preface of Pierre Gourou' s book *Leçons de géographie tropicale* (Gourou, 1971, pp.7-8) where he insisted on Pierre Gourou's humanity. At this time, Pierre Gourou stood aloof from the "determinisme des civilisations", and thought that the civilization was essential but not determinant in the understanding of the landscape.

From time to time, Pierre Gourou brings also into his discussion some anecdotes and narrative arguments which do not really increase the comprehension of the village organic structure but could convey some colourful, enjoyable or racy images to the reader. These anecdotal quotations could be implicitly associated by the reader of the time to the idea of the superiority of the European societies (p.226). This maintains his discourse at a descriptive level more than a theoretical one. In his later works, Gourou continued to write about "Man" and "landscape", in contrast with Fernand Braudel whose works became more nuanced compositions about space and societies.

Pierre Gourou was concerned with the structural role of the Annamite communities in the rural landscape.

Further, Pierre Gourou's approach is not only related to historical time but is also spatial. He investigates the villagers' space, through the analysis of its typical elements (houses, pounds, streets, and temples, pp.249-262). It induces him to consider Annamite beliefs as geographical facts which exercise an influence on the appearance of the villages and, more generally, on the geography of the region. Pierre Gourou perceives that the Annamite space has religious significance and differentiates between sacred and profane areas, providing a visual and spatial representation of the religious aspects of the Annamite life. For example, he provides an inventory of the religious buildings and represents on a map the points of religious significance of the hamlet of Xuân Táo, fig.49, p.251). He writes:

> *We see the Tonkin villages' buildings, which are differentiated from the ordinary houses by their ampler dimensions and their inhabited appearance. These are the public buildings, which are always at the same time religious buildings. Examination that is a bit more searching reveals that the religious preoccupations of the inhabitants have been materialized in a large number of buildings of all sizes. To illustrate this fact which is of considerable geographic importance, we have drawn up the plan of what could be called the points of religious sensibility of a hamlet of the village of Xuan Tao*[94] *...* (p.260)

He portrays the plans of some cult places (plan, section and photography). He gives very detailed drawings of the dinh of Dinh Bang (pp.333-337, fig.93, 94, 95, 96, 97) and of other religious buildings (diêm[95] of Quanh Nhan, pp.261-262, diêm of Canh Nâu, see Appendix G.4, "the shelter (diêm) of Canh Nau", "Shoot in close-up of one of its horn corner", "section of the diêm"), which allow the reader to gain a visual perception of them and an appreciation of their aesthetics. Pierre Gourou quotes the *fengshui* principles which orientate the "Annamite village configuration" (p.256) such as the "influences" of the "five elements" and of the "spirit of Nature" putting together a relationship between human works and the cosmos. He considers, as Charles Robequain did, that the Annamite beliefs in geomancy can explain the locations of villages or markets. However, Pierre Gourou avoids any negative statement about these rites which do not enter the frame of modern and scientific thought and states:

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94 *"On voit dans les villages tonkinois des édifices qui se différencient des maisons ordinaires par leurs dimensions plus considérables et par leur aspect inhabité. Ce sont des édifices publiques, qui sont toujours en même temps des édifices religieux. Un examen un peu plus approfondi révèle que les préoccupations religieuses des habitants se sont concrétisées dans une quantité considérable d' édifices de toutes tailles. Pour illustrer ce fait, qui est d' une importance géographique considérable puisqu' il détermine en bonne partie l' aspect intérieur des villages, nous avons dressé le plan de ce que l' on pourrait appeler les points de sensibilité religieuse d' un hameau du village de Xuan Tao (c. Xuan Tao, p.Hoai Duc, Ha Dong) (Fig.n.49)".*

95 A diêm is a small temple.

> *...it is certain that the villages are quite often set in their present shape for geomantic reasons....We may consider that a village under its present form is placed under the best conditions with regard to the elements and in respect to the underground channels...As a consequence, any change brought into the existing situation runs the risk of destroying a happily achieved equilibrium*[96]*....* (p.257).

Pierre Gourou considers the influence of the spatial and normative conceptions of the Annamite society, and more specifically of the religious constraints of geomancy, without which it is not possible to understand an important part of the organization of the Annamite landscape. But he does not interrogate further the Annamite ontology of space: through a rationalist approach, Pierre Gourou describes the facts inscribed in the landscape or apparent in Annamite life and links its religious principles to tangible, pragmatic considerations.

> *A professional geomancer or scholar more or less initiated to the geomancy decides on the position of the house and the natural or artificial hazards and cardinal points. Despite the superstitious respect that is accorded to his information, peasant wisdom is not entirely free of a certain skepticism about him, as is shown by the saying: " hòn dãt nó biê't nói nang, thì th'ây dia lý hàm rang không còn ".(If the clod of earth could speak, the master geomancer would lose all his teeth (from the blows he would receive from this clod)*[97]*.*(p.314).

This last example shows how Pierre Gourou integrated into his discourse the Annamite popular literature or oral culture, insisting on its piquant aspects: this approach attempts to convey a lively view of the Annamite culture to the reader, but does not allow him to comprehend the social structures of Annamite communuties. As with other Vidalian geographers (see Chapter 3), Pierre Gourou's discourse does not encroach upon the disciplines of sociology and ethnology. Hence, his geography remains essentially based on a directly expressed and material vision of societal facts and culture. For example, he points out as well that

> *All the houses almost without exception, face south. This preference of the Annamite for a southerly orientation is expressed in a dictum:*
>
> *Lãy vo' hi`ê hoà*
>
> *Làm nhà hu'ó'ng Nam.*

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96 "*il est certain que les villages sont bien souvent fixés dans leur forme actuelle par des raisons géomantiques … On peut considérer qu' un village dans sa forme actuelle se trouve placé dans les meilleures conditions par rapport aux éléments et par rapport aux réseaux souterrains où circulent le souffle favorable et le souffle défavorable. Par conséquent, toute atteinte portée aux conditions actuelles risque de détruire un équilibre heureusement réalisé*".

97 "*C' est un géomancien professionnel ou un lettré plus ou moins initié à la géomancie qui décide de la position de la maison par rapport aux accidents naturels ou artificiels et par rapport aux points cardinaux. Malgré le respect superstitieux que l' on attache à ses indications, la sagesse paysanne n' est pas sans montrer à son égard un certain scepticisme, témoin ce dicton: … Si la motte de terre savait parler, le maître géomancien perdrait toutes ses dents [des coups qu' il recevrait de cette motte de terre].*

(Take a wife that is gentle and wise. Expose your house to the South). It is as natural to give your house a southern exposure as it is to take a gentle and virtuous wife[98].

And in a more rationalist and agnostic view, Pierre Gourou (pp.313-314) adds:

This custom is explained by material reasons: the north winds are violent and cold, while the pleasant summer breezes come from the south and the southwest[99].

But this view was not specific to Pierre Gourou. Vietnamese scholars working at the E.F.E.O. also relativized religious practices. For example, Nguyen Van Khoan (1930) noticed:

> For a superficial observer, the Annamite look like fervent practising people, who go to temple with a very developed religious spirit. The truth is that … they believe only really relatively … And if there are mandarins who look after the building of a temple dedicated to a genius, it is less to conciliate his favour than to become famous …(p.110)[100].

Compared to Nguyen Van Khoan, Gourou recognizes that, as a westerner, he is "ignorant" of the Vietnamese geomantic art and logic and that he cannot construct a meaningful description of the Vietnamese religious conception of the Annamite space[101].

The villages plan responds also to religious considerations It happens that we find in villages strips of unoccupied land, they are "song dat", backs (of the dragon) of the earth on which we cannot build.

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98 "*Toutes les maisons presque sans exception font face au sud. Cette préférence des Annamites pour l' orientation sud s' exprime dans un dicton: Lãy vo' hi`ê hoà Làm nhà hu'ó'ng Nam …(Prendre une femme douce et sage-Orienter sa maison au sud). Il est aussi naturel d' orienter sa maison au sud que de prendre une femme douce et sage*."

99 "*Cette habitude s' explique par des raisons matérielles: les vents du nord sont violents et froids, tandis que les agréables brises d' été viennent du sud et du sud-est*".

100 *" Pour un observateur superficiel, les Annamites paraissent des pratiquants fervents, qui fréquentent les temples avec un esprit religieux très développé. La vérité est que, … ils ne sont croyants que d' une façon tout à fait relative … Et s' il se trouve des mandarins qui s' occupent par exemple de la construction d' un temple dédié à un génie, c' est moins par désir de se concilier ses bonnes grâces que pour s' illustrer eux-mêmes ....*"

101 With his cartesian thought (see above section 7.2.2), Pierre Gourou was aware of his inability to understand these cultural differences and said: "the géomancie, I know nothing about it …. I have the impression that these are beliefs of imagination, all these beliefs on the parts of the house, in fact, they are representations, which do not correspond to any material element. It is a kind of metaphysical sight of the house which is not explained by the house itself, such as we can see it. It is an application of metaphysical diagrams on a house which has nothing to do with metaphysics. … To the houses quantities of beliefs are attached, almost religious. It is not like our house, which, all things considered, is fixed on nothing. But, in the delta, it is a very complex unit that I did not understand entirely. It is difficult to get a Vietnamese to explain it because he feels it prior to understanding it …. It is especially difficult to get somebody to explain this in the construction of common houses such as temples with the spirit of the village. The town hall is a temple with the village's genius. Thus, there is a genius of the village, that nobody ever saw, of course …. One can write volumes on the beliefs attached to the house. I was very sensitive. A certain beam posed in a certain way, it had a belief attached to that there. I give the names of all the pieces of the houses, which correspond to Vietnamese beliefs. But, to go further, it would be necessary to be an intelligent and cultivated Vietnamese …". Refer to Appendix H, interview with Pierre Gourou.

Thus we touch upon geomancy which plays its part in the configuration of the Annamite village. Indeed we are too ignorant of this art ... if any slightly excessive series of illnesses or deaths should occur, the village will then be convinced and, believing themselves under the threat of inevitable disasters, will become pessimistic, unhappy, and will lose all wish to bestir themselves. There are, it seems, villages in a state of decadence for geomantic reasons[102] (pp.255-257).

... if, after having examined the architecture and the plan of the house, we wish to get from the inhabitants the explanation of certain particular arrangements, then we come up against multiple reticences, or we get voluble answers in which the object of the question asked is drowned. Except for a few cases of very evident bad will, there is no occasion for anger, but we should wait for the owners of the house to realize that we have no malevolent intention, that we are not making a customs inspection; a few pennies distributed to the children, a few cigarettes to the adults will often overcome the suspicion shown to visitors. Of course familiarity and good-guyism must be avoided as quite out of place and grotesque in the country of Annam; ... Here we mention a touching example of the emotions of a countryman aroused by the visit of a European armed with a yard stick, a briefcase and squared paper. It will be seen that this emotion is of a religious nature and that it is, therefore, most worthy of respect ...The owner was a very mannerly scholar, whose poor and badly furnished dwelling was kept with the greatest cleanliness. A few characters elegantly drawn on a sheet of yellow paper stuck to a wall made of clay struck a note of distinction in this wretched interior ... Our visit made him uneasy because of its length, the detail of its investigation, and because it occurred at the beginning of the year and could be a bad omen for the whole year. He then ran to the Buddhist pagoda ... to consult the oracles: he shook little sticks placed in bamboo tubes and threw them to the earth to draw from them a prognostication by the relative position of the characters which they bear. Very fortunately the sticks gave out a favourable opinion and permitted the old scholar to believe that our visit was well omened[103]. (pp.276-277).

Consequently, Pierre Gourou's regional discourse integrates the geomantic and religious themes implicit in how the Annamite civilization oriented and built its villages and organized its delta space. But, like Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou's geographical discourse does not explore the philosophical and metaphysical aspects of the Annamite conceptualization of the world. In that sense, Pierre Gourou's cultural interpretation of Annamite space is supported more

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102 "*le plan des villages obéit aussi à des considérations religieuses … Il arrive que l' on trouve dans les villages des bandes de terres inoccupées, ce sont des "song dat", des dos (du dragon) de la terre sur lesquels on peut construire. On touche ici à la géomancie qui joue son rôle dans la configuration du village annamite. Certes nous sommes trop parfaitement ignorants de cette discipline … qu' une série un peu excessive de maladies et de décès se produise et voilà le village convaincu que les puissances surnaturelles sont déchaînées contre lui; les villageois en sont persuadés et, se croyant sous la menace d' inévitables désastres, deviendront pessimistes, malheureux et perdront le goût de l' effort. Il est, paraît-il, des villages en décadence, pour des raisons géomantiques: tel Tuu Liet*".

103 "*…si après avoir examiné l' architecture et le plan de la maison, on veut obtenir des haabitants l' explication de certaines dispositions particulières, on se heurte alors à de multiples réticences, ou l' on obtient des réponses diffuses où se noie l' objet même de la question posée. Sauf dans quelques cas de mauvaise volonté très évidente, il ne faut pas se fâcher, mais attendre que les propriétaires de la maison se rendent compte que l' on n' est animé d' aucune intention malveillante , que l' on ne vient pas procéder à une enquête douanière; quelques sous distribués aux enfants, quelques cigarettes aux adultes auront souvent raison de la méfiance que l' on témoigne aux visiteurs. Bien entendu, on évitera la familiarité, le bon—garçonnisme, tout à fait déplacés et grotesques en pays d' Annam; … Il nous faut donner ici un exemple touchant de l' émotion que peut provoquer chez un campagnard la visite d' un européen armé d' un mètre, d' un carton et de papier quadrillé; l' on verra que cette émotion est de nature religieuse et qu' elle est par conséquent des plus respectables … Le propriétaire était un lettré fort courtois, dont la demeure, pauvre et mal meublée, était tenue avec la plus grande propreté; quelques caractères, tracés avec élégance sur une feuille de papier jaune collée à la paroi de pisé mettaient une note de distinction dans cet intérieur misérable … Notre visite l' inquiéta, par sa longueur, par sa minutie, et parce qu' elle se produisait au début de l' année et pouvait être de mauvais augure pour l' année toute entière. Il courut alors à la pagode bouddhique … pour consultter les oracles: il secoua les baguettes placées dans un tube de bambou et les jeta à terre pour déduire une prévision de la position respective des caractères qu' elles portent. Fort heureusement les baguettes émirent un avis favorable et le vieux lettré put penser que notre visite était d' heureux présage*".

by the Vidalian descriptive method (Chapter3, section 3.2) than by ethnological and conceptual assumptions as was evident in Father Cadière's works[104].

7.4.2.2 The importance of village social life

Pierre Gourou attributes a fundamental role to village life, which he conceives as a principle of social organization able to manage the high densities of population. He extends his geographical argument to the social organization of societies, where villages are considered a fundamental regional and peasant reality on which the stability of the Annamite world relies. On several occasions Pierre Gourou refers to this as "a moral and social world". He specifies the villages' administrative autonomy and independence (p.273), with the bamboo border (see quote above, in section 7.2) and notes:

> *An essential component of the environment, villages have moreover a fundamental role in the peasant's moral and social life. The peasant is not isolated citizen incidentally part of a commune the life of which he participates only from far afield, as the inhabitant of the French countryside; on the contrary, the religious, political and social life of the Annamite commune is intensive and everyday, and all the peasants participate in it with faith, with fervor, with the ambition to play there a more and more important role.*[105] (p.225).

Whereas Charles Robequain considers just the administrative divisions and structures of the Thanh Hoá municipalities, such as the "lang" and the "xa", Pierre Gourou considers also the social organizations which structure the life of villages and coordinates the relationships and joint actions between villages. He quoted the *giaps* which are mainly religious associations and many associations of mandarins, veterans, professions, age groups etc (pp.268-270), as well as organizations of mutual aid between villages such as the *dao hao* and the *giao hieu* (p.264). But Pierre Gourou's greater openness to the social structures of the Tonkin villages is also linked to the fact that these associations were more developed in Tonkin than in Thanh Hoà. As Charles Robequain noticed in a footnote (p.473) about the *giap*, the term "seems to be more rarely used than in Tonkin".

Yet, according to contemporary Vietnamese scholars, even if Pierre Gourou's approach moved forwards the geographical discourse through its concentration on the villages tangible

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104 Although his writings remain inevitably influence by his Christian roots.

105 "*Elément essentiel dans le paysage, le village joue d' autre part un rôle primordial dans la vie morale et sociale des paysans. Le paysan n' est pas isolé, citoyen de hasard d' une commune à la vie de laquelle il ne participe que de très loin, comme l' habitant de la campagne française; bien au contraire, la vie religieuse, politique et sociale de la commune annamite est intense et quotidienne, et tous les paysans y participent avec foi, avec ardeur, avec l' ambition d' y jouer un rôle de plus en plus grand*".

political and social structures and life, his discourse remained an oversimplification because the description of the village's organization was more an expression of French first impressions of a dissimilar culture than a substantial reflection on the villager society. For example, the report about the notables or the villager's political and social life (pp.263-272) concentrates on picturesque aspects (p.265, pp.269-270). Annamite intellectuals regard part of these picturesque aspects humorously, because they consider Pierre Gourou's interpretation to be that of an outsider, and that he described what the Vietnamese informants and scholars of the time let him perceive.

However, while Vietnamese scholars consider that Gourou remained "descriptive" and "did not tackle the villages' sociological problems" (Lê Bá Tháo, 1996, personal communication), it must be emphasized that, usually, Vietnamese geographical discourses on the villages coincide with Gourou's view that the efficiency of village organization models the political, economical and social life of the Delta. For example, Lê Bá Tháo (1997, p.327) writes:

> "The basic unit in the social organization in the Red River delta is always the villages and the communes. This is a tight organization, it is more or less autonomous (the king's rule is behind the village's custom), the villagers are bound by clannish relations, ritual relations, communal relations. Contrary to the appearance of the villages that seems 'to be sleeping behind the green bamboo hedge' there is a great potential of dynamic force, generally awoken and strongly manifested when required by the resistance against foreign invaders, the construction of works of public utility (construction of dams encroaching on the sea, of irrigational works, and many other projects of national interests)."

In fact, Pierre Gourou related some of the disfunctioning aspects of the Annamite social web that French administration has aggravated in his section entitled "landowners" (pp.356-364). Quite clearly, he made known how the large landowners take advantage of the peasants too poor to reimburse their loans and of the laws introduced by France which are "too much respectuous of what is written and too much detached from real life" (p.362) Beyond, Pierre Gourou recorded that he has "neither the wish nor the competence to do a sociological study of the village" (p.273). It can be argued that this approach does not open up all the possible elements of the Annamite society. Nevertheless, Pierre Gourou's geographical discourse has acquired a humanist and cultural dimension[106] based on the discovery of the Annamite peasant life and an inclination to personify "this hard-working peasantry", "this balanced and sensible civilization" and "nice people" (pp.575, 577, 578). This constitutes the major difference with Charles Robequain's

[106] Pierre Gourou's humanism is affiliated to that of the French philosopher Montaigne (not to the modern existential humanism).

approach to the Annamite. If Charles Robequain is quite critical of the village's apparently democratic institutions, Pierre Gourou underlines their importance and idealizes the social fraternity and conviviality of Annamite villages, summarising that:

> *Thanks to the intense and well-organized village life, the peasant is something other than a miserable and poorly nourished serf*[107]. (p.272).

This cultural idealization finds its expression in the conception of a harmonious peasant civilization. This concept of civilization is evident in the introduction but is more strongly developed in the conclusion of the thesis ("The peasant civilization", pp.575-578, the last pages of the thesis), as the major explanatory principle underpinning regional organization. At the time of his thesis, Pierre Gourou conceived the notion of civilization as "the network of the family and village relationships" which guides and regulates the Annamite individual, as "the moral and social world which gives him a thousand topics of interest and satisfaction, and which forms one body with the environment where it has been developed" (p.575). In other words, the concept of civilization is composed of the elements of the social life which form a structure able to control, manage and give moral and social stability (p.577) to the peasant population and in accord with the physical environment[108].

Despite the fact that it encloses the Annamite peasantry in its past in some colonial romanticist framework, this humanist approach, which is aware of the being of societies, renewed the dominant colonial discourse and redirected it to recognise the existence of local societies. It is also affiliated with the renewal of the discourses of human sciences, such as the history, which does not separate the past from the present, and was open to economic and social phenomena. Moreover, even if Gourou restricted his argument through concern to avoid interference with other disciplines, his discourse was like a response to the French recognition of Asian cultures that orientalists such as Lévi and his students developed (chapter 5, 5.3).

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107 "*…grâce à la vie intense et bien organisée du village le paysan est autre chose qu' un serf misérable et mal nourri*".

108 Pierre Gourou's conception of the civilization developed in parallel with his life and the time. This conception of civilization where there is a concordant unity between society and nature was transposed by a conception where civilization is determinant. In his article "la civilisation du végétal", he established that the civilization gives form to the human landscape. He disagreed with Toynbee, who "calls physical geography to explain the birth of superior civilization", and wrote in regard to the "superior civilization of the Monsoon Asia" "Nothing shows better how human geography is dependant on civilizations" (Gourou, 1970, pp.5, 262). He asserted recently "To some extent, I remember I put to use Bloch and Febvre [Bloch's and Febvre's conceptions of societies] in the way I drew from these authors the idea that civilization has endowed any human landscape with great characters. This excludes the vague notion of possibilism. There is in a civilization a body of contrainsts which dismisses the notion of possibilism". "*Dans une certaine mesure, je me rappelle que j' ai tiré parti de Bloch et de Febvre, en ce sens que j' ai puisé le sentiment que la civilisation était dotée d' un rôle déterminant dans tout paysage humain. Cela exclut la notion vague de possibilisme, car il y a dans la civilisation un ensemble de contraintes qui exclut le possibilisme*" (personal letter, 5th of may 1995).

7.4.2.3 Buildings, houses and their socio-cultural interpretation

Among the elements of the village, the houses were studied in a long chapter (chapter V, pp.273-348). Gourou studies them through a different grid of analysis than French geographers such as Demangeon, which is more social and appreciative than functional. First, he identifies the different social types of houses according to western social criteria (moderately well off houses, well off houses, poor houses[109]). Then, he decomposes them by analyzing, as for the villages, "the elements of the house" (pp.309-348), putting these elements mainly in relationship to the Annamite culture, its religion, aesthetic values, and Chinese influence.

Like other French geographers (Chapter 3, section 3.2.2), Pierre Gourou classified and elaborated typologies where the questions of the plan, the building material and the roofs are dealt with. In this Vidalian construct, Pierre Gourou writes:

> *Depite their discretion, the houses constitute an essential geographical fact in the Delta...*
>
> *The houses of the Delta offer an important similarity of appearance. Generally, it is ground floor houses, put on the soil, built with elements borrowed from the vegetable kingdom, and covered with straw. But a bit more thorough examination reveals variations in the form of the roofs and in the plan. Thus, there are several social types of houses*[110]*...*(p.274)*.*

But compared to the other French theses of the time, the artistic, cultural and technical aspects of the construction are examined more closely than the impact of the physical environment and of agriculture on the structure of the houses.

> *(the Tonkin houses) are absolutely not coincidental buildings, established without method by poor people using the first material fallen into their hand; on the contrary, we recognize a style, a wish to create a lasting and harmonious thing* (p.275)[111]

Actually, Pierre Gourou's architectural interest and aesthetic interpretation of the Annamite architecture was a component of the traditional cultural humanism of the Ecole

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109 *maisons moyennement aisées, maisons de briques couvertes de tuiles (maisons aisées), maisons pauvres*

110 "*Malgré leur discrétion, les maisons constituent un fait géographique essentiel dans le Delta …*

Les maisons du Delta offrent une grande similitude d' aspect. Dans l' ensemble ce sont des maisons à rez-de-chaussée, posées sur la terre, construites avec des éléments empruntés au règne végétal, et couvertes en paille. Mais un examen un peu plus approfondi révèle des variations dans la forme des toits et dans le plan, et de grandes différences de richesse. Il y a donc plusieurs types sociaux de maisons"

111 "*Ce ne sont nullement des édifices de hasard, établis sans méthode par de pauvres gens utilisant les premiers matériaux qui leur tombent sous la main; on y reconnaît au contraire un style, le désir de créer quelque chose de durable et d' harmonieux*".

Française d' Extrême-Orient (Chapter 5, 5.3). But, if, like the Indochinese French elite[112] Pierre Gourou's description of the religious and public buildings expresses his esteem for the Annamite aesthetic (for example the temple (or *dinh*) of Dinh Bang village which is also the local house of the village's community[113], see above in section 7.4.2.1), his originality is based primarily on his description of ordinary peasant houses. More thoroughly than in Charles Robequain's thesis, Pierre Gourou draws their plans with their various sections, different rooms and pieces of furnitures, items, utensils, the ancestors altar, the garden with its fruit trees, the yard, the pond and the stable (pp.277-312, Appendix G.4, "house II of Quan Nhan", and its sections AB, CD, EF, GH). He considered the architecture and aesthetic of the peasant houses also in the process of revealing the wealth of their owners and, further, the social hierarchy of the Annamite community. He explained that "the Annamite who becomes wealthy hurries to build a beautiful home", and that "the main building will have an air of nobility"[114] (p.288). He differenciates as well in great details the peasant dwellings according to the form of the framework, the material of the walls and partitions, the number of slopes of the roofs. Fundamentalier, Gourou's writing concerning buildings is very notably supported by meticulous illustrations with plans and sections where the elements mentioned in the text are located precisely and with close-up photographs[115]. His discourse is not only constructed as a written text, but is expressed through photographs, pictures and drawings (for example, photographies n.32 Pl.XXIII, n.55, Pl. XXXIII, and fig.98 p.338 of the little shelter (which is also a diêm) of Canh Nau, which are

[112] In the same emphatic style in regard to the Annamite "morals and customs" "so dignified of esteem and affection", Albert Sarraut wrote (Appendix E.4, "Albert Sarraut and the seductiveness of Indochina"): "Look … this adorable distinction of art, poetry and charm granted to indigenous preference by the two subjects of the tree and the pagoda: a little temple with curved roofs, sculpted with dragons and chimeres, with lively earthenware softened by the patina of the time, and harmonizing the grace of its lines…in the mystery of this sacred wood, where silence, quietness and peace reign. These exquisite oasis, the Annamite handles them carefully, keeps them, beautifies ceaselessly them with an intelligence of the beauty, a taste, a sensibility which detect its true nature" (Sarraut, 1930, p.17). See also in chapter 5, 5.4.3.2, Pierre Pasquier's quotation.

[113] Pierre Gourou explained "each village in the Delta has a dinh, which is the temple of the village's genius and the meeting place for important festivities" (p.332).

[114] "*L' Annamite qui s' enrichit se hâte se faire bâtir une belle demeure … le bâtiment principal aura noble allure, ses murs seront en briques, et le toit couvert de tuiles; l' autel des ancêtres sera dressé dans un cadre digne de donner da la fierté aux âmes des défunts et le salon de reception produira une heureuse impression sur les visiteurs*", (p.288).

[115] Pierre Gourou extended his analysis of Annamite dwellings in his complementary thesis, *Esquisse d' une étude de l' habitation annamite*, considering that "There is no comprehensive general study relative to Annamite houses. The essential geographical fact that the house is constituted in the landscape of the very populated Annamite plains has been until now neglected" (Gourou, 1936b, p.7) (*Les maisons annamites n' ont pas fait l' objet d' une étude d' ensemble. Le fait géographique essentiel que constitue la maison dans le paysage des plaines fortement peuplées de l' Annam a jusqu' à présent été négligé*). But it is in only in the late version of *L' Homme et la terre en Extrême-Orient* that Gourou defined the geographical meaning of the house that he considered a "summary of a civilization", stating that "Houses … are a medley of facts of civilization: techniques to build, architectural ideal, social needs as the Far-East civilization has conceived them." (Gourou, 1972, p.209).

reproduced in Appendix G.4[116]). Compared to Charles Robequain' thesis (pp.494-495, Appendix G.5, "Annamite hut at Trung Thon") or other French geographers' work (such as in Albert Demangeon's thesis, the description, the photos and plans of the farms in Picardie pp.362-364), this intertextuality is more developed and constitutes a tangible means to give to the reader a substantial, social image of Annamite life. According to Mrs Thanh Tâm Langlet: "Gourou inaugurates a humanist discourse", where "the life of the people is at the center of his work" (personal communication, September 1995).

Summing up, Pierre Gourou interprets the deltaic regional habitat through his perception of the social structures and divisions of the Annamite society and the French conception of an Annamite cultural originality and unity. More generally, he has incorporated a cultural and humanist dimension in the Vidalian and the colonial discourse, where the everyday life, habitation and environment are taken into consideration.

7.5 Conclusion

Within the Indochinese context, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou renewed the French geographical discourse, where the Asian civilization became the object of study and the major geographical component of the region. Furthermore, their discourse opened up a geographical understanding more closely articulated with the cultural concept of civilization than the Vidalian concept of *genre de vie.* From the 1950s, this concept of civilization became the theoretical core of French tropical geography. Their works established a link between geography, ethnology and anthropology, even if this connection was limited by the French geographers' intention to remain objective and work only on tangible, measurables aspects. In Charles Robequain, this approach was still embedded in early 20th century conceptions in which human communities were categorized from primitive ethnic groups[117] to more complex societies and modern cultures. With Pierre Gourou, the ethnographical analysis acquires a social dimension, where it is the Annamite peasantry that Pierre Gourou designates in his thesis as constructing the region, firstly under the Vidalian terminology "Man" and later, in his conclusion under the concept of "civilization". Thus, the notion of civilization acquires a sense close to the one of

[116] See above in section 7.4.2.1

[117] We mentioned Marcel Mauss, but, in the Anglo-saxon world, E.B. Taylor also studied "Primitive Culture" (Tylor, 1871).

more recent ethnologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss[118], where societies are not only determined by the degree of their technical development and their material production, or the number of their population, but also in a more internal sense, through the richness and complexity of their daily life. As in Claude Lévi-Strauss's discourse, Pierre Gourou substitutes for the evolutionist approach the statement and mechanisms of cultural diversity and mechanisms. For researchers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Gourou, the civilization at the world scale must be an alliance of all the world cultures which retain their own original characteristics.

However, from the Vietnamese point of view, French researchers translated Annamite culture and civilization through the prism of their own civilization, with its cultural and Cartesian conceptions. For example, when Pierre Gourou suggests "harmonious relationships" between the Annamite civilization and its natural environment, his notion of harmony symbolises a different reality compared to the Vietnamese Confucean, Taoism and Bouddhist interpretations of the term. This notion of harmony is a fundamental component of the Vietnamese culture and, more generally, of a range of Asian philosophies[119]. However it has a distinct significance compared to the occidental terminology, where it is essential to understanding the relationship between the Annamite society and its environment. Likewise, because of Pierre Gourou's occidental cultural grid of analysis, the Annamite mythical or metaphysical conceptions of space which are key components for the understanding of the regional structure, are not integrated in his rhetoric. In

[118] In France, Claude Lévi-Strauss is the originator of modern anthropology and was elected professor at the *Collège de France* in 1948 with a chair called "anthropologie sociale" where he replaced Marcel Mauss, just after Pierre Gourou's election as the chair "Etude du Monde tropical" in 1947. When he founded his revue of anthropology *l' Homme*, he called on Gourou to be a member of the advisory group. He said "it appeared to me essential to show some original character of French research, especially the link between ethnology and human geography, as it is asserted in the Vidal de la Blache tradition. *Les paysans du delta tonkinois* made Pierre Gourou famous, as an ethnologist as well as a geographer or historian" (Lévi-Strauss and Eribon, 1988, pp.95-96), quote also in a recent article of this revue that Michel Bruneau wrote after Pierre Gourou death in regard to him (Bruneau, 2000). Both of them were presenting in their respective lectures a concerned and humanistic approach of the societies they were studying.

In Australia, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown is considered as a precursor of the Structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. At the University of Sydney where he worked from 1925 to 1931, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown advanced a theory about aboriginal communities to explain social facts such as the systems of relationships as durable systems of adaptation, amalgamation, and integration of elements (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930). He perceived that "social organization" was similar to a dynamic system of functionally harmonious and interdependent elements. Consequently, he is considered as representative of the Functionalist school of thought.

[119] In a range of Asian philosophies, Man and Nature form a totality, and are complementary, and a constant relationship linked Man to the Universe. As Đam Truong Phuong said, this conception has major implications in the Vietnamese perception of the environment and conception of space. Moreover, the environment is interpreted not in an objective and physical way. As notices Augustin Berque (1995) about China, the "*raison paysagère* refuses deliberately to become geomorphology; instead of measuring the physical phenomena in order to catch the reasons, it attachs importance at once, beyond these phenomena, to get the principle of any landscape. The principle in question, it is the *qi*, the cosmic inspiration. This one runs through the landscape as well as it runs through the human body. It integrates the microcosm to the macrocosm in an organic whole. Consequently, it is not possible to discriminate, in the modern European way, the landscape on the one hand, and in another, the physique of the things from the environment. China invented what we can call a landscaped physiology: this fengshui that we translate generally by "geomancy", but which pertains to quite another context where neither the geomorphology, nor the geophysic achieve to thwart the symbolism of the places" (pp.98-99).

recent years, and in the context of the communist ideology, Vietnamese geographers (Vennetier, 1991; Phan Huy Le et al., 1993) have reconsidered the work on Vietnamese villages, and ponder that "none has given a complete picture of the village and much remains to be done". "The Vietnamese village ... conceals so many little-known relationships that it is impossible to gain an exact knowledge of it without dismantling it piece by piece" (p.6). As Đam Truong Phuong[120] (personal communication in Hanoi, October 1996) has said with regard to Robequain and Gourou's theses, "In my opinion, Gourou stays descriptive ... he does not go into the structure of the village: he has not the conditions to be able to go into it: he is a foreigner" and "Robequain and Gourou have not enough time to understand Confucianism and Taoism. If you enter in the detail, you can find the vestiges of Confucianism in the structure of the villages ... Robequain is from the time of the European Industrial Revolution, of the confidence and the application of science. (In this context) he cannot understand geomancy." As well, Lê Bá Tháo (personal communication, Hanoi, October 1996) observes: "Gourou relies more on the natural, material and technical conditions of the peasant life than on social ones." However, as products of the colonial context, Lê Bá Tháo writes, "In the end, they (Robequain and Gourou) are both masters of French geography, humanist and clever" (personal letter, March 5 1997).

As a result, in terms of cultural images and representations given by the two geographers, Pierre Gourou produces an important image of the Indochina, where the Annamite civilization presents as much value as the French civilization in terms of techniques, aesthetic skills, sociability and moral life. Hence, he assigns a compassionate image to the peasantry, which contrasts with the one of Charles Robequain, whose writings and photographs suggest often that Indochinese societies are primitive or backward (especially the mountain ethnic groups) and live in precarious conditions (such as the Annamite people, whose life is determined by natural calamities such as floods or drought, pp.308-329, Appendix G.1, "The distribution of food supplies to the disaster victims of the flooded districts, in the Royal Pagoda of the citadel of the country town", pl.XVIII B in Robequain's thesis). Thus, if we compare photographs of women in the two theses, in Charles Robequain the women are frequently represented as the ethnologists studying primitive societies did, often pausing in their traditional-exotic clothes (Appendix G.2,

[120] Đam Truong Phuong is a professor based in Hanoi: Like Lê Bá Tháo (see Chapter 3, footnote 77), Đam Truong Phuong has known the colonial time and undertook study in French colonial institutions. Hence, he speaks French fluently and knows well the works of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. He has a vast knowledge of his Vietnamese culture and country, as well as French culture. He was a close friend of Lê Bá Tháo. Professor Đam Trung Phuong worked as a major adviser to the Minister for Construction on projects concerning economic and tourist development in the country.
Đam Truong Phuong fought with General Giap against the French at Dien Bien Phu (March-May 1953, the battle of Dien Bien Phu sounded the knell of French occupation). During the meeting I had with Professor Đam Truong Phuong in Hanoi, he explained to me with humour "I like French people, but I dislike French colonization!".

"Thai women from Phu Le, on the pass to Van Mai", "Muong women from Hac Cao", "Thai young girls from Lam Lu with ceremonial costumes", pl.IV A, pl.VI B in Robequain's thesis), in front of their huts (Appendix G.2, "Muong women from Hac Cao", "Thai women on their hut's balcony", pl.IV B, pl.V, pl.XIII,C), or at the market (Appendix G.2, Man women arriving at Cho Men", "Man and Muong women at Cho Men", pl.XLVII A, B). Some are represented working (Appendix G.2, "Trung Lap. Thai women hulling rice in an empty tree trunk, under the hut", "Annamite women refining rice in Sam Son", pl.XIII D and pl.XXIX A), but the image or the text suggests their cheerless life[121]. In contrast, Pierre Gourou represented the Annamite women in their natural and daily tasks, among rice field (Appendix G.3, "women planting out rice", pl.XXXVII, photo 62 in Gourou's thesis) fishing (Appendix G.3, "Prawns and crabs fisherwoman", pl.XXXVIII n.64) or coming back from the market (Appendix G.3, "Country women coming back from the market and little girl bringing back to the stable the buffalo", pl. XLV n.75 and "Country women coming back from the market", pl.XLVII n.78). They are represented as part of the human landscape, among other aspects of the Annamite countryside (such as the peasant women coming back from the market walking on a narrow little dike, and photographed from a shelter like the one presented in the latter photo, n.78). Pierre Gourou underlines the elegance or the refinement of their appearance or gestures, in contrast with the hardness of their work. From his own camera angle[122], he captures the agility and gracefulness of their march, and inserts occasionally a commentary:

> *Photo n 62:The women transplant the rice by handfuls going backward. They take the plants in the bundles that the men bring from the nurseries. The young person standing to the left is very elegant; notice her pointed hat, the white kerchief in which she has wrapped her head and neck to avoid sunstroke. In the upper Delta, as shown by the terraces of the rice fields*[123] (p.384). Refer Appendix G.3 "Women planting out rice"

In summary, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou dealt differently with Indochinese culture. On the one hand, Charles Robequain described the traditional social context, customs and superstitions, which differentiate one ethnic group from another and separate them from French contemporary culture, considered as superior according to French colonial ideology. On the other hand, Pierre Gourou understood the Annamite culture through the villagers' rich and engaging social life. This allowed Pierre Gourou to go beyond Charles Robequain's sentiments

[121] However, it should be remembered that Thanh Hoá was a poor region compared to the Tonkin (see Chapter 3, section 3.3.3).

[122] Most of the photos presented by Pierre Gourou or Charles Robequain have been photographed by them.

[123] "*Les femmes repiquent le riz par poignées, en allant à reculons. Elles prennent les plants dans les paquets que les hommes apportent de la pépinière. La jeune personne qui est debout à gauche est très élégante: remarquer son chapeau pointu, le foulard blanc dont elle a enveloppé sa tête et son cou pour éviter la brûlure du soleil*".

of pity towards Indochinese indigent existence and commiseration towards conditions of life for women. “Moving to a different cultural setting”, he occasionally questions to some extent French “social behavior” (see quotation of Buttimer, in chapter 2, section 2.1), where “modern progress seems to have created in the West a kind of divorce between Man and the natural environment, even in the most familiar details” (p.576) and material wealth is often connected to happiness (p.577).

Consequently, compared to Charles Robequain and correspondingly to French maturing colonial questioning (Chapter 5, section 5.3), Pierre Gourou relativized the colonial preconceptions of the superiority of French culture by considering the refinement and skillfulness of the Annamite agricultural and handicraft activities, as well as the Tonkin peasantry’s deep and respectable social life. He conceptualized the role of culture in human geography trough the central theme of civilization.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have demonstrated in what measure different contexts - especially Vidalian geography, French cultural thought, colonial institutions, and the Inter-War period - interacted in the production of the geographical discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou. Indeed, within Vidalian conceptual limits, the colonial and Indochinese contexts provided the circumstances for the production of two discourses, which were more empirical, prospective, and personal than other regional theses and most of the writings on Asia of the time. The regions of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou were portrayed not only through a classical Vidalian approach focusing on the ecological relationships between societies and their natural environment (Chapters 3, 4), but also by highlighting their development problems (chapter 6) and their societal and cultural organization (Chapter 7). The social organization is revealed in the daily life and preoccupations of the population. This contrasts with the theoretical tone of many academic orientalist discourses, based often on linguistic (philological) and comparative studies, where the old Indian and Chinese civilizations constitute the references[1].

Furthermore, it has been pointed out how culture and ideology gave shape to discourse and how discourses of regional geography varied according to regional, political, economic and social contexts (the context of the 1920s compared to the 1930s especially) (Chapter 5). They reveal the extent to which authors such as Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, according to their respective personalities, have resisted the dominant ideology and transformed or moved the boundaries of established geographical discourse without being opposed to them.

With the Vietnam wars and decolonization, Charles Robequain's representations of Indochina, where geographical thought and colonial action were intertwined, became provocative and increasingly irrelevant. More fundamentally, the French appropriation of Indochinese regions throughout the discourses of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou (section

[1] Henri Maspéro, for example, studied the ancient Chinese thought (Maspéro, 1965); Georges Coedès studied the Sanskrit and Khmer epigraphy (concerning Angkor especially), or Indochinese and Indonesian history (Coedès, 1964).

8.2) brings in to question the ethics of geography (section 8.3.1). Further, the political contexts and the world have changed since the thirties. The collectivization of agriculture and, from the 1990s, the diversification of Vietnamese peasantry and its mutation to economic sectors which are not systemanically linked with the rice cultivation or even agricultural activities (Lagrée, 1995, p.155) have changed the nature of the traditional relationships between the villagers and their environment. New tools (such as Geographical Information Systems[2]), cultural management and new philosophical perspectives (where the objectivity of knowledge is questioned, or where the conceptual thought and knowledge of societies are investigated) are operating through other dimensions than the regional one. Scholars now construct geographies based more on systems, networks, or space than on regions. However, despite these transformations of Vietnam and of the world scene, Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's interpretations of Thanh Hoá and the Tonkin delta peasantry have still some discursive relevance in the present-day geographical discourses on Vietnam (section 8.3.2).

8.2 The Impact of French Assumptions on the Two Indochinese Discourses

In all, the two discourses have inherited from the Renaissance humanist movement an historical methodology and the promotion of the concept of Man. This is especially noticeable in Pierre Gourou, whose geographical curiosity is similar to Montaigne's (Chapter 5, 5.3). They are related to Naturalist philosophy through their taxonomic approaches and concern for natural sciences, a trait particularly evident in Charles Robequain. They are rooted in positivism, where knowledge is generated by the application of reason to empirical observations aiming to show the correlation between phenomena. They are grounded in French democratic and republican ideals[3].

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[2] Nowadays, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's geographic data and maps would have been stored, analysed or displayed via GIS software and technology, where remote sensing images, numerical maps and data series modelled regions.

[3] Similar to Vincent Berdoulay (1988, pp.45-56, 78-80) who considers Vidalian geography as a form of neo-Kantian philosophy (refer chapter 3, 3.1.1.2)., we can also observe in Pierre Gourou parallels with Kant's reasoned philosophy. In *The Critique of Reason*, where the necessary "a priori" forms of human knowledge, such as space (Kant, 1963, pp.55-57) and time (pp.61-62) are investigated, Emmanuel Kant recognized through a critical, rigorous and methodical approach the spatial and temporal intuition of Man. Analogously, in his thesis, Pierre Gourou recognizes Annamite peasant within his spatial and historical environment. As with Kant's philosophy, which tends not to extend the knowledge of the world but to explore thoroughly human understanding, Pierre Gourou's geography aims not to extend information on Indochina, but to comprehend the Annamite peasantry.

Furthermore, Robequain and Gourou's discourses are indirectly connected to more contemporary theories including modernization as rationalization - the Weberian theory of society. Max Weber asserted that the rationalization process characterised modern society (Weber, 1968). According to Jack Goddy (1999), with the development of capitalism, Max Weber relied on conceptions which contrast with the Oriental ones: conceptions of authority, rationality, and economic ethics, which underpin our two discourses.

These diverse contributions meant that the texts were understandable within a perspective which French readers were used to and, therefore, were sanctioned by the opinions of the geographical authorities. Thus, the methodology and concepts they used remain confined to Western or French conceptions and notions, which were still dominated in the 1920s-1930s by rationalist and positivist scientific understanding essential to impartial geographical argument. Thus, by a concern to be rigorous, to treat only incontestable facts, and to distinguish geography from other human sciences and more specifically sociology and ethnology (Robequain, p.113; Gourou, p.256), their geographical discourses deliberately do not explore Indochinese conceptual thought.

Besides these general tendencies, the two discourses presented some new geographical positions and cartographic approaches to the analysis and portrayal of population density, and differ from each other in some of their major directions: Charles Robequain's discourse suggests a more general approach to Indochina from a dynamic and a planning perspective; Pierre Gourou's discourse is permeated by his humanist thinking.

8.2.1 Charles Robequain's discourse and the colonial appropriation of Thanh Hoá

Charles Robequain's discourse applied the classical Vidalian concepts and incorporated them into the dominant French colonialist discourse. By this means, his discourse endorsed the colonial appropriation of the indigenous lands and people[4]. The natural environment and resources were considered to be abundant with great potential that French scientific knowledge and technology could develop[5]. Combined with evolutionist and positivist theories, human societies were classified as more or less developed, and the duty and task of the coloniser was to bring to them French political and moral values and technical know-how. The *genres de vie* and agriculture were seen and understood through their evolution (Chapter 7, section 7.3.3.2). Charles Robequain's cultural approach analysed the observable artifices that the Indochinese societies created, such as their tools and clothes, their habitat, and their agricultural techniques. Yet, while he emphasized the way they lived in and exploited their environment, he did not

[4] This is even more apparent in Charles Robequain's other major work on Indochina, *l' évolution économique de l' Indochine française* (Robequain, 1939), where Charles Robequain explained the modern changes brought by French colonialization to the Indochinese economy (see footnote 3 in Chapter 6).

[5] This colonial theory composes the French discourse in regard to colonialization. Paul Vidal de la Blache wrote in *Principles of Human Geography*: "Let us congratulate ourselves, because the task of colonisation which constitutes the glory of our age would be only a sham if nature set definite, rigid boundaries, instead of leaving a margin for the work of transformation or reparation which it is within man's power to perform" (Vidal de la Blache, 1926, p.24).

consider the Indochinese conceptions of the environment which modelled the region, and which were more intuitive and introspective. The descriptions of these artifices produce retrospective images of Thanh Hoá, in the tradition of the discovery and travel stories of the time, along with some exoticism. They sustained the colonial idea that the duty of French colonialization was to bring progress to colonial populations who belonged to inferior civilizations. Charles Robequain's discourse is constructed using a regional procedure in which he studied Thanh Hoá both through its components and in its totality, presenting the internal physical and human divisions and complementarities that define and energise the region. Accordingly an important place is given to the study of the exchanges and trade under the patronage of the colonial administration. Charles Robequain thought of the province as a harmonious totality, based on "an alliance of interests" between the delta and its "background country", where the delta is conceived as the dynamic part able to energise the development of the background country under the patronage of the colonial administration. This dynamic vision brought Charles Robequain to conceive a less static cartography than in many other geographical works (Appendix F, "Densité de la population [essai]", "Carte commerciale du Thanh Hoá")[6].

This approach testifies to the concern of French geographers about colonial development and planning challenges, with the wish, at least in Charles Robequain, to realize a "truly rational colonialization" such as Marcel Dubois had suggested. Thus, if the geography of Charles Robequain was not strictly speaking a 'colonial geography', his discourse was however embedded in French colonial ideology and opened French geography to a more dynamic conception of the region. In two of his later books on French Indochina (Robequain, 1935) and the Malaysian world (Robequain, 1946), Charles Robequain went deeper into this regional conception. The first parts concern the general characteristics of the Indochinese and the Malaysian regions. Then, as in his thesis, Charles Robequain showed the fragmentation and the fundamental physical and human diversities of the different provinces. It is also by highlighting the colonializers' work in development and education that Charles Robequain explained the regional coherence and future of Indochina and Malaysia.

In summary, Charles Robequain's discourse in regard to the developing of Thanh Hoá was constructed around a normative view of the world, adjusted to Vidalian geography, the French culture and its colonial convictions. Implicit in this study is the belief that the unity,

[6] This dynamic vision of the regional space was in fact already present in his first important research work about the Trièves, where Charles Robequain studied the role of communications (Robequain, 1922, pp.88-105). But Charles Robequain matured it in his thesis.

dynamism and development of Thanh Hoá require the protection and authority of French colonialism.

8.2.2 Pierre Gourou's humanistic discourse

Confronted by an unaccustomed physical, human and social environment distinct from French and European regions (as he outlines on p.9), Pierre Gourou has conveyed an Indochinese interpretation which if not totally original compared to other Indochinese discourses of the 1930s, is very different from Charles Robequain's thesis. He gave a sympathetic and assertive representation of the Annamite peasant, where French readers are encouraged to understand and be aware of the Annamite country and people. This discourse, which parallels that of some French elites and geographers (such as Jacques Weulersse) of the 1930s, represents the Orient through humanist, poetic ("Beauties of the delta") and idealistic ("the peasant moral and social world") conceptions. In general, Pierre Gourou's approach gives to Annamite peasantry the central and active role in the understanding of the delta, thus composing a 'humanistic' discourse.

Pierre Gourou also renewed the methodology of Vidalian discourse. His argumentation is less formally positivist and inductive than Charles Robequain's, because he is more aware of the cultural and social aspects, and he was firmly focussed on the problematic of the high density of population. However, Pierre Gourou's discourse does not include mature theoretical or nomothetic laws of regional distributions of the populations. Pierre Gourou evokes the deficiencies of the information and data, considering that "too many elements are still missing to solve absolutely in a satisfactory way the problems posed by the existence of very high densities of population" (p.180). But the non-appearance of theory is due also to the fact that Pierre Gourou's objective is more the human understanding of the Annamite society, identity and vitality than the concept of region[7]. Thus, Pierre Gourou's geography was distant from the search for an unequivocal law or principle of distribution[8]. After he distinguished the general

[7] However, neither Pierre Gourou, nor Charles Robequain and the other researchers of the E.F.E.O. were focusing on theoretical explanations. Nguyen Van Chinh writes: "B.E.F.E.O. began to be distinguished by a unique characteristic. There was an absence of theoretical explanations although the notions of evolutionism and diffusionism seemed to be spontaneously accepted without much debate" http://www.vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn August 1999.

[8] Pierre Gourou's questioning in regard to the transposition of data in general laws of distribution can be compared to the reserve of some French geographers concerning "choremes" and modelling, which simplify and reduce the complexity of the economic and social reality (the chorèmes are the basic structures of geographical space and are often represented in association with models).

characteristics of the geographical disparities of the villages' populations or having analysed at length the houses of the delta, he wrote:

> *But these general considerations must be proposed carefully because the important fact in this area is probably the variability of the population from one village to another*[9]. (p.236).

> *At the end of this study, is it possible to determine original types, to establish a map of houses in the delta? We could not manage it, and we believe that our failure is linked to the nature of the place. On the whole, houses of the Tonkin delta are uniform, and the differences are subsumed by this uniformity*[10], (p.348).

Furthermore, compared to other French discourses, Pierre Gourou constructed a different model of geographical analysis focusing on the comprehension of the "humanised landscape" and the varying density of the population. The landscape retained deeply Pierre Gourou's attention because its various constituents (such as the rice fields and dykes, the villages and peasant houses, the religious elements such as cemeteries, graves, temples, burial procession pp.109-110, the dinh, pagoda or altars p.260, or even the stone dogs p.312) revealed the tangible reality of the Annamite civilization[11] (p.109). Consequently, more than most of the French regional theses conceived in the first part of the 20th century, Pierre Gourou described the socio-cultural features of the landscape through the long history of civilizations similarly to the French historians of the *Ecole des Annales*. More specifically, Pierre Gourou's argumentation held the Annamite tradition in esteem, considering that the Annamite peasants "are the heirs of a very old technique, rich in an experience which goes back in time to prehistory"[12] (p.387), and sanctioning the established link between the peasantry and elements of the landscape. He insisted on the human values of Annamite society, on its qualitative aspects, on the frustrations, hopes happiness and gratification of the Annamite peasants. He wrote in regard to the aesthetic of the houses where Tonkin family hands down the household from a generation to the following one (p.275)[13], and

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9 "*Mais ces considérations générales doivent être développées avec prudence car le fait le plus important dans ce domaine est peut-être la variabilité de la population d' un village à l' autre*".

10 "*Au terme de cette étude est-il possible de mettre en valeur des types originaux, d' établir une carte des maisons dans le delta? Nous n' y sommes pas parvenus et nous croyons que notre échec est lié à la nature des choses. Dans l' ensemble, les maisons du delta tonkinois sont uniformes, et les différences sont faibles en face de cette homogénéité.*"

11 Pierre Gourou writes in the introduction of his long section on human geography "Man does not step aside from the landscape" ("*l' homme ne s' efface pas du paysage*") (p.109).

12 "*ils sont les héritiers d' une très ancienne technique, riche d' une expérience qui remonte à la préhistoire …*".

13 "(les maisons tonkinoises) *sont des constructions solides, durables, que les générations se transmettent …Ce ne sont nullement des édifices de hasard …on y reconnait au contraire un style, le désir de créer quelque chose de durable et d' harmonieux*".

with "architectural rules tested by time" (pp.575-576)[14]. With Pierre Gourou, the regional discourse became less economic and more socio-cultural. For that reason, Pierre Gourou did not use the concept of *genre de vie* and promoted the concept of civilization, this later notion being more embedded in the idea of culture and having relatively less to do with economic issues than the former.

However, despite these particularities, Pierre Gourou perceived Tonkin through his Occidental values: he identified the landscape by appraising it through the French impressionist movement, and his analysis remained largely negotiated via the Western assumptions of the notion of technique, principles and ideals of social harmony and equilibrium.

In summary, if Charles Robequain used the Vidalian problematic of the relationship between Man-environment and the concept of *genre de vie* and natural region to portray the Thanh Hoá Province, Pierre Gourou brought a different deductive methodology and humanistic conception of the region. However, their discourses remain enclosed in the contextual limits of French colonial thought, Vidalian geography and French culture.

8.3 The Contextual Limits of the Discourse of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou and the Cultural Challenge of Geographical Discourse

8.3.1 The question of geographical ethics in regard to foreign societies

Consideration of the contextual limits of discourse links with the problematic of the debate connected with 'postmodernity', where the ultimate foundations for geographical knowledge cannot be discovered, unequivocal correctness of a discourse cannot be proved and the concepts on which its argument is constructed cannot be universally accepted. Thus the theoretical position of postmodern geography is that any discourse is the product of a definite intellectual context, belonging to a circumscribed time and space. The limits of Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's discourses were established by the context of the colonial time and by the French characteristics of the classical components of Vidalian epistemology, which were not always meaningful when applied to countries and societies belonging to a non western culture.

[14] "*les maisons tonkinoises, qui ne sont pas des huttes informes, mais des édifices obéissants à un style, et respectant des règles architecturales éprouvées par le temps, s' harmonisent avec le cadre*".

Nowadays, in a context where the universality of Western thought is sometimes questioned, philosophical[15] and geographical works recognize that the conception of the relationships established between Chinese or Japanese societies and their environment does not necessarily conform with French (or western) conceptions. In his thesis dealing with the Japanese settlement in Hokkaido from the end of the 19th century, Augustin Berque (1980) demonstrates how the ricefield was inherent to Japanese society and, consequently, how western crops (such as wheat) could not be substituted for the rice culture, despite the fact that rice was, from a biogeographical point of view, not adapted to the cold climate of Hokkaido. In another work, Augustin Berque (1995, pp.71-102) compares the Western to the Chinese "purposes of landscape" ("*Les raisons du paysage*") and shows that the Chinese conception of landscape differs from the European conception. More recently, Augustin Berque (2000) has written on the intrinsic ecological and social reality of any human existence. However, Augustin Berque wrote about his thesis on Hokkaido with regard to Gourou's memory: "The techniques of management rather framed my own research …But rethinking about that nowadays, I see well that it was my departure point: this necessary link between the immaterial and the material, which is structuring human environments" in (Nicolaï, Pélissier and Raison, 2000, p.44).

In fact, at the beginning of the 1980s, Pierre Gourou's thesis had been criticised because he presented a homogenous peasantry without taking into account the critical cleavages and injustices within peasant society. These were cemented by the social power of the traditional Annamite elites and by the political control of the colonial authority (Courade, 1984, pp.333-335). More generally, it was argued that Pierre Gourou's geography expunged "the political dimension of geographical facts", and erased "the dynamic of the social phenomena" (Bruneau and Courade, 1984, p.315). Pierre Gourou's thesis has also been criticized because the negative consequences of colonization on the Annamite peasant population were never explored (about taxation, the peasant opposition etc), and, more generally, because of the "absence of three aspects of colonization: the economic strength of colonial interests, the ascendancy of the colonial administration, and the existence of a foreign domination with its attack on the human dignity of the colonised people"[16] (Suret-Canale, 1994, p.159). Pierre Gourou's geography has been also criticized for its "cultural determinism", in that the civilization is said to explain all the

[15] For example, the philosopher Roland Barthes (1970) brought a new western perspective to Japanese culture, that he interpreted as the "Empire of signs".

[16] *"Il y a, en effet, dans ce livre (Les Paysans du Delta tonkinois) un grand absent: la colonisation; sous un triple aspect: l' emprise économique des intérêts coloniaux, l' emprise de l' administration coloniale, l' existence d' une domination étrangère avec ce qu' elle comporte d' atteinte à la dignité humaine des colonisés".*

other geographical phenomena, and his geographical discourse was not open to the complexity of the conceptual thought of societies, and to phenomenology. Charles Robequain's approach also did not investigate the interethnic, social and economic problems engendered by the colonization of the region[17]. More generally, the descriptive model of the Vidalian geography installed notions of "harmony", "equilibrium" and "stable evolution" used in the two theses which dissolve the social problems through ideas of social adaptation and compatibility[18].

The contextual and sociological standpoints of the two works can elucidate Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's disregard of the likely anticolonial reactions of Indochinese people and Pierre Gourou's lack of political engagement. Obviously, Charles Robequain's convictions identify with the French Third Republic and its colonial ideology where France and through it Charles Robequain and each French citizen have the duty to "civilise" and develop the countries and people under French "protection" (in fact, conquered by the French army). In this view, Pierre Gourou's thinking, with its concern for the Annamite "social and moral world" and the social changes that French colonisation can brought (p.538) can be related to a more conservative trend of thought, attached to traditional values and resistant towards social change and revolution. In this view, Charles Robequain's and Pierre Gourou's theses are examples of what can be respectively called a "colonialist geography" aware of colonial development and modernity and a "colonial geography" aware of French colonial inheritance with its diverse societies and cultures. And, as Alain Durand-Lasserve observes (Durand-Lasserve, 1984, p.338) "Gourou has a humanist outlook on the world, historically and socially inscribed (the French Republican and civil middle classes of the 1930s), as it is expressed, for example, by the philosopher Alain[19]", while Charles Robequain presents a rationalist and pragmatic view,

[17] Charles Robequain's ethnic approach is very distinct compared to that of another French geographer, Jacques Ancel, who studied the multiethnical region of Macedonia. Jacques Ancel (1926) questioned the complex reorganization of a multiethnic space in crisis with complicated ethnic relations. The geography of Jacques Ancel was more realist when he considered the puzzling relationships between ethnic groups and his style was less apologetic than that of Charles Robequain. But Jacques Ancel was not working in the French colonial field, and his discourse was not constrained or limited by French colonial ideology.

[18] From a more radical point of view, Pierre Gourou's thesis has even been considered as an instrument for the Vietnam War (Lacoste, 1976). The "ideological" content of of Gourou' s thesis was also criticized in an article of the revue created by Yves Lacoste, where Maurice Ronai conceives Pierre Gourou's conclusion about "the beauties of the delta" as symbolic of the colonial mystic (Ronai, 1976). But, later, Yves Lacoste apologized for not having taken into account the "intellectual context of the period in which it (Gourou's work) was conceive and wrote: "It was a blunder and an injustice, because we did not take into account either the very scientific value of the work, or the intellectual context of the time when the work was conceived". "*Ce fut une bévue et une injustice, car on n' avait pas tenu compte ni de la très grande valeur scientifique de l' ouvrage, ni du contexte intellectuel de la période où il avait été conçu*" (Gourou et al., 1984, p.51).

[19] Probably some links could be found between the two authors when they think about the every day facts and human actions in order to deliver their importance (Alain, 1990), and through Cartesian thought. But Gourou never mentioned Alain as one of his favorite philosophers or writers.

characteristic of the years following the first War World (see the observations of Marie-Claire Robic, 1996a, pp.37-40).

But the issue of this research is not to condemn important aspects or themes, which have not been mentioned or not treated. Instead, the query of our research is ethical, and more related to the challenge that the study of a foreign country and a different culture poses to geographers, considering that discourses in general are shaped within the moral and political background of the authors. As Professor Đam Truong Phuong observes "any regime has its interest" and Robequain's and Gourou's theses could not have been validated and published by the E.F.E.O. if they were openly critical towards French occupation of Vietnam. This condemns geographical thought to relativism, in which discourses are dependent, in their form and content, upon subjective, psychological, social or historical determinations, which are linked to the culture or personality of the author. Hence, the geographer must be fully aware of how historically and culturally relative any conception might be.

Such a relativist postmodern reading of the geographical discourse does not mean that geographers, because of the inherent diversity of cultural ideologies, must refuse to express moral or political choices about different values and beliefs. But we can suggest that "a sensibility in geography to the 'areal differentiation' of people, events and phenomena simply being different in different places must always be kept in mind as a counter to the 'totalising' ambitions of 'grand theories' that reckon the world 'to happen' in a curiously spaceless head-of-a-pin realm" (Cloke, Philo and Sadler, 1991, p.206). Pierre Gourou's humanism helped him to perceive this differentiation. He described the natural conditions of a non-western region according to the way its inhabitants look upon their environment, that is to say in conformity with the techniques that they control in order to exploit it (and not according to the exhaustive nomenclature French geographers were using). If cultural factors such as fengshui beliefs or religious facts were not deeply investigated, Pierre Gourou at least mentioned their existence and their importance and, in this view, opened new geographical perspectives.

8.3.2 The relevance of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou's discourse

Pierre Gourou's major contribution to geography was to create a new geographical discourse, established by French geographers as a model for the "French School of tropical geography". As Paul Claval (1994b, p.232) notes, it had "an emphasis on farming, an awareness of the differences between material and social techniques, the study of the geographical

consequences of these, and the use of density maps as a basis for all comparisons". Furthermore, villages were conceived as lively communities and dynamic agents, which construct the landscape and animate the region. The majority of the French geographical public accepted this discourse because it came up to its expectations in three ways. First, it is inscribed in a Vidalian approach (where progress towards comprehending a region was the first test of the geographer). Second, it is marked with humanist (attached to the significance of Man) and Cartesian (through a logical and methodical thought) thinking. Third, it is dedicated to traditional societies which have to be protected against untimely modernization.

Moreover, Pierre Gourou's concepts of 'civilization' and of 'humanised landscape' were explicit and open-minded appraisals able to develop the substance of a new discourse of human geography. His ambition was to explain "what, in the landscape, is relevant based on human intervention", as he considered that "the landscape does not contain in itself its own explanations", but is only "the visible manifestation of the techniques of production and management[20]" identifying each civilization (Gourou, 1982, pp.9, 13, 30). Gourou said more recently: "Yet, I see geography as a study of the game of the civilizations on the surface of the earth" (Tertrais, 1993, p.8). It was probably in his book *Terres de bonne espérance: le monde tropical*, where Gourou abandoned the pessimistic vision of the future of the tropical world which dominated his works during the 1930s and 1940s, that the meaning of his concept of civilization achieves fulfilment. Gourou wrote:

> In the way I organize my research, "civilization" covers the body of the techniques of management and of production; each and every man is "civilized" (which means that he is managed); man and civilized are synonymes: there are no "savages". The societies tactlessly qualified as "primitive" have put in place imperious managements, but which lack the skill to manage a large number of men on a vast territory for a long period … There are no uncivilized, no uncultivated men[21]… (Gourou, 1982, pp.29-30).

At the least, the relevance of Gourou's discourse lies in the fact that perceiving the landscape as a totality which is both reflecting the society ("moulded by Man") and supporting it ("its frame"), his geography could contribute to creating an alternative to the European politics of colonialization or, more recently, the Occidental political theories of development where

[20] See footnote 14 in Chapter 5.

[21] *"Dans ma procédure de recherche, la 'civilisation' recouvre l' ensemble des techniques d' encadrement et de production; tout homme est un 'civilisé' (ce qui signifie d' abord qu' il est 'encadré'); homme et civilisé sont synomymes: il n' y a pas de 'sauvages'. Les sociétés maladroitement qualifiées de 'primitives' ont mis au point des encadrements très impérieux, mais malhabiles à encadrer un grand nombre d' hommes sur un vaste territoire et pour une longue durée"*.

development associated with economic growth aimed to modernize the country for the benefit of its inhabitants and the colonizer country[22].

Charles Robequain dealt with colonialization very differently, practising an 'active' geography, with practical points of view and argumentation in the last part of his thesis. In this, his discourse focuses on the fact that France had undertaken to transform a backward region into a 'peaceful' one with new cultures. More generally, the deltaic regions of French Indochina became French building sites, with dykes and irrigation works, various agricultural projects and the construction of roads. In that way, Charles Robequain's discourse ventured further than the classical limits and habits of geographers working on French regions, being ideologically engaged in the colonial ideology of the *mise en valeur*, organization and rationalization of the French colonial regions.

Thus, two different geographical discourses arose from a shared Indochinese context. Because Pierre Gourou's argument is based on the belief that civilization produces the region, it became a model of analysis for Vidalian geographers who were traditionally critical towards the Ratzelian belief that the physical environment determined the nature, ability and destiny of society. After the colonial era, this became important to French geographers. With the independence of the colonies, the concept of civilization, politically (or apparently) more neutral compared to other concepts such as "development", enabled them to continue to study in a neo-"colonial humanist" approach various regions of the former French Empire. Tropical societies were analysed within their traditional environment and social organisation. Consequently, Pierre Gourou's model of discourse has persisted over several decades. It is only recently that some criticisms have questioned the assumed apolitical nature of the French school of geography (see above), and have been connected to the development of post-colonial literatures.

However, the cultural perspective of the regional geography of Pierre Gourou, where, as a result of his dialogue with Vietnamese friends and scholars, Vietnamese landscape and peasant society were held in esteem, or, at least, presented in all its humanity, is still put to use by French geographers working in Vietnam. For example, Pierre Gourou's thesis is often quoted in recent

[22] Some parallel can be established between Pierre Gourou's questioning regarding "modern progress" which "has determined in the Western World a kind of divorce between Man and natural environment" ("*Il semble que le progrès moderne ait déterminé en Occident une sorte de divorce entre l' homme et le milieu naturel, jusque dans les détails les plus familiers*") p.576 and the recent debate on 'sustainable development' raising questions regarding the economic, environmental and social meanings of world growth in the context of development.

articles in regard to the agricultural evolution of the Red River delta (Lagrée, 1995, p.152[23]). As well, in the recent *Geographie Universelle*, the Red River Deltaic region is presented by the geographer Christian Taillard in the same way as in Gourou's thesis. It is portayed as "made with Man's hands"; the same significance is attributed to the long historical time, and to the hydraulic systems which "have moulded a landscape entirely constructed", with "extraordinary densities" which "are expressed by the succession of villages..." (Bruneau et al., 1995, pp.190, 202). We also find in contemporary Vietnamese writings written after the 1986 renovation policy, such as the recent work of Lê Bá Tháo (1997), the same type of representations of the Deltaic region, where "Man has turned the Red River delta into a big granary" and "has lived harmoniously with nature and has known how to put it to use" (p.324). As we have seen in Chapter 7 (section7.4.2.2), Lê Bá Tháo wrote as well "The basic unit in the social organization in the Red River delta is always the villages and the communes. This is a tight organization, it is more or less autonomous (the king's rule is behind the village's custom) …" and Pierre Gourou and Charles Robequain evoked too this later maxim in their theses.

Further, in his work, Lê Bá Tháo referred several times to Pierre Gourou's thesis (Lê Bá Tháo, 1997, p.327, p.328). This corroborates our view that Pierre Gourou's discourse is not totally a French construction, but the result of a dialogue between Vietnamese scholars and French researchers. Thus, the perpetuation and relevance of Gourou's discourse relies on conceptions and images of the Red River delta operating in both cultures. As well, Charles Robequain identified the problem of the ethnic, demographic and economic fracture between highlands and deltaic regions which remains a major political issue and geographical statement despite the fact that, "since 1970, the Vietnamese government has encouraged the movement of the people from the plains to the middle and high regions" and that "after 1975, the movement has intensified in arrangements made for tens of thousands of families to go to "new economic region…" " (Lê Bá Tháo, 1997, p.120). For example, this dichotomy between "highlands" and "lowlands" is charted and modelized in the recent trilingual *Atlas of Vietnam* (Taillard and Vu

[23] Stéphane Lagrée cites Pierre Gourou's extract from p. 265 The main thing is that the peasant sincerely wants to become a dignitary; sometimes he can achieve this by working with such people, or by election and thus by intrigue" "L'important est que le paysan désire passionnément faire partie des notables, il peut y parvenir en certains cas par cooptation des notables, ou par élection, donc par l'intrigue. Il y parvient nécessairement par l'âge". He suggests in regard to the present-day socio-economic contrasts and inequalities between families that the former existing situation described by Pierre Gourou, where certain families who monopolize the supervision of villages and co-option practices have to some extent persisted through different political systems (pp.152-153).

T? L? p , 1994, p.400), written jointly by a Vietnamese and a French professor of geography, Vu T? L? p and Christian Taillard[24].

More generally, despite the fact that the Vidalian and the colonial contexts have influenced Pierre Gourou's writings, Pierre Gourou established a new geographical discourse where the understanding of non-western societies differs compared to the other geographical discourses of the time. With Pierre Gourou, geographers are invited to observe societies along with their material, social and political surroundings in order to explore their ability to develop their own environment. Consequently, like Montaigne writing about Indians in the 16th century, he has encouraged French geographers to renew their ethnogeographical approach by acknowledging the humanity of non-Europeans societies. In that matter, Gourou is quite close to George Condominas who said recently (Condominas and Tertrais, 1996):

> "Our utility, it is to testify. To make our compatriots discover the deep humanity of the other: these are not exotic beings, these are humans as us."

To summarize this research, three issues must be raised. Firstly, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou described and interpreted the Thanh Hoá and Tonkin Delta regions from the Vidalian and inherently the French colonial standpoint. This encouraged the two geographers to study traditional societies in the context of their environment, but to bound part of their discourse to French assumptions. However, the specificities of the Indochinese context, together with the geographical ingenuity of Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou, led the two specialists to construct their specific discourses in regard to Far Eastern regions with new insights and from a new perspective. They promoted certain concepts (such as "civilization"), new geographical tools, and more fundamentally Far Eastern regional representations and interpretations, which have become central to French geography, and to some extent Vietnamese geography, especially since the political changes of the late 1980s in Vietnam.

Secondly, Charles Robequain and Pierre Gourou did not approach Indochinese culture and people in the same way. They differ in their attitude to human life, reflecting their very

[24] This *Atlas of Vietnam* symbolises the renewal of scientific cooperation between French and Vietnamese scholars since the Doi Moi. The two partner organisations, the Center of Socio-economic Geography of the National Center for the Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi and GIF RECLUS in Montpellier, France came together in order to provide a relevant and up to date information on land use management and development in present-day Vietnam. The Atlas outlines "the major territorial tendencies which should be taken into account as the reconstruction of the country infrastructure begins" (p.30). Vu T? L?p explained that, despite the natural richness and variety of Vietnamese environment, the natural resources in Vietnam are often inadequately exploited or devastated because of demographic pressures and the consequences of thirty years of war. Vu T? L?p said that he considered that technical and scientific cooperation between France and Vietnam would help to restore its natural environment (Personal interview with Vu T? L?p in Hanoi, October 1996).

different personalities and indeed two versions of French philosophy of society. Charles Robequain represents the school of thought which believed that modern techniques and methods must be introduced to traditional societies to improve the life of the people. Pierre Gourou represents another school of thought, which counteracts the confidence in modern sciences and techniques giving credit to traditional societies and knowledge. This last version gained in importance with the increasing social and economic tensions in Indochina during the 1930s.

Thirdly, our understanding of their theses has shown that geographical discourses cannot be neutral. Furthermore, we have to acknowledge that our own interpretation is also bound by a philosophical framework that geographers with a different perspective and cultural background may challenge. However, openminded multicultural and collaborative approaches would enlarge geographers' understanding of places and people, just as Pierre Gourou broadened French geographical understanding of Vietnam thanks to his partnership with Vietnamese scholars.

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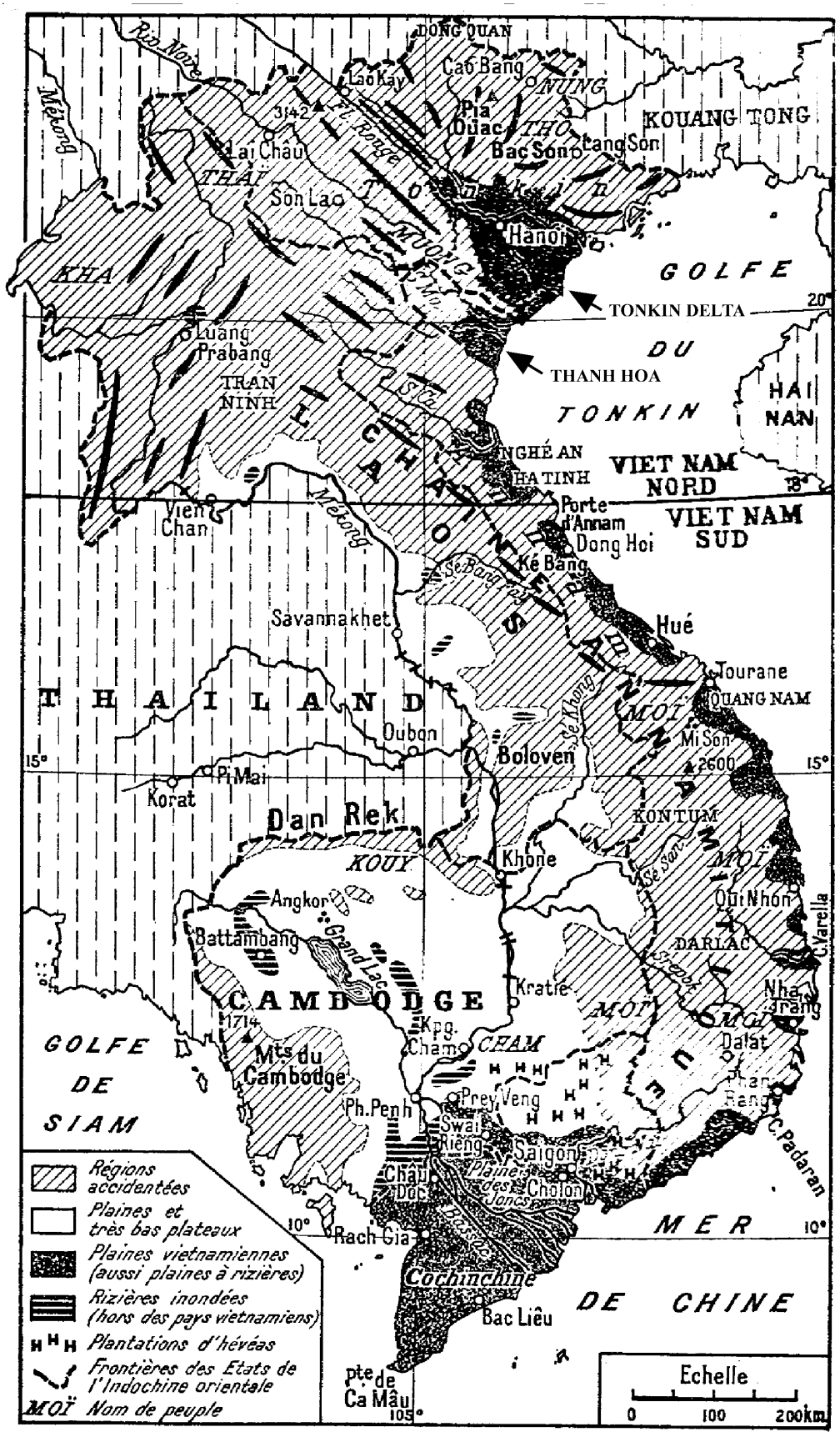
APPENDIX A

INDOCHINA, THE TONKIN DELTA AND THE THANH HOÀ PROVINCE

Appendix A.1: Map of “Eastern Indochina”

This map entitled “Indochine orientale” is extracted from Pierre Gourou’s later work on Asia (Gourou, 1953), published after the collapse of French Indochina and the independence of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, the latter being divided along the 17th parallel into North and South Vietnam until 1975. The Tonkin delta and the Thanh Hoá regions covered by the two theses are delimited with a thick line by the author of this research.



Source: Gourou, P. (1953). **L' Asie**. Paris: Hachette, p.317

Appendix A.2: Political events and significant publications of the 1920s-1930s.

	Tonkin and Annam	French geography	French and world politics and economy	Culture
End of the 19th century	1873: The citadelle of Hanoi is taken by Garnier 1885: French protectorat of Annam From 1885 (to 1925): National resistance organised by Vietnamese scholars and peasants and colonial repression 1897: Doumer, governor general of Indochina	1891: Creation by Vidal de la Blache of the *Annales de géographie.* 1893: Dubois held the first chair of colonial geography at the Sorbonne University		1898: Foundation of the Ecole Française d' Extrême-Orient
From 1901 to 1920		1903: *Tableau de la géographie de la France* by Vidal de la Blache. 1905: *La Plaine picarde* by Demangeon 1906: *La Flandre* by Blanchard. 1908: *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale* by Sion 1910: *La Géographie humaine* by Bruhnes 1920: *Le déclin de l' Europe* by Demangeon	1914-1918: First World War	
1921				*René Leys*, by Victor Ségalen.
1922		*Les principes de la géographie humaine* by Vidal de la Blache Robequain succeeds in the history and geography *agrégation* and starts to teach at the lycée in Nice	Mussolini begins to establish a fascist government in Italy	-*La Terre et l' évolution humaine*, by -Lucien Febvre.
1923		Gourou succeeds in the history and geography *agrégation* and starts to teach at the lycée Carnot in Tunis. *L' Empire britannique* by Demangeon	*La mise en valeur des colonies*, by Albert Sarraut.	*Essai sur le don* by Mauss
1924		Robequain arrives in Indochina as a member of the E.F.E.O. with a two years contract (10-4-1924 to 10-4-1926)		
1925				

1926		Gourou arrives in Saigon to teach at the lycée Chasseloup-Laubat. Robequain started to teach at the lycée Albert Sarraut in Hanoi		
1927	Agitation in Tonkin. Foundation of the V.N.Q.D.D. (Revolutionary National Vietnamese Party)	Gourou arrives in Hanoï and replaces Robequain as a teacher at the lycée Albert Sarraut		
1928	The socialist and reformist Alexandre Varenne is dismissed from the post of Governor General of Indochina and replaced by Pierre Pasquier closer to the French settlers	Robequain returned to France		
1929		*L' Asie des Moussons* by Sion in *Géographie universelle* (initiated by Vidal de la Blache and Gallois) -*Le Thanh Hoá, étude géographique d' une province annamite*, by Charles Robequain	25 October: Crach of New York stock exchange. Beginning of the world economic depression	-*Les Annales d' Histoire Economique et Sociales* (Bloch and Febvre)
1930	1930-1931: Foundation of Indochinese Communist Party by Nguyen Ai Quôc (Ho Chi Minh). Communist agitation: Yen Bay uprising(Tonkin), strikes (plantation of Phu Rieng, textile mill of Nam Dinh, Vinh manufacture) and peasant demonstrations in North Annam and Cochinchina. Severe colonial counter offensives (executions, penal colony of Poulo Condor).			
1931		-*Noirs et Blancs*, by Weulersse. -*Le Tonkin* by Gourou -International Geographical Congress of Paris	*Grandeur et servitude coloniales*, by Albert Sarraut	International Colonial Exhibition in Vincennes. *Regards sur le monde actuel* by Valéry *Les caractères originaux de l' histoire rurale française* by Bloch

1932				
1933		*Géographie et colonisation*, by George Hardy	Hitler, Chancellor of the Reich. Beginning of the Nazi dictatorship	
1934	*Le problème économique indochinois*, by Paul Bernard.			
1935		Gourou returned to France *L'Indochine française*, by Charles Robequain		
1936	Completion of the Trans-Indochina railway	*Les paysans du Delta tonkinois*, by Pierre Gourou Robequain appointed Professor at the University of Rennes and then *Maître de conférences* at the Université of Paris-Sorbonne. Gourou appointed Professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles	Leon Blum organizes the governement of the *Front populaire*	

APPENDIX B

CHARLES ROBEQUAIN AND PIERRE GOUROU

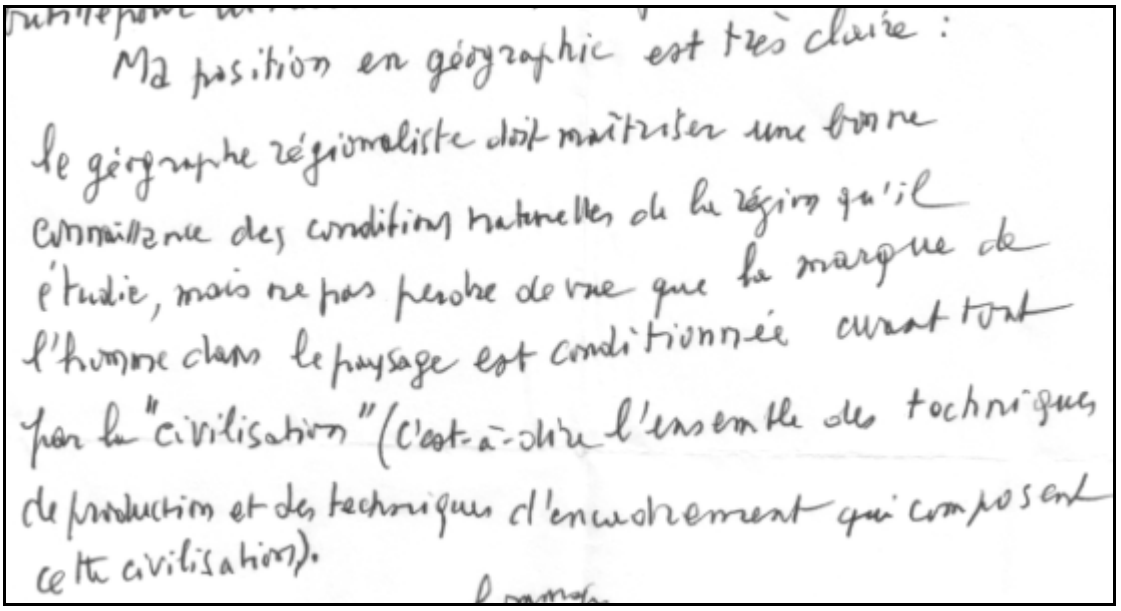
Appendix B.1.Pierre Gourou photographed in India in 1950

Source: Mrs Bray (Pierre Gourou's daughter)

Appendix B.2 Charles Robequain during the International Congress of Geography held in Paris in 1931

Source: http://www.cybergeo.presse.fr/ehgo/cgeo1931.htm (July 1998)

Appendix B.3 extract from Pierre Gourou's letter, 27 November 1994, where he exposes his conception of regional geography



Ma position en géographie est très claire :
le géographe régionaliste doit maîtriser une bonne
connaissance des conditions naturelles de la région qu'il
étudie, mais ne pas perdre de vue que la marque de
l'homme dans le paysage est conditionnée surtout
par la "civilisation" (c'est-à-dire l'ensemble des techniques
de production et des techniques d'encadrement qui composent
cette civilisation).

Source: Dany Bréelle

"My position in geography is clear: the regionalist geographer must possess a good knowledge of the natural conditions of the region being studied, but not lose sight of the fact that the footprint of man in the landscape is conditioned above all by the 'civilization' (that is to say the entire system of production and management techniques which comprise that civilization)".

APPENDIX C

TABLE OF CONTENTS IN CHARLES ROBEQUAIN AND PIERRE GOUROU'S THESES

Appendix C.1: Reduced structure of Charles Robequain's thesis

Volume 1	
Divisions	**Chapters titles**
Introduction: the Framing	
First Book (pp.9-52): the Climate	
Second Book (pp.53-254): the Hinterland	1-The structure and the relief: the natural regions 2-The main ethnic groups 3-The social organisation and the landownership of mountain people 4-The agricultural and forest economy: the vegetal landscape 5-Housing and distribution of population 6- Man and the Meo 7-The industry and exchanges of mountain people

Volume 2	
Divisions	**Chapters titles**
Third book (pp.255-584): the Delta	1-The formation and natural regions of the delta 2-The deltaic settlement 3-The "*mise en valeur*" of the delta 4-Agriculture 5-Fishing and related activities 6-Handicraft people 7-Human establishments and migrations 8-Trade
Fourth book (pp.585-610): the work of France	
Conclusion (pp.611-616)	
Bibliography (pp.618-626) Table of illustrations (pp.627-632) Index (pp.633-636)	

Appendix C.2: Reduced structure of Pierre Gourou's thesis

Divisions	**Chapter titles**
Introduction	
First part: the Physical Environment (pp.17-108)	1-The relief of the delta 2-The climate 3-Water
Second part: the Peasant Population (pp.109-348)	1-History of the settlement 2-Density of the population 3-Movements of the population (migrations) 4-The villages 5-The houses
Third part: the means of existence of the Tonkin peasants pp.349-578	1-Agriculture 2-Village industries 3-Exchanges
Conclusion (pp.554-578)	
Bibliography (pp.579-602)	
Index and Tables (pp.603-666)	

APPENDIX D

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS UNION WITH HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Appendix D.1: the four first slides presented by Pierre Gourou in the *Peasants of the Tonkin Delta,* (prints n.1 p.26; n.2 and n.3 p.34; n.4 p.42)

The four following slides are the first photos presented by Pierre Gourou in his thesis. They appear in his first chapter entitled “The relief of the Delta” in order to give an illustration of its horizontal physionomy and its humanization. Fundamentally, Pierre Gourou associated in his illustrations the “flat immensity” of the plain with the Annamite community, its religious beliefs and agricultural exploitation. For example, Pierre Gourou submited firstly the delta “from the inside of a temple” with a “magic screen put in the axis of the temple and the door” (photograph n.1). On the photographs of the high and low delta, he noticed the “Buddist pagoda” (n.2) or the presence of young peasants “perched on the back of buffalos” in the rice fields (n.3). He showed in the valley of Hu’o’ng Tich a pilgrimage (n.4). In other words, the physical environment is presented as the frame of Annamite life.

The human presence appears as well in the four first slides of the second part of Charles Robequain’s thesis entitled *The Delta,* but Charles Robequain did not stress with the same vigor as Pierre Gourou did in his commentaries the profound humanization of the physical environment (Pl.XV, slides A, B, C , p.265 and Pl. XVI, slides A p.267.

1. — Vue sur le Delta

Cliché pris à Tam Á (c. Tam Á, p. Thuận Thành, Bắc Ninh), à l'intérieur de l'enceinte d'un temple. Entre les piliers d'entrée s'étale l'immensité plate du Delta. On aperçoit à droite du cliché l'écran magique placé dans l'axe du temple et de la porte.

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, p.26

“Slide from Tam A (…), inside a temple’s enclosed area. Between the pillars from the entrance, spreads the flat immensity of the delta. We notice on the right side of the slide the magic screen placed in the axis of the temple and the door.”

2. — Le haut Delta

Vue prise à Đông Lai (c. Thượng Trì, p. Hoài Đức, Hà Đông) du haut de la digue rive droite du Fleuve Rouge, en août. Au pied de la digue des mares profondes qui ont été creusées pendant l'édification de la digue; une de ces mares est couverte de jacinthes d'eau. Le repiquage est presque complètement achevé; la plaine est verte jusqu'à l'horizon. A droite les beaux arbres d'une pagode bouddhique. Au fond, la chaîne du Baì. *(Cliché de l'auteur.)*

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, p.34

“The upper delta: Slide from Dong Lai (…) from the top of the right bank dike of the Red River, in August. At the base of the dike, deep ponds were dug during the construction of the dike; one of these ponds is covered with water hyacinth. The replanting is almost finished. The plain is green up to the horizon. On the right, beautiful trees of a Buddhist pagoda. In the background, the Bai mountain range.”

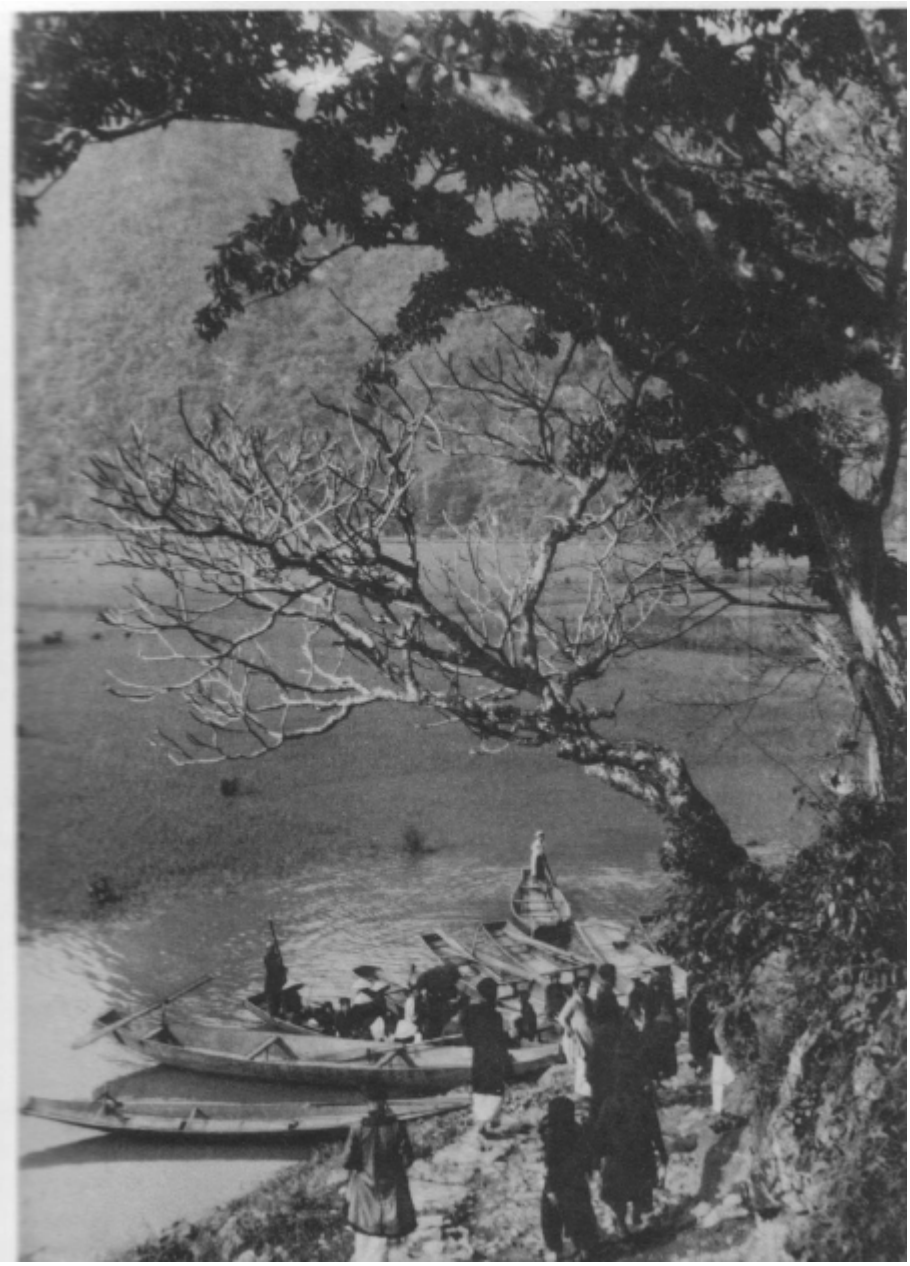
3. — Le bas Delta

Vue prise à Liêu Tràng (c. Thạch Khôi, h. Gia Lộc, Hải Dương). Pays beaucoup plus plat et uniforme que dans la figure précédente; moins d'arbres. Les buffles qui broutent l'herbe courte des diguettes semblent flotter sur l'océan des rizières; jeunes gardiens juchés sur le dos des buffles. Vue prise en janvier; on vient de repiquer le riz du cinquième mois.

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, p.34

"The lower Delta: slide from Lieu Trang (…). The country is far more flat and uniform than in the above slide; fewer trees. The buffalos which graze the short grass of the little dikes seem to float on an ocean of rice fields. Young buffaloo keepers perch on the back of the buffaloos. The slide was taken in January, the rice of the fifth month has just been replanted"



4. — Débarcadère du pélerinage de Hương Tích

On parvient en barque jusqu'au fond de la reculée qui donne accès aux sanctuaires de Hương Tích. La plus grande partie de la vallée est occupée par des rizières du cinquième mois. Au premier plan le sentier raboteux qui conduit aux temples; des Annamites en habits de fête rejoignent leurs barques; au deuxième plan un frangipanier dépouillé de ses feuilles. Au fond la muraille calcaire. *(Cliché de l'auteur.)*

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie** humaine (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, p.42

“We reach by a boat the end of the canyon which gives access to the Huong Tich sanctuaries. The major part of the valley is occupied by fifth month rice fields. In the foreground, the uneven pass which leads to the temples. Annamites with their ceremonial clothes go back to their boats. Behind them, a frangipani tree without leaves. In the background, the limestone barrier”

Appendix D.2: Photographs and figures presented by Pierre Gourou concerning the Tonkin hydrographical network and Annamite irrigation techniques

Pierre Gourou's analysis of the "water" is directed to its implications on the Annamite life and agricultural activity and devoted to the understanding of the peasant work and accomplishment. Thus, Pierre Gourou put emphasis in his illustrations on the dike networks of the Tonkin peasants or the Annamite irrigation techniques, whereas Charles Robequain stressed the achievement of France in regard to the irrigation system (Appendix 6.7).

The dikes in the Tonkin delta

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, fig.12 p.73

Pierre Gourou explained in regard to this map (p.72): "Whether their object is to hold the sea water or the river water, dikes are an essential fact in the Deltaic landscape. The fig.12 shows the prodigiously tight network of the levees that peasants have built through a millenium effort" (Les *digues, qu'elles aient pour but de contenir les eaux marines ou les eaux fluviales, sont un fait essentiel du paysage deltaïque. La figure n.12 montre le réseau prodigieusement serré des levées de terre que les paysans ont édifiés dans un effort millénaire).*

The Annamite irrigation techniques

12. — Irrigation au moyen de l'écope glissante (cái gầu kèo)

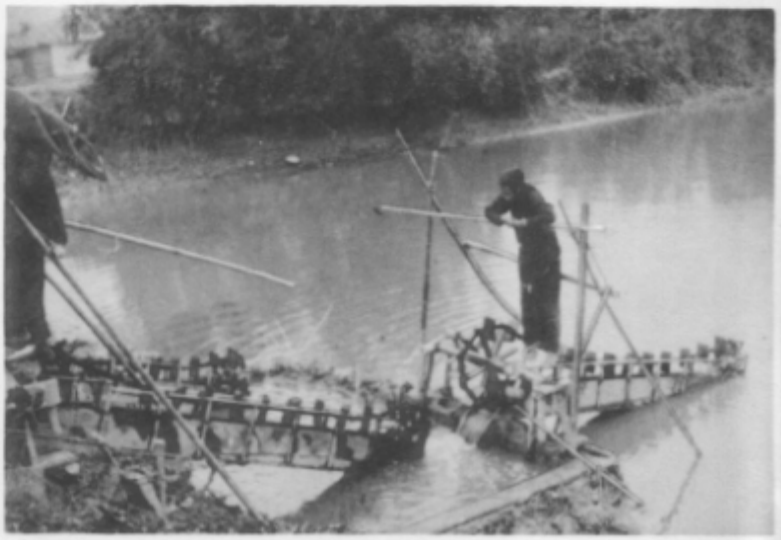
Dans le bas Delta, où l'on élève l'eau à de faibles hauteurs. Le riz vient d'être repiqué.

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

13. — Irrigation à l'aide de l'écope à trépied (cái gầu sông)

Haut Delta (province de Vĩnh Yên). Au deuxième plan un coolie portant des javelles enfourchées sur un bambou.

(Cliché Gouvernement général Indochine.)



14. — Norias à pédales utilisées pour vider une mare. Observé à Đình Bảng (c. Phù Lưu, p. Từ Sơn, Bắc Ninh.)

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, photos 12. 13, 14 p.82

Appendix D.3: Photograph extracted from Charles Robequain's thesis concerning Annamite irrigation techniques

Charles Robequain's analysis of the "water", presented in his chapter "the development of the delta" (la *mise en valeur du delta)*, is directed, similarly to Pierre Gourou's, to its implications for the Annamite conditions of life and agriculture. However, when he represents the Annamite irrigation technique with "a man irrigating, before planting out, with a bale" (Pl.XIX, B), the picture presents the peasant in the distance whereas Pierre Gourou's prints are quite close to the peasant (n.12).

B. — Chaîne-frontière septentrionale, vue des basses terres du Hà Trung, vers Gia Kiêu. Homme irriguant, avant le repiquage, à l'aide de l'écope suspendue au trépied.

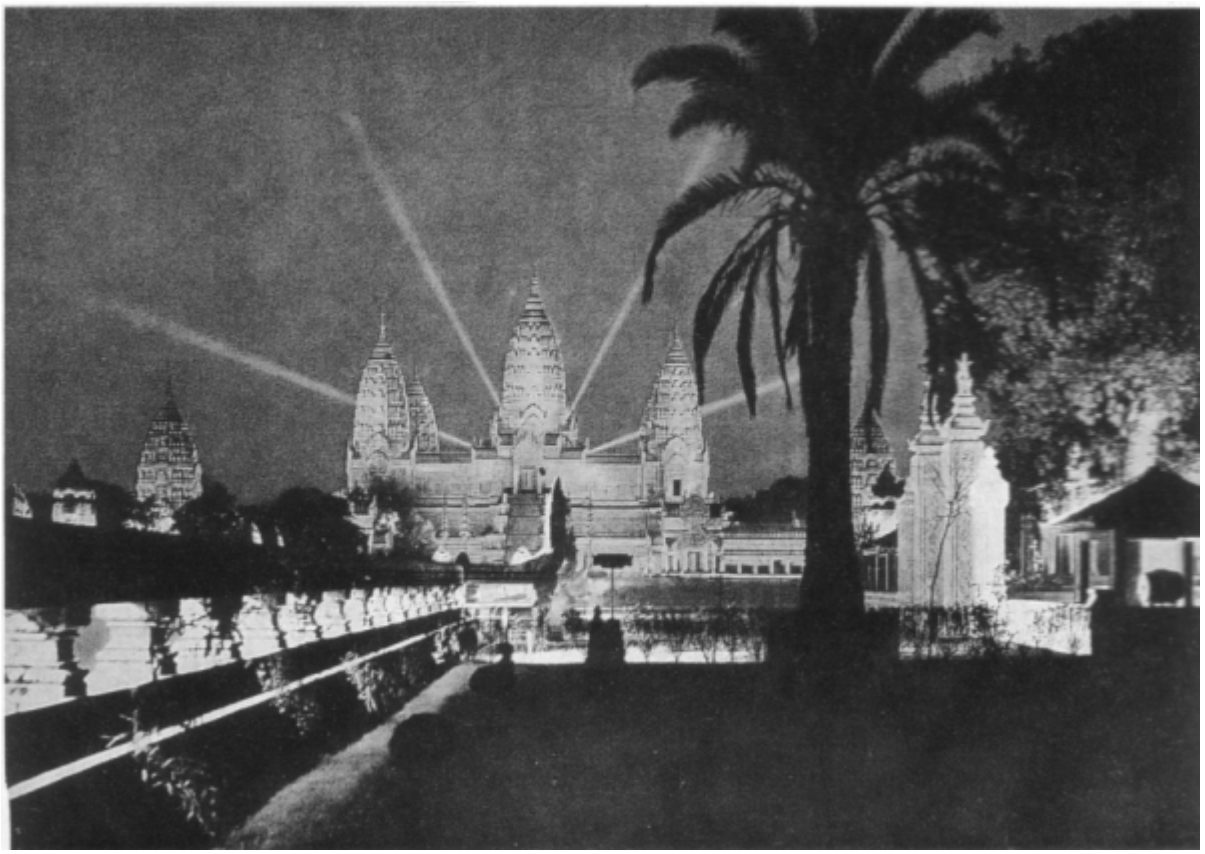
Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest, Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, plate XIX, B, p.326

APPENDIX E

COLONIAL IDEOLOGY AND ITS INTERTEXTUAL VERSIONS

Appendix E.1: The Duplication of Angkor Wat Temple (Cambodia)

Highlight of the International colonial exhibition of 1931, the Angkor Vat temple, completely duplicated, was the symbol of the achievement of France in regard to a great civilization of the past. Charles Robequain's thesis and Pierre Gourou's work on the Tonkin (1931a) were presented during the exhibition.



Source: Marseille, J. (Ed.). (1988). **Histoire** (classe de Première). Paris: Nathan, p.179

Appendix E.2: Ballenger: "République française" 1931 and Desmeures: "Le Tour du monde en un jour" (1931)

These two posters are the expression of French colonial ideology: The white colonizer is separated from the indigenous people and looks resolutely towards the light like a leader who looks to the future. The indigenous races from all over the world (the African, Arabian, West Indian and Asian races are represented), with at the background the Temple of Angkor Wat and a mosque are dominated by the French flag flying in the distance. This separation of the two worlds, the white world and the indigenous one is quite apparent in Charles Robequain's thesis, where the French colonizers are described as "masters", and in Pierre Gourou, but with a different meaning, where the act of colonization is occasionally criticised.

DESMEURES. – « Le Tour du monde en un jour » (1931)

BELLENGER. – « République française » (1931)

Source: Lemaire, S. Blanchard, P. and Bancel N. (2000). ***1931!*** Tous à l' Expo…Un évènement oublié de la République coloniale**. Le Monde Diplomatique, vol.562, p.10**

Appendix E.3: Three extracts from Paul Reynaud's speech at the Vincennes international colonial exhibition

Paul Reynaud's speech at the international colonial exhibition of Vincennes published in the golden book of the exhibition in October 1931can be compared with Sarraut (Appendix 6.1, from p.22 of "Indochine") and Robequain's discourses (Appendix 6.2, from the p.587 of his thesis) in regard to the colonial achievement of France in Indochina ("l'œuvre *de la France").* As in Albert Sarraut and Charles Robequain, Paul Reynaud's discourse exemplifies the imperialist and humanitarian ideology and myths (myths of "progress" and of the "civilisation" led by the white colonizer nations, in extract n.3, third line). It embodies the French colonial terminology where the work (l' *œuvre)* of France (extracts n.2 and 3, lines 1) is represented as a deserving and exemplary "effort" (in extract n.1 last line and extract n.3, third line) as well as the economic assessments on which French colonial discourse relies. The same colonial phraseology appears in the three discourses.

Extract n.2: after the First World War, France reoriented its ambitions into its colonies and withdrew its financial and economic investments in its Empire. This was reinforced after the World crisis of 1929 (see also in chapter 6, section 6.4.3). In fact, if the colonies became France's "first commercial partner", the trade between France and them was in deficit and dropped between 1927 and 1937 (Pervillé: 1993, p.64).

Extract n.1

■ L'exposition coloniale internationale de Vincennes

Ouverte le 6 mai 1931, elle est restée dans les mémoires comme l'apothéose de la colonisation française et européenne. Le ministre des Colonies, Paul Reynaud tira les leçons de son succès (34 millions d'entrées) dans son introduction au livre d'or de l'exposition, imprimé le 8 octobre 1931. Il surestimait pourtant le degré d'adhésion des Français à l'idée coloniale, et la solidarité entre les puissances colonisatrices.

Parler de ce que l'on connaît est une grande force. Cette force, les auteurs de ce livre la possèdent. Qui peut mieux parler de notre empire colonial que ceux qui ont travaillé à le maintenir et à le développer ? Pour le révéler à ceux qui l'ignorent, il leur suffit de se souvenir. Il leur appartient de nouer la chaîne entre le passé et le futur. En montrant les résultats de leur effort, ils apprendront aux jeunes à le continuer.

Extract n.2

Si le nombre est restreint de ceux qui doivent travailler de leurs mains à l'œuvre coloniale, tous en France en profiteront. Déjà la France extérieure est le plus gros client de la France d'Europe et le premier de ses fournisseurs ; le quart de la production totale de nos tissus de coton est absorbé par nos colonies. Que de chômeurs si ce débouché se fermait brusquement !

Extract n.3

Le livre d'or n'eut pas été l'image fidèle de la réalité, s'il ne nous eut pas montré l'œuvre colonisatrice de la France encadrée dans l'œuvre des autres nations, toutes ensemble souscrivant d'un égal effort au progrès moral et matériel : plus de civilisation et plus de richesse pour un plus grand nombre d'hommes.

Source: Pervillé, G. (1993). **De l'Empire français à la décolonisation** (Carré histoire ed., Vol. 6). Paris: Hachette, pp.79-80

Appendix E.4: French intellectuals and their picturesque perception of Indochina

Pierre Pasquier's description of Indochina entitled "Picturesque Indochina" (Pasquier, 1930, pp.245-246) is part of a work entitled *un Empire colonial français L'Indochine* which was presented during the colonial exhibition of 1931. It shows similarities with Pierre Gourou's describing the "beauties of the Delta" (pp.554-555) and "the peasant civilization", and Albert Sarraut's evocation of Indochina (Sarraut, 1930, p.17). Both of them described the landscape like a painting, and express their attachment to the tradition and the past. They used comparable phraseology and lexicon, evoking "the light and the colors, the forms and the lines of the landscape" and the "gradations of colors" (lines 10, 11, 12 p.254 in Pasquier, and lines 6,7,17,18,19 in Gourou's extract), inviting the reader to take the time to appreciate the "charm", the "harmony" established along the centuries between the landscape and the Indochinese people (line 3-8 p.256 and lines 5, 7-20 p.257 in Pasquier, lines 10-20 in Gourou's extract, lines 1-11 in Sarraut's extract).

Pierre pasquier and the picturesque Indochina

Il nous faudra ton trait nerveux, tes dégradés, encre de Chine, ton grain si doux, papier de riz, pour interpréter tes grisailles, tes jours de crachin, tes horizons en ombres chinoises, tes files de « nhàquê » en silhouette, âpre et poétique Tonkin.

Mais si la lumière et les couleurs, les formes et les lignes peuvent nous apprendre à mieux lire le visage d'un pays, il faut à notre intelligence une tendance bienveillante pour le comprendre et surtout pour s'expliquer ce qu'il a, avec le plus de prédilection et de constance, déposé dans l'esprit de ceux qui naquirent sur son sol. De lui est né une esthétique, des for-

Cl. Serv. Phot. Indochine

FIG. 123. — Cochinchine. L'arroyo.

Source: Pasquier, P. (1930). **L 'Indochine pittoresque.** In G. Maspéro (Ed.), Un Empire colonial français, l 'Indochine (Vol. II, pp. 245-253). Paris et Bruxelles: Les Editions G. Van Oest, p. 245

mules d'art qu'un effort d'affection mieux qu'une érudition, si riche soit-elle, nous rendra compréhensibles jusqu'à l'émotion qui veut la sincérité. Alors seulement, nous serons sans surprise devant l'étrange accord des paysages que nous traverserons avec l'état social des peuples destinés à y vivre.

Cl. Serv. Phot. Indochine

FIG. 124. — Thû-dû'c. Les cocotiers sur la rivière.

Du Sud et du Nord de cet étroit couloir côtier de la dernière péninsule asiatique, des races et des conceptions différentes, après s'être affrontées en un mouvement de flux et de reflux, rencontrèrent leur définitif équilibre. Le point de choc de leur plus haute marée s'inscrit au pied du jet vertical de la Tour Cham en briques roses par la ligne horizontale, proche de la terre, de la pagode annamite aux murs blafards.

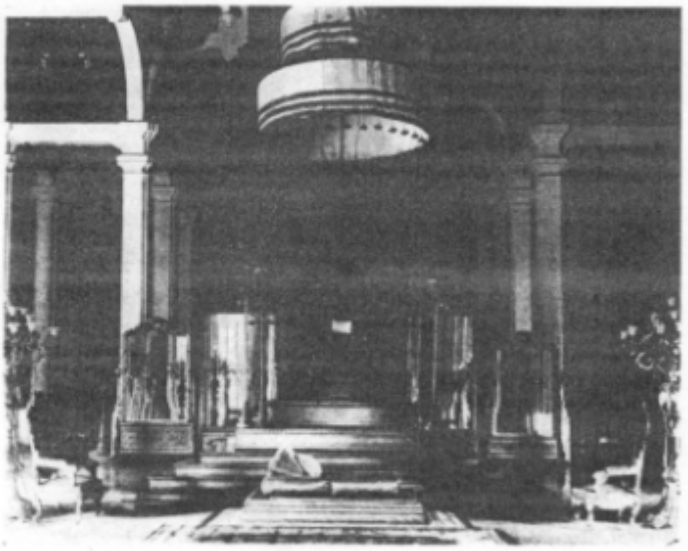
Source: Pasquier, P. (1930). **L 'Indochine pittoresque.** In G. Maspéro (Ed.), Un Empire colonial français, l 'Indochine (Vol. II, pp. 245-253). Paris et Bruxelles: Les Editions G. Van Oest, p. 246

Cl. Serv. Phot. Indochine.

Fig. 125. — Saigon. Sur la rivière.

faits. Il faudrait n'avoir aucune sensibilité pour ne pas déceler la présence des agents facteurs de transformations, créateurs de forces nouvelles sûrement, mais par cela même perturbateurs qui blessent les harmonies établies par le temps. De nouvelles symphonies s'élaborent ; elles auront leur grandeur et leur beauté ; mais ceux qui connurent l'Indochine ne peuvent oublier les aspects d'un pays encore immobilisé dans des cadres archaïques et confronter les tableaux désuets et charmants qu'elle offrait alors avec le spectacle d'une vie moderne qui heurte et bouscule dans son élaboration fiévreuse d'un décor rénové tout le pittoresque émouvant attaché aux forces faiblissantes du passé.

Vieilles coutumes qui s'effacent, gestes exquis qui s'évanouissent sous la lumière crue de notre civilisation. Combien passionnante était pour nous la recherche de la vérité devant ces rideaux interposés, ces obstacles subtils destinés à « sauver la face ». Ombre et pénombre des

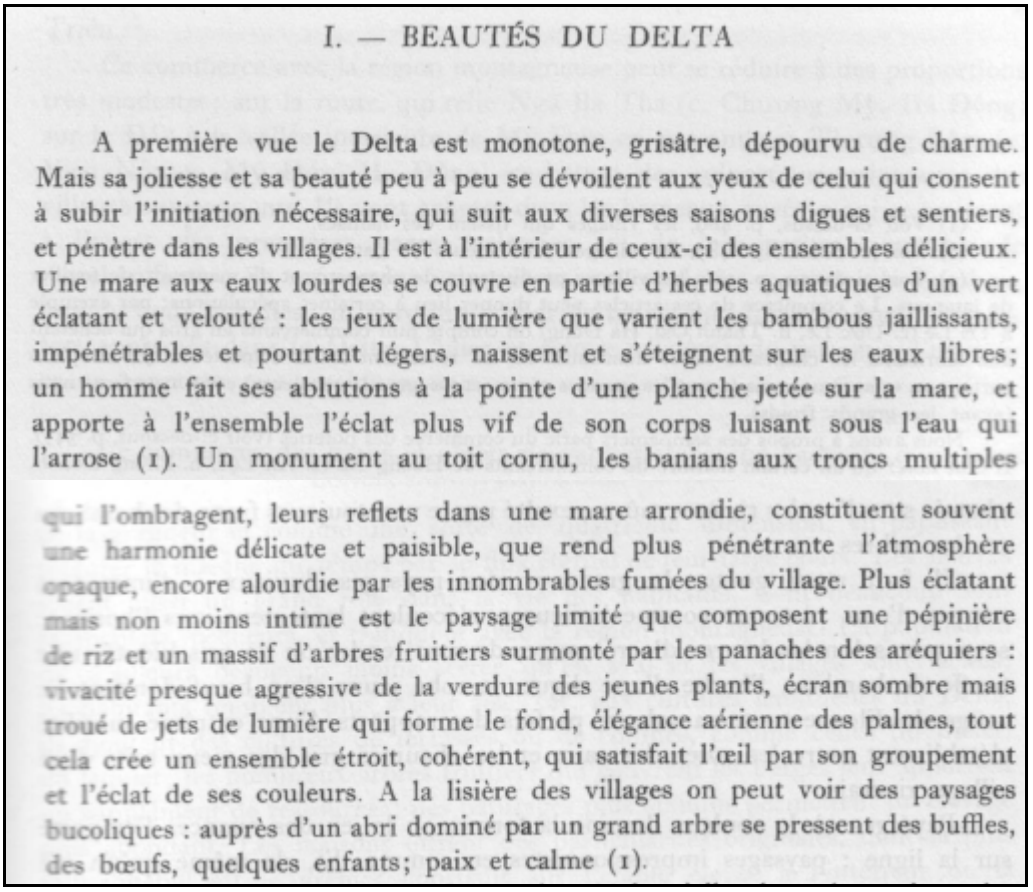


Cl. Serv. Phot. Indochine.

Fig. 126. — Phnom-peñ. Le trône royal.

Source: Pasquier, P. (1930). **L 'Indochine pittoresque.** In G. Maspéro (Ed.), Un Empire colonial français, l 'Indochine (Vol. II, pp. 245-253). Paris et Bruxelles: Les Editions G. Van Oest, p. 246

Pierre Gourou and the beauties of the Delta

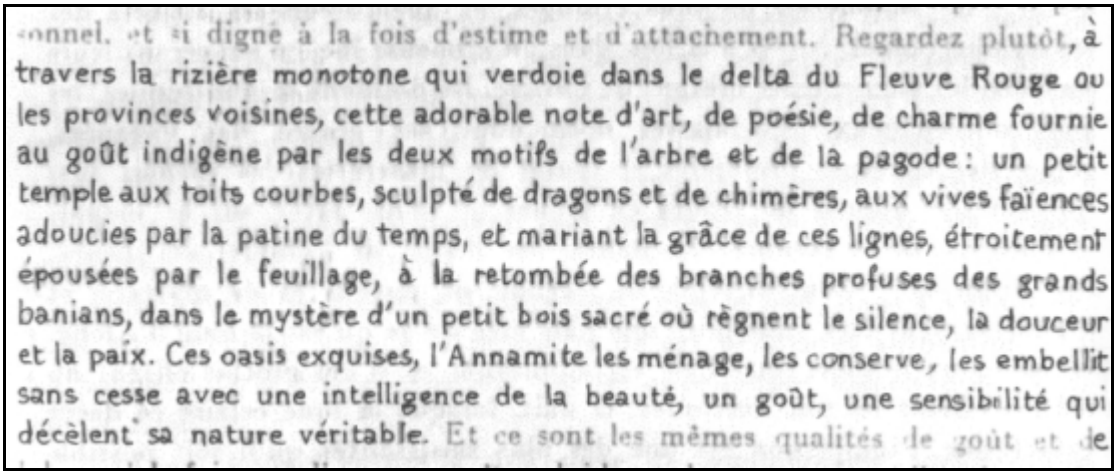


I. — BEAUTÉS DU DELTA

A première vue le Delta est monotone, grisâtre, dépourvu de charme. Mais sa joliesse et sa beauté peu à peu se dévoilent aux yeux de celui qui consent à subir l'initiation nécessaire, qui suit aux diverses saisons digues et sentiers, et pénètre dans les villages. Il est à l'intérieur de ceux-ci des ensembles délicieux. Une mare aux eaux lourdes se couvre en partie d'herbes aquatiques d'un vert éclatant et velouté : les jeux de lumière que varient les bambous jaillissants, impénétrables et pourtant légers, naissent et s'éteignent sur les eaux libres; un homme fait ses ablutions à la pointe d'une planche jetée sur la mare, et apporte à l'ensemble l'éclat plus vif de son corps luisant sous l'eau qui l'arrose (1). Un monument au toit cornu, les banians aux troncs multiples qui l'ombragent, leurs reflets dans une mare arrondie, constituent souvent une harmonie délicate et paisible, que rend plus pénétrante l'atmosphère opaque, encore alourdie par les innombrables fumées du village. Plus éclatant mais non moins intime est le paysage limité que composent une pépinière de riz et un massif d'arbres fruitiers surmonté par les panaches des aréquiers : vivacité presque agressive de la verdure des jeunes plants, écran sombre mais troué de jets de lumière qui forme le fond, élégance aérienne des palmes, tout cela crée un ensemble étroit, cohérent, qui satisfait l'œil par son groupement et l'éclat de ses couleurs. A la lisière des villages on peut voir des paysages bucoliques : auprès d'un abri dominé par un grand arbre se pressent des buffles, des bœufs, quelques enfants; paix et calme (1).

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, pp.554-555

Albert Sarraut and the seductiveness of Indochina


onnel, et si digne à la fois d'estime et d'attachement. Regardez plutôt, à travers la rizière monotone qui verdoie dans le delta du Fleuve Rouge ou les provinces voisines, cette adorable note d'art, de poésie, de charme fournie au goût indigène par les deux motifs de l'arbre et de la pagode : un petit temple aux toits courbes, sculpté de dragons et de chimères, aux vives faïences adoucies par la patine du temps, et mariant la grâce de ces lignes, étroitement épousées par le feuillage, à la retombée des branches profuses des grands banians, dans le mystère d'un petit bois sacré où règnent le silence, la douceur et la paix. Ces oasis exquises, l'Annamite les ménage, les conserve, les embellit sans cesse avec une intelligence de la beauté, un goût, une sensibilité qui décèlent sa nature véritable. Et ce sont les mêmes qualités de goût et de

Source: Sarraut, A. (1930). **Indochine** (Images du Monde ed., Vol. III). Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, p.17

In this last extract, Sarraut evoked, in a similar way to Gourou in lines 10-13, the “poetry”, “charm”, “peace”, “beauty” of the delta, its pagoda in the shade of banyans.

APPENDIX F

“THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FRANCE” AND ITS COLONIAL STATEMENT

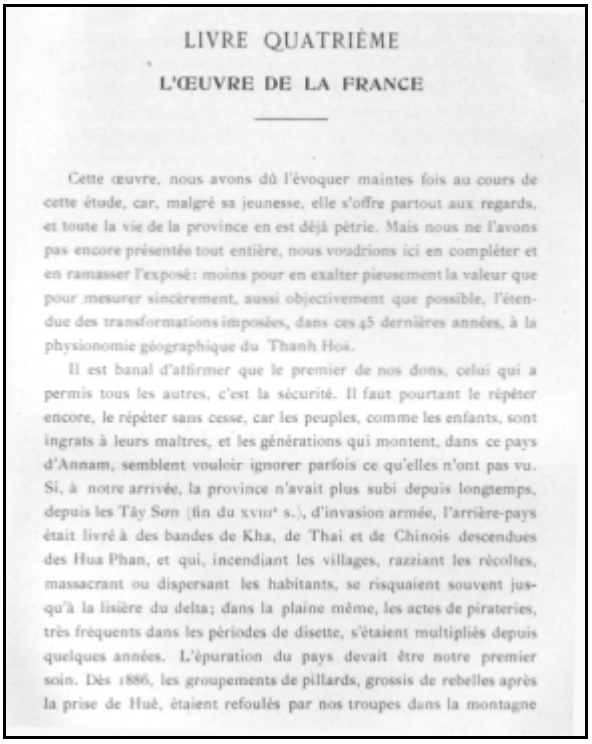
Appendix F.1 Charles Robequain’s and Albert Sarraut’s imperialist perceptions of the “achievement of France” in Indochina

The colonial myths of “progress”, “humanitarian” and “civilizing mission” set up Charles Robequain and Albert Sarraut’s argumentation in regard to “the achievement of France” in Indochina.

In the two extracts below (appendix F.1 and F.2), corresponding to Paul Reynaud’s discourse (see above appendix E.3) the words “œuvre” “effort” and “devoir” are used to designate the work of France. In the French rhetoric, “œuvre” “effort” and “devoir” have a moral connotation, where the human action gains an exemplary dimension. This rhetoric consecrates French colonialism. Both Charles Robequain and Albert Sarraut praised the colonial work and underestimated the colonial opposition, which arose in Indochina or more generally in French colonies.

Albert Sarraut and Charles Robequain’s conclusive reflection on the work of France asserts that the strategy of “French sovereignty” and colonial “pacification”, “protection”, and political “order” (in Charles Robequain’s extract, lines 9-40, in Sarraut’s extracts, lines 7-8 in the first extract, 5-22 in the second extract) is the sine qua non condition of the French work of modernization and development.

Charles Robequain's version of the colonial "achievement of France" in Thanh Hoá

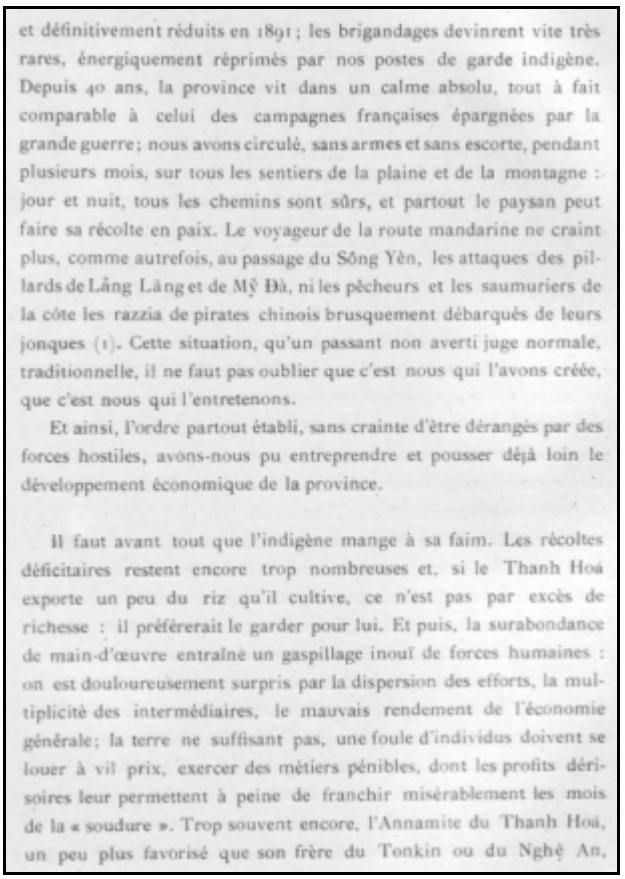


LIVRE QUATRIÈME

L'ŒUVRE DE LA FRANCE

Cette œuvre, nous avons dû l'évoquer maintes fois au cours de cette étude, car, malgré sa jeunesse, elle s'offre partout aux regards, et toute la vie de la province en est déjà pétrie. Mais nous ne l'avons pas encore présentée tout entière, nous voudrions ici en compléter et en ramasser l'exposé: moins pour en exalter pieusement la valeur que pour mesurer sincèrement, aussi objectivement que possible, l'étendue des transformations imposées, dans ces 45 dernières années, à la physionomie géographique du Thanh Hoá.

Il est banal d'affirmer que le premier de nos dons, celui qui a permis tous les autres, c'est la sécurité. Il faut pourtant le répéter encore, le répéter sans cesse, car les peuples, comme les enfants, sont ingrats à leurs maîtres, et les générations qui montent, dans ce pays d'Annam, semblent vouloir ignorer parfois ce qu'elles n'ont pas vu. Si, à notre arrivée, la province n'avait plus subi depuis longtemps, depuis les Tây Sơn (fin du XVIIIe s.), d'invasion armée, l'arrière-pays était livré à des bandes de Kha, de Thai et de Chinois descendues des Hua Phan, et qui, incendiant les villages, razziant les récoltes, massacrant ou dispersant les habitants, se risquaient souvent jusqu'à la lisière du delta; dans la plaine même, les actes de pirateries, très fréquents dans les périodes de disette, s'étaient multipliés depuis quelques années. L'épuration du pays devait être notre premier soin. Dès 1886, les groupements de pillards, grossis de rebelles après la prise de Huè, étaient refoulés par nos troupes dans la montagne



et définitivement réduits en 1891; les brigandages devinrent vite très rares, énergiquement réprimés par nos postes de garde indigène. Depuis 40 ans, la province vit dans un calme absolu, tout à fait comparable à celui des campagnes françaises épargnées par la grande guerre; nous avons circulé, sans armes et sans escorte, pendant plusieurs mois, sur tous les sentiers de la plaine et de la montagne : jour et nuit, tous les chemins sont sûrs, et partout le paysan peut faire sa récolte en paix. Le voyageur de la route mandarine ne craint plus, comme autrefois, au passage du Sông Yên, les attaques des pillards de Lăng Lăng et de Mỹ Đà, ni les pêcheurs et les saumuriers de la côte les razzia de pirates chinois brusquement débarqués de leurs jonques (1). Cette situation, qu'un passant non averti juge normale, traditionnelle, il ne faut pas oublier que c'est nous qui l'avons créée, que c'est nous qui l'entretenons.

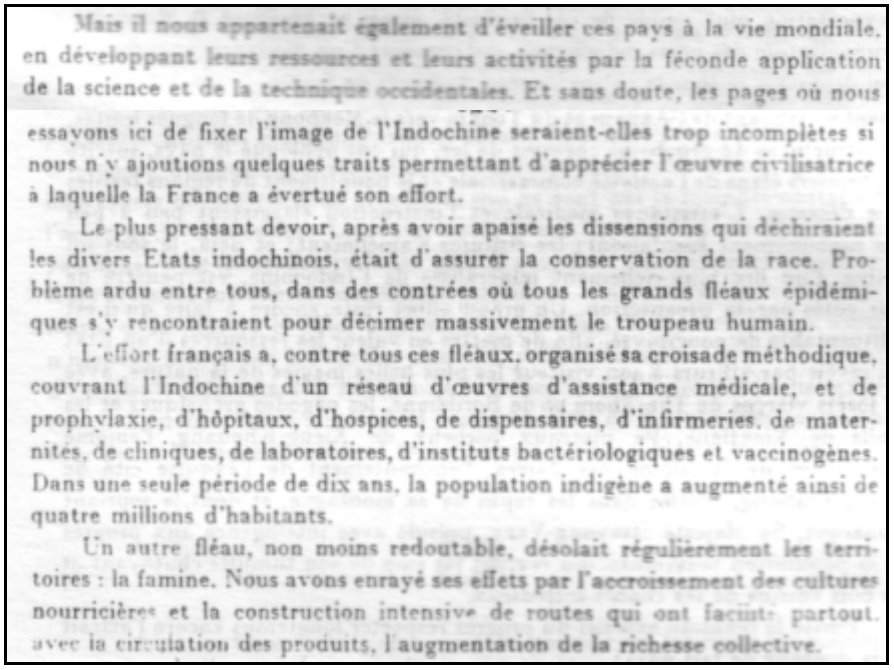
Et ainsi, l'ordre partout établi, sans crainte d'être dérangés par des forces hostiles, avons-nous pu entreprendre et pousser déjà loin le développement économique de la province.

Il faut avant tout que l'indigène mange à sa faim. Les récoltes déficitaires restent encore trop nombreuses et, si le Thanh Hoá exporte un peu du riz qu'il cultive, ce n'est pas par excès de richesse : il préférerait le garder pour lui. Et puis, la surabondance de main-d'œuvre entraîne un gaspillage inouï de forces humaines : on est douloureusement surpris par la dispersion des efforts, la multiplicité des intermédiaires, le mauvais rendement de l'économie générale; la terre ne suffisant pas, une foule d'individus doivent se louer à vil prix, exercer des métiers pénibles, dont les profits dérisoires leur permettent à peine de franchir misérablement les mois de la « soudure ». Trop souvent encore, l'Annamite du Thanh Hoá, un peu plus favorisé que son frère du Tonkin ou du Nghệ An,

Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest, Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, pp.585-587

Albert Sarraut's version of the colonial "achievement of France" in Indochina

Extract I



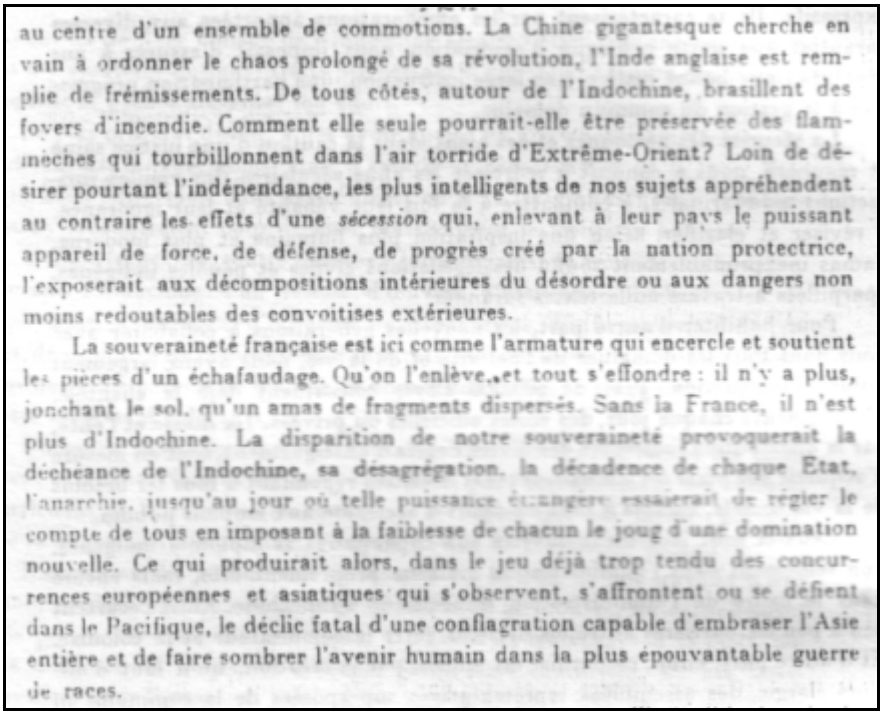
Mais il nous appartenait également d'éveiller ces pays à la vie mondiale, en développant leurs ressources et leurs activités par la féconde application de la science et de la technique occidentales. Et sans doute, les pages où nous essayons ici de fixer l'image de l'Indochine seraient-elles trop incomplètes si nous n'y ajoutions quelques traits permettant d'apprécier l'œuvre civilisatrice à laquelle la France a évertué son effort.

Le plus pressant devoir, après avoir apaisé les dissensions qui déchiraient les divers Etats indochinois, était d'assurer la conservation de la race. Problème ardu entre tous, dans des contrées où tous les grands fléaux épidémiques s'y rencontraient pour décimer massivement le troupeau humain.

L'effort français a, contre tous ces fléaux, organisé sa croisade méthodique, couvrant l'Indochine d'un réseau d'œuvres d'assistance médicale, et de prophylaxie, d'hôpitaux, d'hospices, de dispensaires, d'infirmeries, de maternités, de cliniques, de laboratoires, d'instituts bactériologiques et vaccinogènes. Dans une seule période de dix ans, la population indigène a augmenté ainsi de quatre millions d'habitants.

Un autre fléau, non moins redoutable, désolait régulièrement les territoires : la famine. Nous avons enrayé ses effets par l'accroissement des cultures nourricières et la construction intensive de routes qui ont facilité partout, avec la circulation des produits, l'augmentation de la richesse collective.

Extract II



au centre d'un ensemble de commotions. La Chine gigantesque cherche en vain à ordonner le chaos prolongé de sa révolution, l'Inde anglaise est remplie de frémissements. De tous côtés, autour de l'Indochine, brasillent des foyers d'incendie. Comment elle seule pourrait-elle être préservée des flammèches qui tourbillonnent dans l'air torride d'Extrême-Orient? Loin de désirer pourtant l'indépendance, les plus intelligents de nos sujets appréhendent au contraire les effets d'une *sécession* qui, enlevant à leur pays le puissant appareil de force, de défense, de progrès créé par la nation protectrice, l'exposerait aux décompositions intérieures du désordre ou aux dangers non moins redoutables des convoitises extérieures.

La souveraineté française est ici comme l'armature qui encercle et soutient les pièces d'un échafaudage. Qu'on l'enlève, et tout s'effondre : il n'y a plus, jonchant le sol, qu'un amas de fragments dispersés. Sans la France, il n'est plus d'Indochine. La disparition de notre souveraineté provoquerait la déchéance de l'Indochine, sa désagrégation, la décadence de chaque Etat, l'anarchie, jusqu'au jour où telle puissance étrangère essaierait de régler le compte de tous en imposant à la faiblesse de chacun le joug d'une domination nouvelle. Ce qui produirait alors, dans le jeu déjà trop tendu des concurrences européennes et asiatiques qui s'observent, s'affrontent ou se défient dans le Pacifique, le déclic fatal d'une conflagration capable d'embraser l'Asie entière et de faire sombrer l'avenir humain dans la plus épouvantable guerre de races.

Source: Sarraut, A. (1930). **Indochine** (Images du Monde ed., Vol. III). Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, pp.22-24

Appendix F.2: Maps and the Spatial Representations of Demographic Statistics or Trading Activities

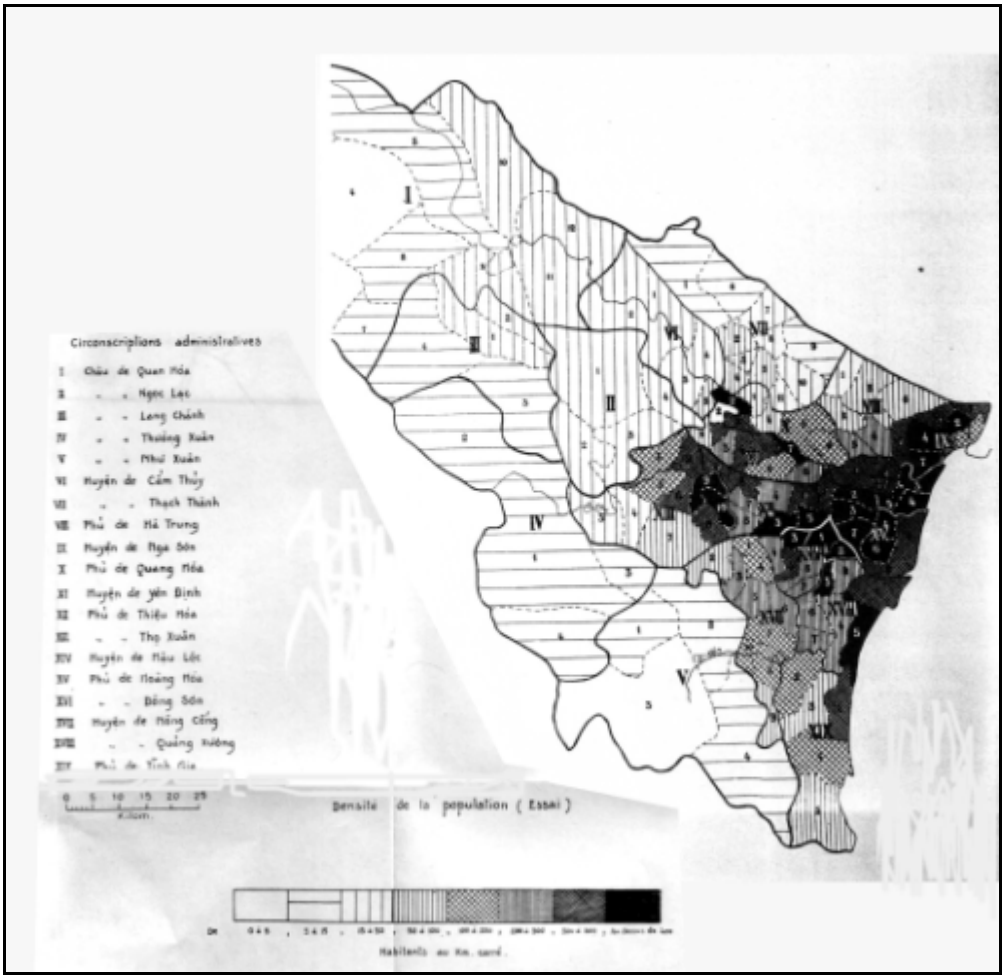
Charles Robequain started to treat regional demographic data by drawing statistical maps ("*Densité de la population [essai]*", Plate 3 in attachment in Robequain's thesis, reproduced below).

Charles Robequain's thematic map "*carte commerciale du Thanh Hoá*" (see below) meets the colonial and planning ambition to classify order and rationalize places and regions. His map innovates in representing the structure, the hierarchy and the embryos of organization (with nodal places with a star pattern) of trade infrastructures and markets in the Thanh Hoá province.

Pierre Gourou developed rather further than Charles Robequain the use of census and cartographical tools: In his thesis, the statistical maps became an integral part of the geographical discourse. For example, the map entitled *"Delta tonkinois Densité de la population [carte thématique*" (fig.31 p.152 in Gourou's thesis) is jointly correlated to the text next to it (pp. 151, 153-154 in Gourou, partly represented below). It shows how Gourou studied methodically the demography of the delta with a statistical treatment of the 1931 census data and a systematic cartographic representation of the results. Such treatments were quite new at the time.

All these maps represent a new geographical language, which unveil regional structures.

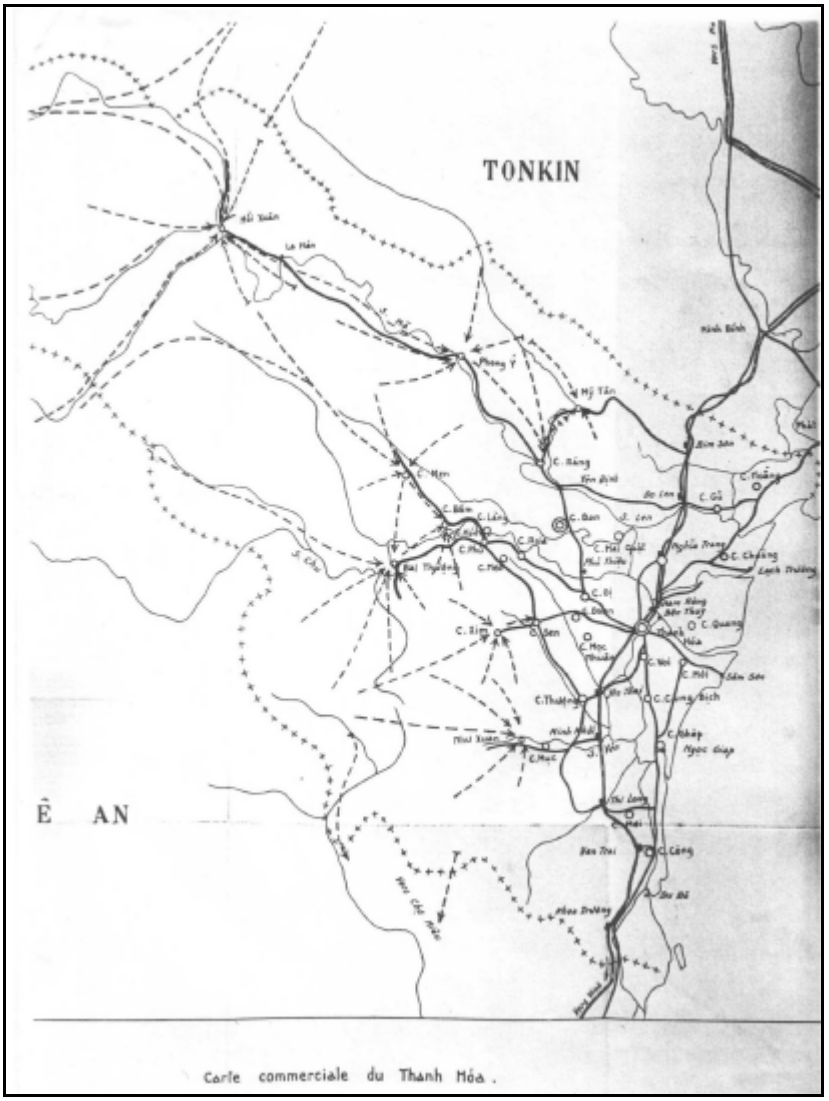
Densité de la population [essai]

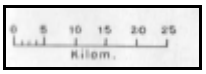


Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest, Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, attachment Plate n3

Charles Robequain expressed the view that it is “necessary to know as soon as possible the correct number and the exact distribution of the Indochinese population” (p.497) and that the results of the census data are erroneous (p.498). He explained that “armed with a naïve courage” he tried to calculate himself the total of the villages’ population by questioning the inhabitants and then comparing his results with the results of the 1921 census data. He wrote about this map: “From these inquiries and comparisons, no absolute certainty could be formulated, but only the impression that the results of the census data had to be increased from ¼. Then the approximate limits of the districts on 1/25,000 scale maps were drawn from the information that we gathered during the inquiries … That is how the map of the distribution of population density was done (Plate 3)”. And Charles Robequain qualified this map as a “basic sketch” and expressed the wish to work on a more rigorous and reliable census data (p.499).

Carte commerciale du Thanh Hoá

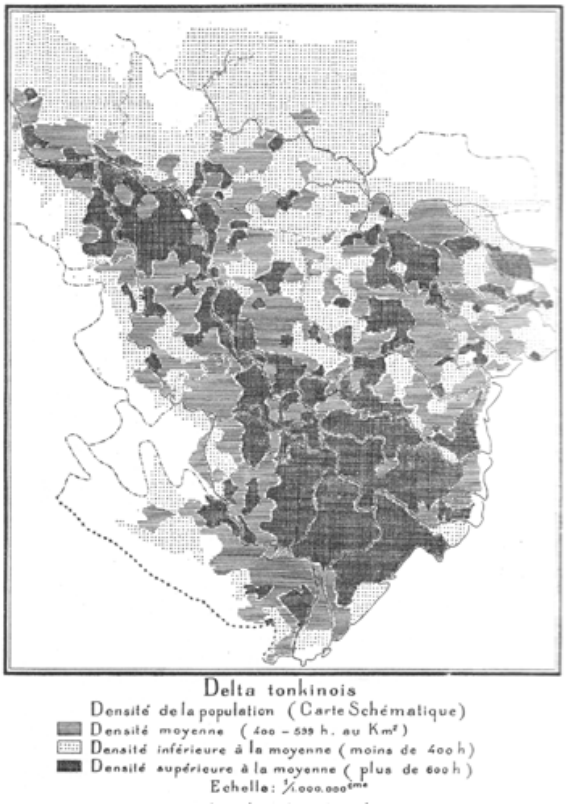




Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest, Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, attachment plate 4

Charles Robequain (p.538) noticed that *"if we observe accurately* and classify markets according to their importance, we notice immediately that some locations are preferred (plate n.4)."… He observed the presence of a line of more active markets, which marks the border between the sandbars and the lower delta (cho Hoang, cho Bui, cho Choang…) or the border between the Delta and the mountainous country (cho Xim…). He recorded also the role of the Mandarine road (which encourages the development of the markets of cho Chep and cho Cong for example), the crossroads (which sustain the development of the markets in the upper delta like cho Moi) and of the railway built under French authority (with the recent development of the market of cho Tinh, the market of the capitale). He finds it "more difficult to explain the prosperity of Cho Ban" (p.540).

Delta tonkinois Densité de la population (carte thématique)



Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humai**ne (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École *Française D' Extrême-Orient, fig.31 p.152*

B. — Les Types de Densité

Avant d'examiner la répartition géographique des densités il nous paraît utile d'étudier les types de densité (1). Le territoire du Delta tonkinois se répartit de la façon suivante entre les divers types de densité :

La carte hors-texte des densités figure ces divers types de densité, mais contracte en une seule teinte les densités comprises entre 1.100 et 1.500 (645 Km²).

Si l'on répartit les densités selon les zones schématiques de la carte au 1/1.000.000me (Fig. nº 31) on obtient les résultats suivants :

Densité moyenne (400-600 habitants au kilomètre carré)	3.100 Km²
Densité inférieure à la moyenne (moins de 400 habitants par kilomètre carré)	7.500 Km²
Densité supérieure à la moyenne (plus de 600 habitants au kilomètre carré)	4.320 Km²

Il est maintenant intéressant d'étudier comment se répartit la population du Delta selon les types de densité :

Si l'on reprend les catégories de la carte au 1/1.000.000me (Fig. nº 31), on constate que 1.500.000 personnes vivent dans des régions de densité moyenne, tandis que 1.500.000 habitent des régions de densité inférieure à la moyenne et 3.500.000 des régions de densité supérieure à la moyenne.

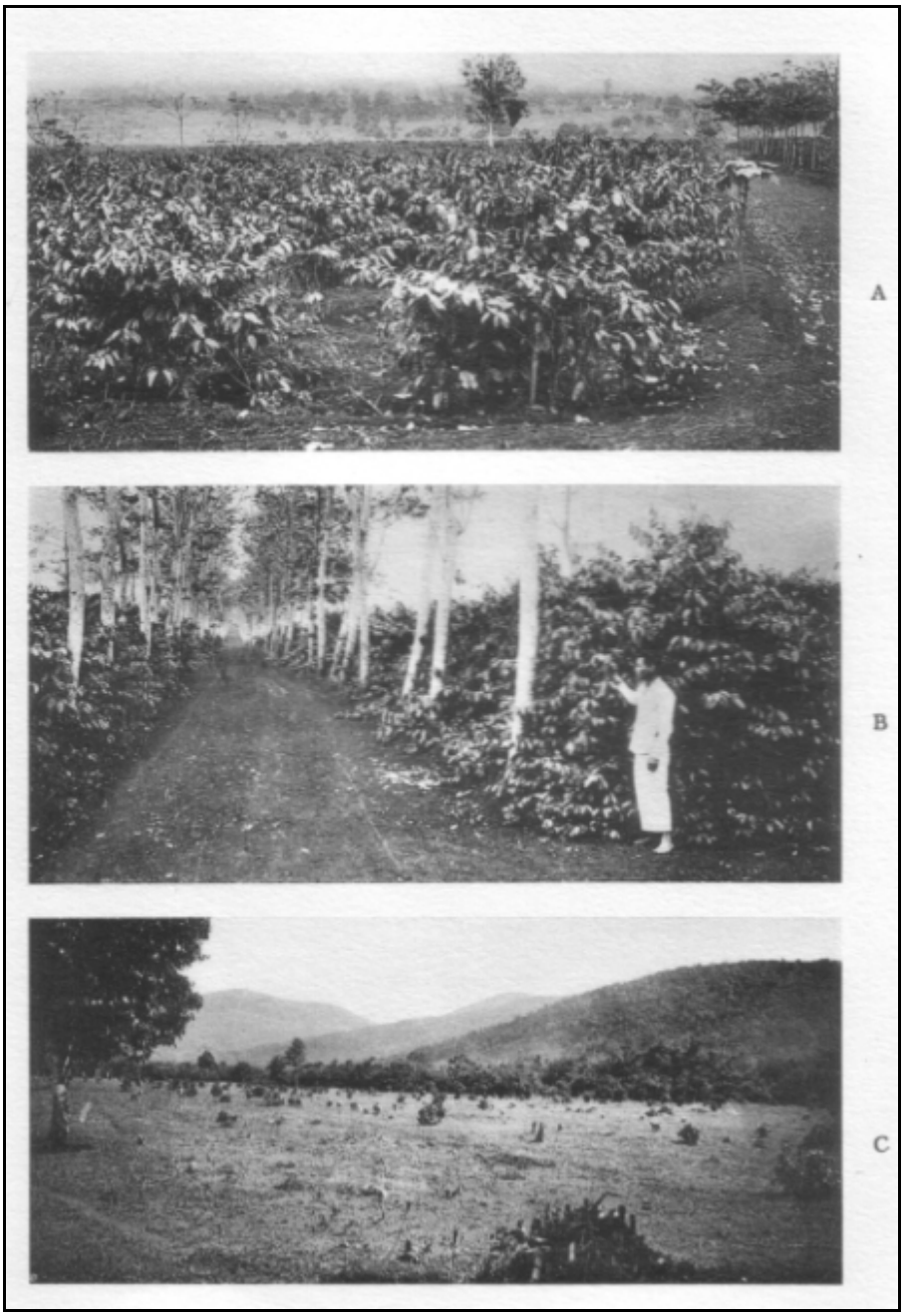
Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, pp.151, 153-154 (extracts only)

On this 1/1000,000 scale map, Pierre Gourou gathered in three representative groups the 17 types of population density he identified in the 1/250,000 map (plate 2, in the Appendix of his thesis) in order to reveal the broad scheme of the distribution of the Tonkin delta peasantry. In the written part, he investigates further these categories, these various and contrasted types of densities, where the most populated villages are established along the side of the Red River and in the lower delta and the lesser populated areas are found towards the periphery of the delta.

Appendix F.3: Modernity and Indochinese Landscapes

Yên Mý concession" presented in Charles Robequain's thesis, A: "3 years old coffee tree, B: 9 years old coffee tree. Road lined with xoan and abrasins", C: "Pastures

These three prints from Robequain's thesis (plate XLVIII, in the fourth part "L' œuvre de la France) are the last ones to appear in the thesis and give the reader a view of the most recent husbandry (a model coffee plantation with healthy trees and approached by broad avenues) and a familiar and bucolic vision of the region.



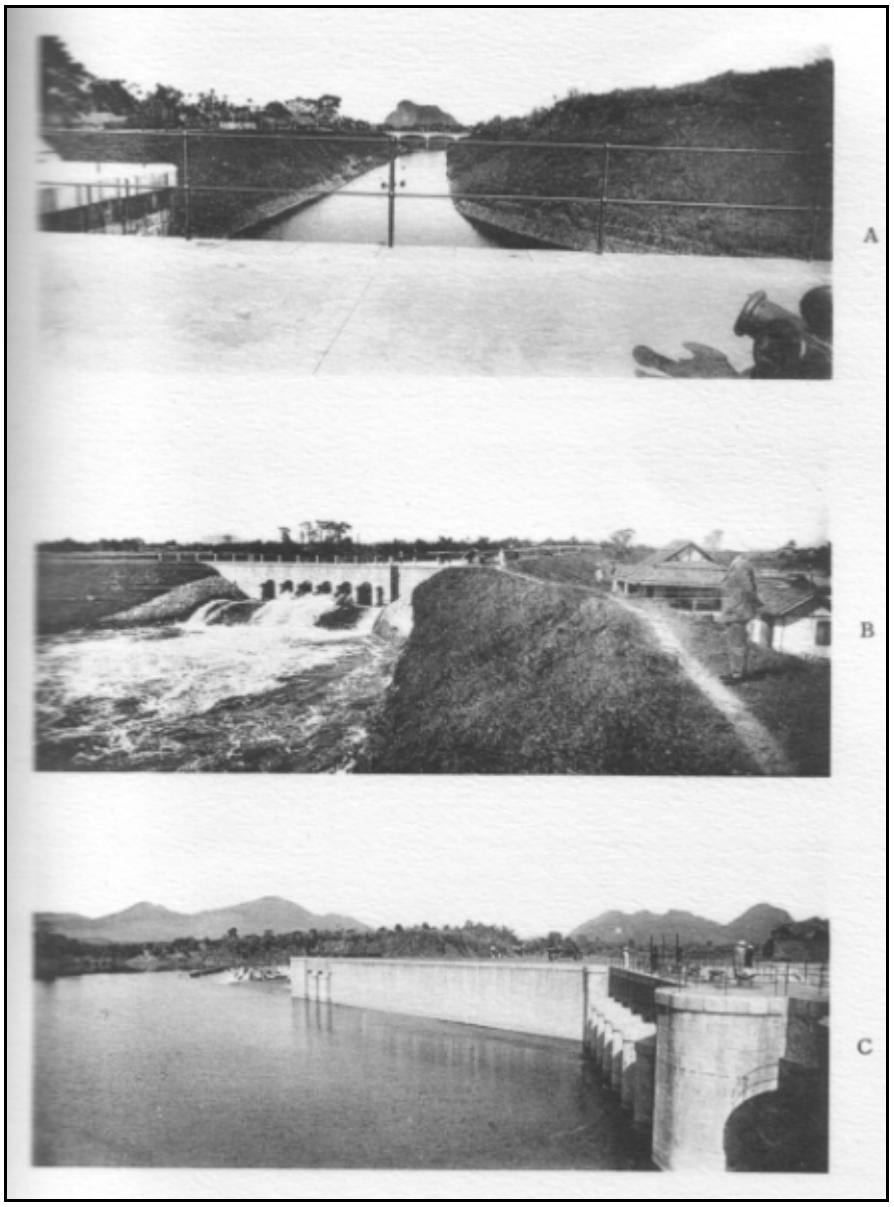
Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest, Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate XLVIII

Appendix F.4: The construction of dams and irrigation networks as a symbol of French achievement in Indochina

With the presentation of these photographs (pl.XX, in the chapter “la mise en valeur du delta”), Charles Robequain extolled, like the author of the article entitled l’ effort français en Indochine in the magazine *l’ Illustration* published the 5 January 1935, “the admirable achievement” (Robequain, p.330) and the French “effort” (SEFAG et L’ Illustration (Ed.), 1993, p.188) in Indochina in regard to the construction of dams and dykes networks. The photos are like the visual demonstration of the ‘greatness’ of French works. These were conceived to “protect efficiently” Vietnamese populations from floods, “provide” a “modernized” irrigation network, and “improve the peasant life” (Robequain, p.331). At another level, these works were supposed to reinforce the economic links between France and its colony.

There is no such visual representations and accent in regard to the French achievement in Indochina in Pierre Gourou’s thesis. In fact, Pierre Gourou’s discourse (p.105) presents also some colonial wording and statements, writing about “the magnificent improvement” provided by the modernization of the irrigation network, but he is far more sceptical towards the relevance of the irrigation systems and dams which have been built or planned. He even notes “Besides the hundreds of thousands of piastres absorbed by the works, it would have been good to spend some thousands of piastres for the good of society. Thus we would have avoid this shocking strangeness that the regions where we did the biggest efforts to improve the lot of people are probably the ones which needed it the least” (“à côté des centaines de milliers de piastres absorbées par les travaux, il n’ eût pas été mauvais de dépenser quelques milliers de piastres dans un but social. Ainsi aurait-on évité cette étrangeté choquante que les régions où l’ on a fait les plus gros efforts pour améliorer le sort des habitants sont probablement celles qui en avaient le moins besoin”), lines 12-16.

Charles Robequain's illustrative emphasis on French irrigation accomplishment in Thanh Hoá



A. — Barrage de Baï Thượng : origine du canal principal (décembre 1927).

B. — Réseau d'irrigation du Sông Chu : écluse et déversoir sur le canal Nord (décembre 1927).

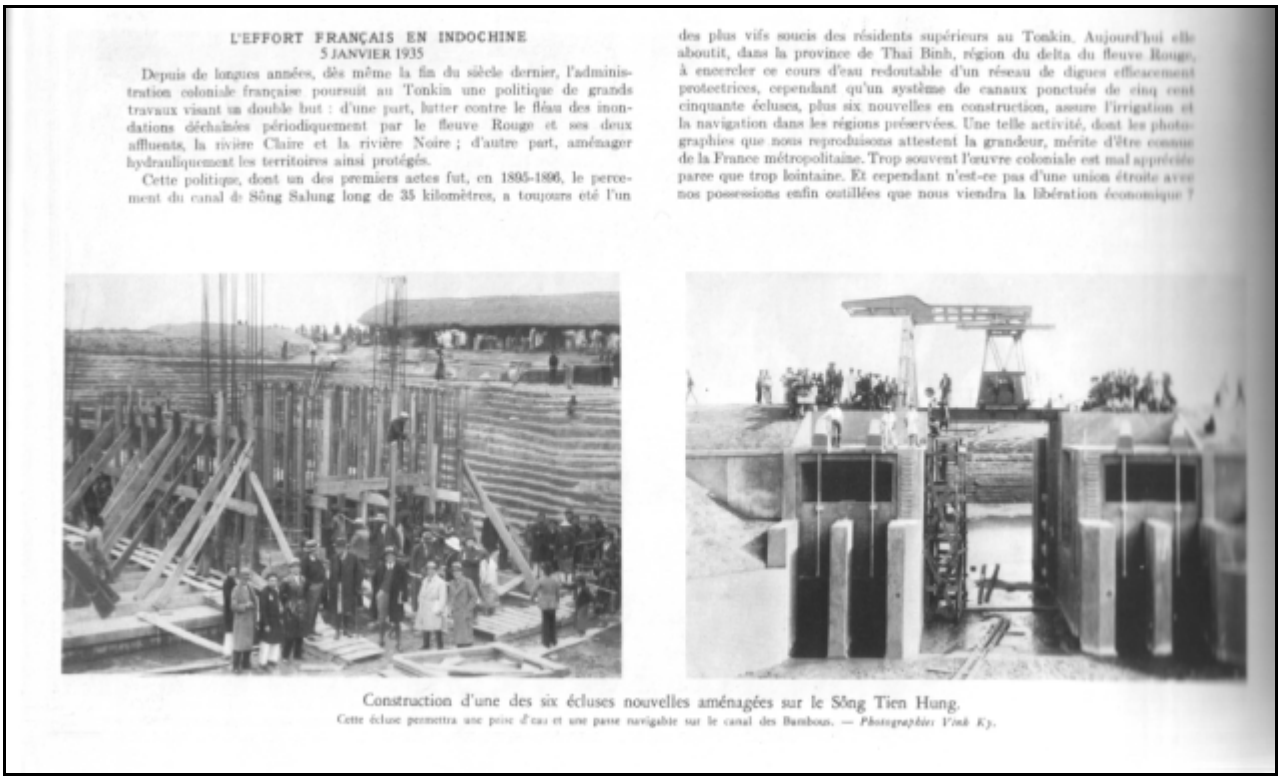
C. — Barrage de Baï Thượng, vu de l'amont (décembre 1927). A gauche, écluse de chasse à 3 pertuis. A droite, au premier plan, écluse de prise à 7 pertuis. Au fond, collines du Ngọc Lạc.

Clichés E. F. E. O.

Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest, Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, plateXX.

These photos represent the Bai Thuong dam with its main irrigation canal (photo A), a lock and overflow in the North canal of the Song Chu irrigation network (photo B) and the same dam from a different perspective (photo C)

Representation and exaltation of French irrigation achievement in Indochina” in French magazines



L'EFFORT FRANÇAIS EN INDOCHINE
5 JANVIER 1935

Depuis de longues années, dès même la fin du siècle dernier, l'administration coloniale française poursuit au Tonkin une politique de grands travaux visant un double but : d'une part, lutter contre le fléau des inondations déchaînées périodiquement par le fleuve Rouge et ses deux affluents, la rivière Claire et la rivière Noire ; d'autre part, aménager hydrauliquement les territoires ainsi protégés.

Cette politique, dont un des premiers actes fut, en 1895-1896, le percement du canal de Sông Salung long de 35 kilomètres, a toujours été l'un des plus vifs soucis des résidents supérieurs au Tonkin. Aujourd'hui elle aboutit, dans la province de Thai Binh, région du delta du fleuve Rouge, à encercler ce cours d'eau redoutable d'un réseau de digues efficacement protectrices, cependant qu'un système de canaux ponctués de cinq cent cinquante écluses, plus six nouvelles en construction, assure l'irrigation et la navigation dans les régions préservées. Une telle activité, dont les photographies que nous reproduisons attestent la grandeur, mérite d'être connue de la France métropolitaine. Trop souvent l'œuvre coloniale est mal appréciée parce que trop lointaine. Et cependant n'est-ce pas d'une union étroite avec nos possessions enfin outillées que nous viendra la libération économique ?

Construction d'une des six écluses nouvelles aménagées sur le Sông Tien Hung.
Cette écluse permettra une prise d'eau et une passe navigable sur le canal des Bambous. — *Photographies Vinh Ky.*

Source: magazine **l’ Illustration** Journal universel, 5 January 1935

Reprinted in SEFAG et L’ Illustration (Ed.). (1993). **Les Grands Dossiers de L’ Illustration L’ Indochine Histoire d’ un siècle 1843-1944**. Paris: Le Livre de Paris, p.188

This article presents the construction of a new lock from the Thai Binh irrigation network as an achievement of “French colonial administration” (line 1). The journalist explains that 6 new locks will be added to the 550 others and notes that “such a performance which the photos we reproduce [in the article] corroborate, deserves to be known by the French mother country”.

Extract from Pierre Gourou's chapter "the physical environment: irrigation networks"

mal la population actuelle, on ignore quel était le nombre des habitants avant le commencement des travaux : le plus ancien de ces réseaux, celui de Kép, ayant été mis en eau en 1902, il serait instructif de pouvoir étudier l'évolution de la population de 1905 à 1935; il est malheureusement tout à fait impossible de le faire. Les réseaux ayant été généralement établis dans des pays faiblement peuplés, il eût été logique que se produisît spontanément ou que fût organisée une migration de colons recrutés dans les régions à population excessive; rien de semblable n'a eu lieu. Aucune tentative de ce genre n'a été faite pour le dernier réseau mis en service, celui du S. Cầu; il semble pourtant qu'une partie des terres valorisées eût pu être réservée à des immigrants de Thái Bình et de Nam Định; à côté des centaines de milliers de piastres absorbées par les travaux, il n'eût pas été mauvais de dépenser quelques milliers de piastres dans un but social. Ainsi aurait-on évité cette étrangeté choquante que les régions où l'on a fait les plus gros efforts pour améliorer le sort des habitants sont probablement celles qui en avaient le moins besoin. Au point de vue économique le Service des Travaux Publics estime que l'irrigation par gravité apporte une amélioration de 50 % des rendements dans les terres déjà cultivées et permet d'utiliser des terres en jachère en hiver. Il est certain que l'amélioration est magnifique dans les terres hautes, mais elle est beaucoup moins sensible dans les terres moyennes et basses (1).

L'expérience des réseaux d'irrigation en fonctionnement au Tonkin apporte quelques enseignements qui pourront être utiles pour les futurs travaux. D'abord l'irrigation telle qu'elle a été organisée dans les quatre réseaux réduit le travail du paysan puisqu'elle supprime la manœuvre de l'écope et du panier; en ce sens les paysans la jugent commode; pourtant le but des travaux d'irrigation ne doit pas être de réduire le travail du paysan, mais d'assurer à ce travail une rémunération plus abondante et plus régulière. D'autre part l'étude de l'irrigation doit s'accompagner d'une étude non moins poussée du drainage; comme nous l'avons dit, sur la presque totalité du Delta et dans le plus grand nombre d'années, il est plus nécessaire d'enlever de l'eau en été que d'en apporter. C'est pourquoi il faut complètement rejeter les canaux « hauts » qui mettent l'eau au-dessus des rizières et donnent toute facilité à l'irrigation, mais ne servent de rien pour le drainage, l'entravent par leur présence même et inondent les terres par les infiltrations qui se propagent à travers leurs berges; il faut établir des canaux « bas », qui peuvent à l'occasion servir au drainage et qui ne risquent point d'inonder les rizières environnantes; le paysan sera obligé de se donner la peine de puiser dans ces canaux avec écopes et

(1) Le Service des Travaux Publics estimait en 1913 que le total des dépenses du réseau de Kép s'était élevé à 671.000$, et que le bénéfice annuel réalisé par les habitants était de 300.000$ (cf. un article de M. ROUEN, *BEI.* 1914, pp. 517-540). En 1926 on estimait ce bénéfice à 500.000$ (66 piastres de super-revenu annuel pour 90$ de frais d'établissement) (A. POUYANNE, *Les Travaux publics de l'Indochine*, Hanoi, 1926, p. 107).

Le réseau de Vĩnh Yên a coûté 1.240.000$ (73 $ par Ha.); le bénéfice annuel serait de 50$ par Ha., soit 850.000$, d'après la même source (ID., p. 107).

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, p.105

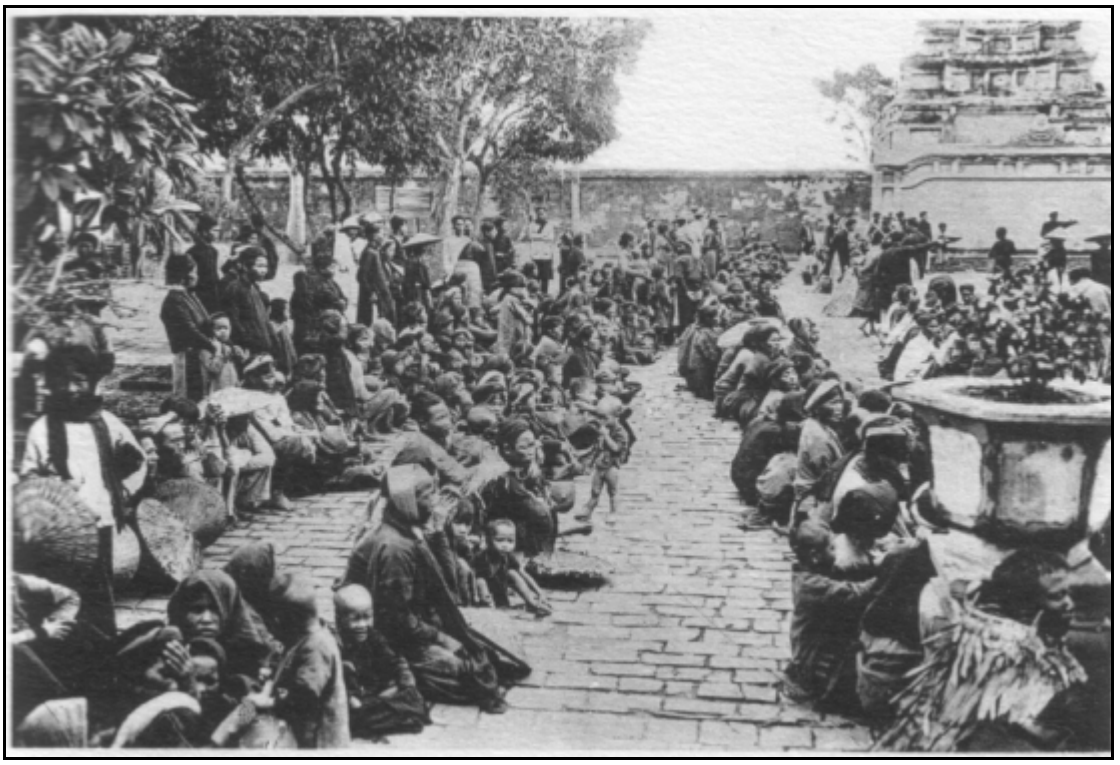
Pierre Gourou remained critical towards French irrigation achievements and informs in this extract: "that the regions where we made the biggest effort to improve the lot of the people are probably the ones which needed it the least" (line 15) and that "…irrigation [the irrigation network that France has organized]…has reduced the peasant work. However, the aim of the colonial irrigation waterworks must not be to reduce the peasants' work, but to insure more generous and regular payments for this work". (lines 25-27).

APPENDIX G

CHARLES ROBEQUAIN'S COLONIAL AND PIERRE GOUROU'S SOCIAL ETHNOGEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS

Appendix G.1 "The distribution of food supplies to the disaster victims of the flooded districts, in the Royal Pagoda of the citadel of the country town"

With this photograph, Charles Robequain informed that Indochinese life was affected by natural calamities such as floods or drought, and that French administration was rescuing the population affected by these disasters.

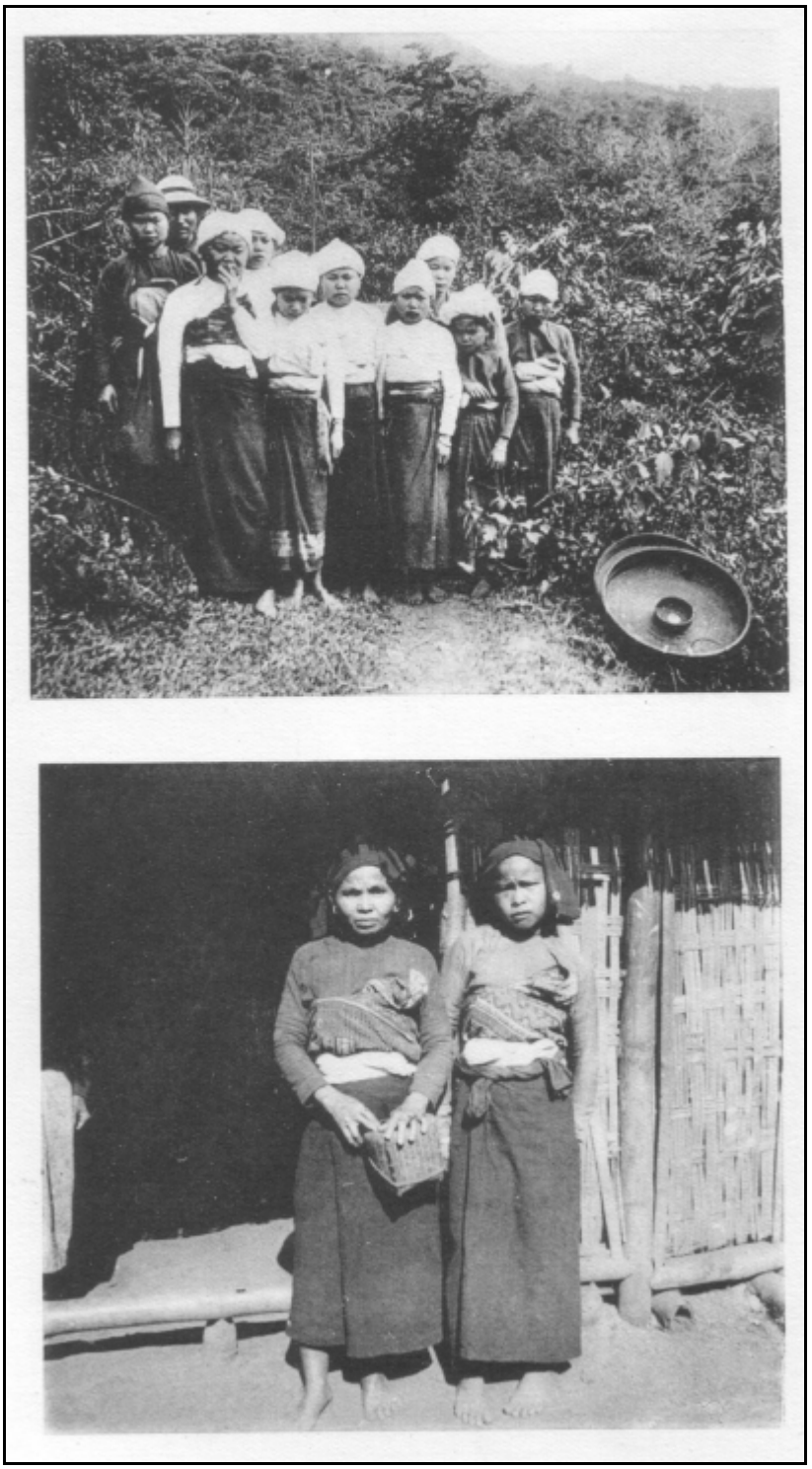


Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate.XVIII

Appendix G.2: Representations of women in Charles Robequain's thesis

Charles Robequain, frequently represented Indochinese women in similar ways to the ethnologists of the time who were studying primitive societies. Women are often captured in their traditional costumes (appendix 7.2, plate IV A, plate VI B and plate XIV F in Robequain's thesis), in front of their huts or rice storehouses (appendix 7.3, plate IV B, plate V B, plate XIII,C), or at the market (appendix 7.4 plate XLVII A, B). Some are represented working (appendix 7.5, plate XIII D and plate XXIX A), but the image or the text suggest the cheerless, archaic or backward aspects of their life. In contrast, Pierre Gourou's thesis portrays Annamite women in movement with appreciative and affectionate words and illustrations. In Charles Robequain's thesis, Indochinese women and the men look sad and even reluctant to be photographed (see the Thai women from Phu Le), and there is often a white man with his colonial helmet in the background of the picture.

Thai women from Phu Le, on the pass from Hoi to Van Mai, B: Muong women from Hac Cao



Source: Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate IV A

Thai young girls from Lam Lu with ceremonial costumes

Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate VI B

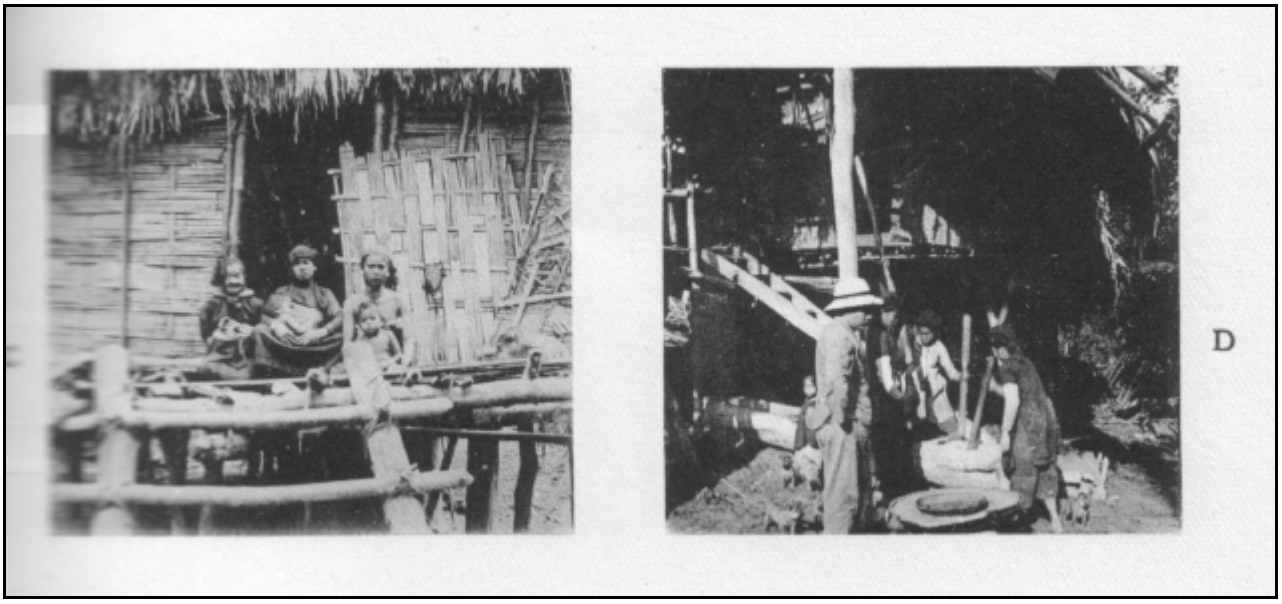
Man women from Nui Hao

Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Pl.ate XIV F

Muong women from Hac Cao

Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate IV B:

Thai women on their hut's balcony
Trung Lap. Thai women hulling rice in an empty tree trunk, under the hut



Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate XIII C, Plate XIII D

Man women arriving at Cho Men
Man and Muong women ((white blouse) at Cho Men

Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate XLVII A, Plate XLVII B

Annamite women refining rice in Sam Son

Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest ed., Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Plate XXIX A

Appendix G.3 Representations of Women in Pierre Gourou's thesis

Pierre Gourou represented the Annamite women in their natural and daily movements and tasks, in the rice field (appendix 7.6, pl.XXXVII, photo 62 in Gourou's thesis) fishing (appendix 7.7, pl.XXXVIII n.64) or coming back from the market (appendix 7.8, pl. XLV n.75 and pl.XLVII n.78). They are represented as part of the human landscape, among other aspects of the annamite countryside (such as the peasant ladies coming back from the market walking on a narrow little dike, and probably photographed from a shelter). Pierre Gourou underlined the elegance or the refinement of their appearance or gestures, as if in contrast with the hardness of their work, reveals the agility and gracefulness of their gait, and occasionally makes an laudatory comment.

Women planting out rice

62. — Repiquage

Les femmes repiquent le riz par poignées, en allant à reculons. Elles prennent les plants dans les paquets que les hommes apportent de la pépinière. La jeune personne qui est debout à gauche est élégante : remarquer son chapeau pointu, le foulard blanc dont elle a enveloppé sa tête et son cou pour éviter la brûlure du soleil. — Dans le haut Delta, comme le montre l'étagement des rizières.

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire ed.). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Pl.XXXVII, photo 62

Prawn and crab fisherwoman

64. — Pêcheuse de crevettes et de crabes

Cette enfant passera toute une journée à recueillir quelques poignées de crabes et de crevettes, qu'elle recherche à la main et dépose dans le panier placé auprès d'elle. Elle utilise aussi des balances qu'elle va relever de temps en temps.

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire ed.). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Pl.XXXVIII, photo 64

Country women coming back from the market and little girl bringing the buffalo back to the stable

75. — Pont de pierre

Sur un petit arroyo. Ces ponts, faits de dalles de pierre calcaire reposant sur des traverses et des piliers de pierre, sont assez répandus dans le Delta. Paysannes revenant du marché; petite fille ramenant un buffle à l'étable. Au fond les bambous qui cernent un village.

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire ed.). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Pl.XLV, photo 75

Country women coming back from the market

78. — Paysannes revenant du marché

Elles cheminent sur une étroite diguette, entre des rizières où le riz du cinquième mois approche de la maturité. — On remarque les longs vêtements et les manches collantes. — Chapeaux rustiques de forme légèrement arrondie, comme en portent les campagnardes pauvres.

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire ed.). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Pl.XLVII, photo 78

Appendix G.4: Dwelling Representations in Pierre Gourou's thesis

Compared to Charles Robequain, Pierre Gourou's discourse analysed deeply and in detail the structure, the aesthetic and the various elements of the Annamite house (see below the plan, fig.63, and the four sections A-B, C-D, E-F, G-H, of the house II of Quan Nhan) and religious buildings (see below the two photos and drawing of the shelter/diem of Canh Nau). Pierre Gourou provided plans and sections and photos of the buildings he portrays. This introduces an existential approach to the society.

The shelter (diêm) of Canh Nau

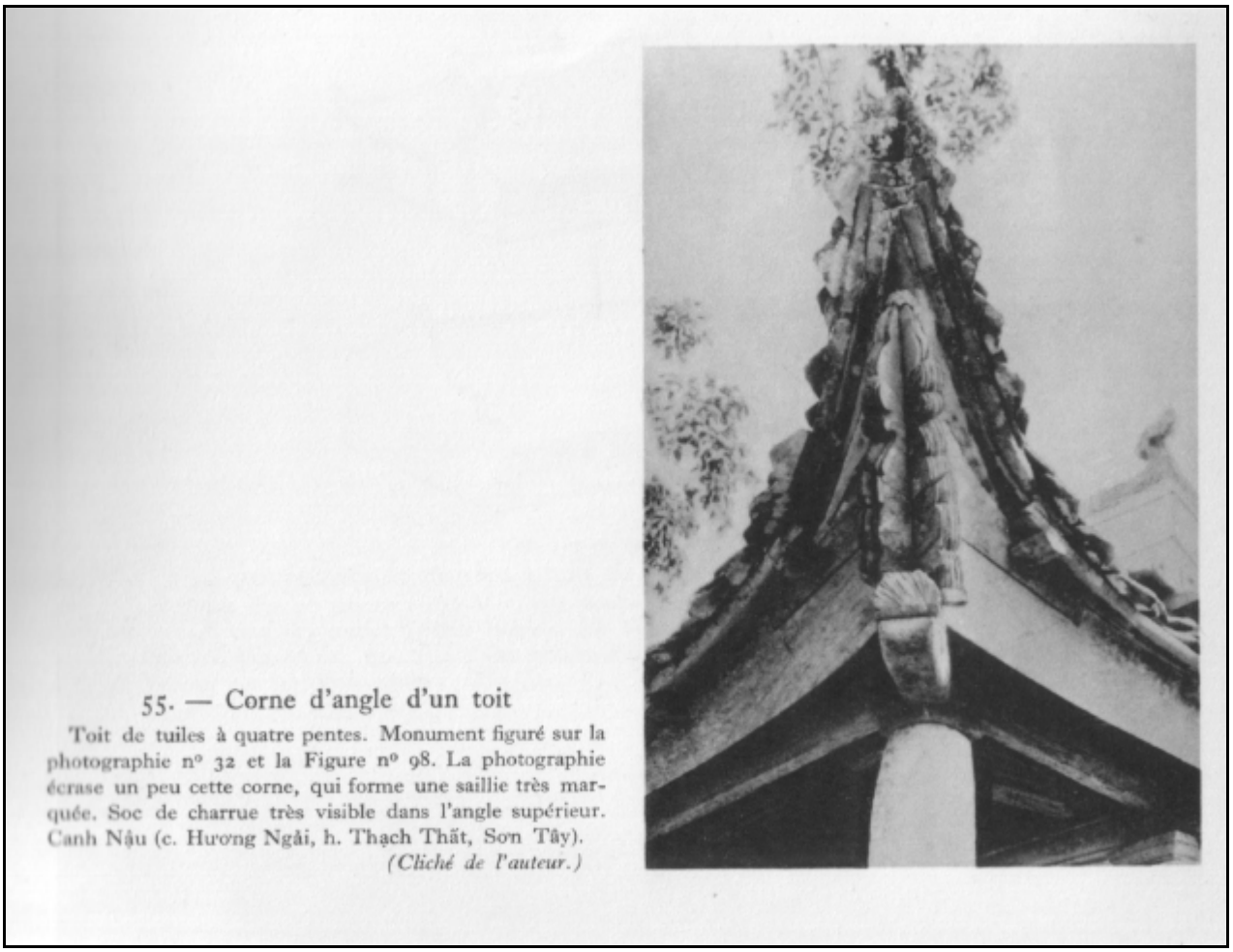
32. — Un abri dans la campagne

Non loin de l'entrée du village de Canh Nậu (c. Hương Ngải, h. Thạch Thất, Sơn Tây). Édifice très élégant; toit à quatre pentes aux angles relevés; encadrement de deux grands arbres. Lieu de repos bien exposé à la brise d'été; on vient s'y étendre sur l'estrade de bambou qui y est ménagée. A gauche, des buffles se reposent à l'ombre des arbres; à droite, un puits avec un autel pour le génie des eaux. Des femmes, venant du marché, rentrent au village. Quelques garçons gardiens de buffles. Voir aussi Figure nº 98. *(Cliché de l'auteur.)*

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Pl. XXIII, photo 32:

"Not far from the village of Canh Nau (…). Very elegant building; roof with four slopes and lifted angles; surrounded with two big trees, resting place well exposed to the summer breeze; people come to have a lie down on the bamboo platform. On the left, buffalos resting under the shade of the trees; on the right, an altar dedicated to the spirit of water. Women, coming back from the market, are returning to their village. A few young boys are guarding buffalos."

Close-up of one of the 'horned' corners



55. — Corne d'angle d'un toit

Toit de tuiles à quatre pentes. Monument figuré sur la photographie nº 32 et la Figure nº 98. La photographie écrase un peu cette corne, qui forme une saillie très marquée. Soc de charrue très visible dans l'angle supérieur. Canh Nậu (c. Hương Ngải, h. Thạch Thất, Sơn Tây).

(Cliché de l'auteur.)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Plate XXXIII, photo 55:

"Tiles roofs with four slopes. Building represented on the photo n.32 [see above] and the figure n.98 [see below]. The photo tends to flatten this horn which overhangs quite substantially…"

Section of the diêm.

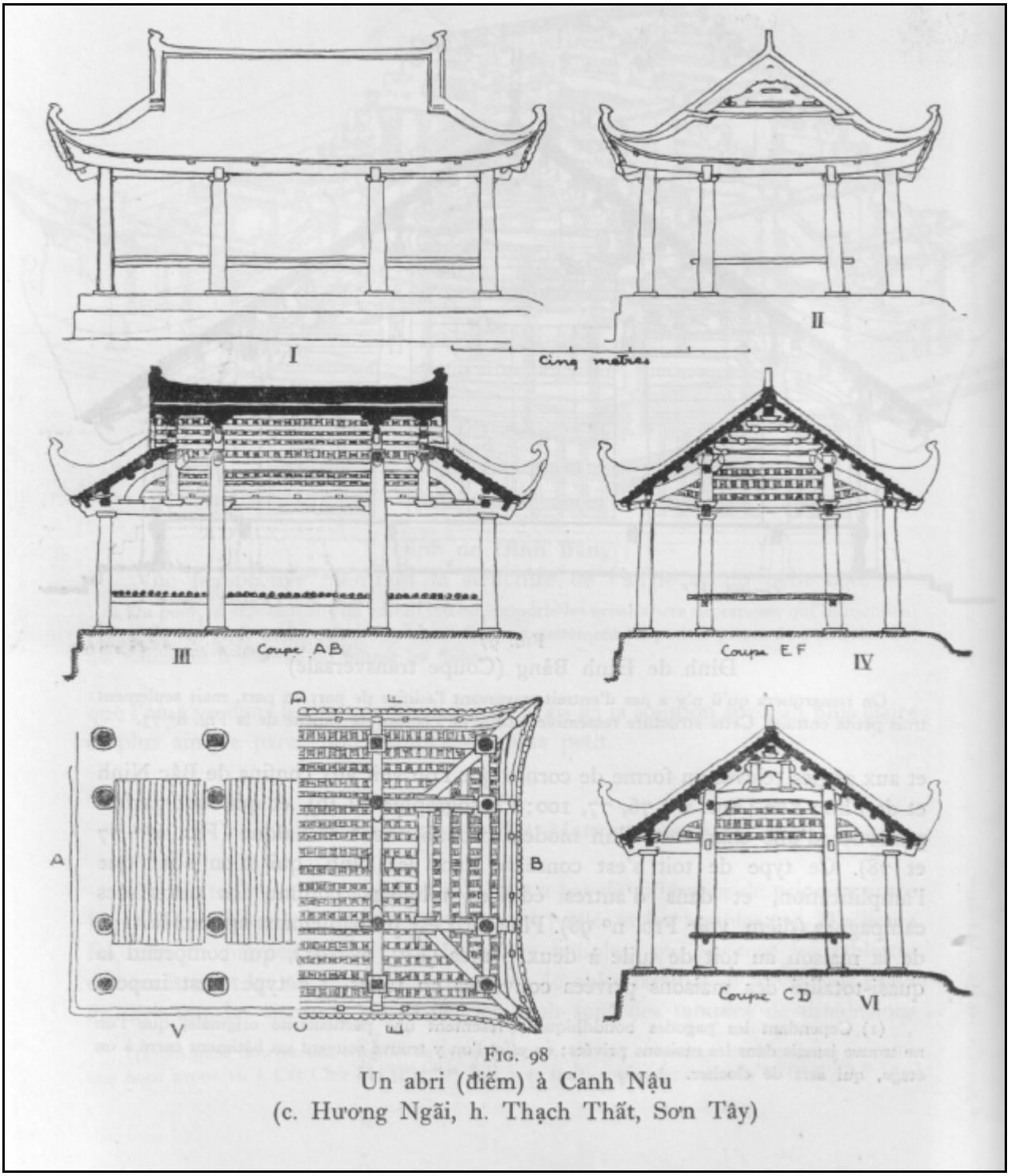


FIG. 98
Un abri (điếm) à Canh Nậu
(c. Hương Ngãi, h. Thạch Thất, Sơn Tây)

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Fig.98, p.338

Pierre Gourou wrote: “the diem at Canh Nâu is the perfect example of meticulous monumental building…The angles of the roof turn up in eminently decorative horns which required a very carefully constructed framework…” (p.335).

House II of Quan Nhan

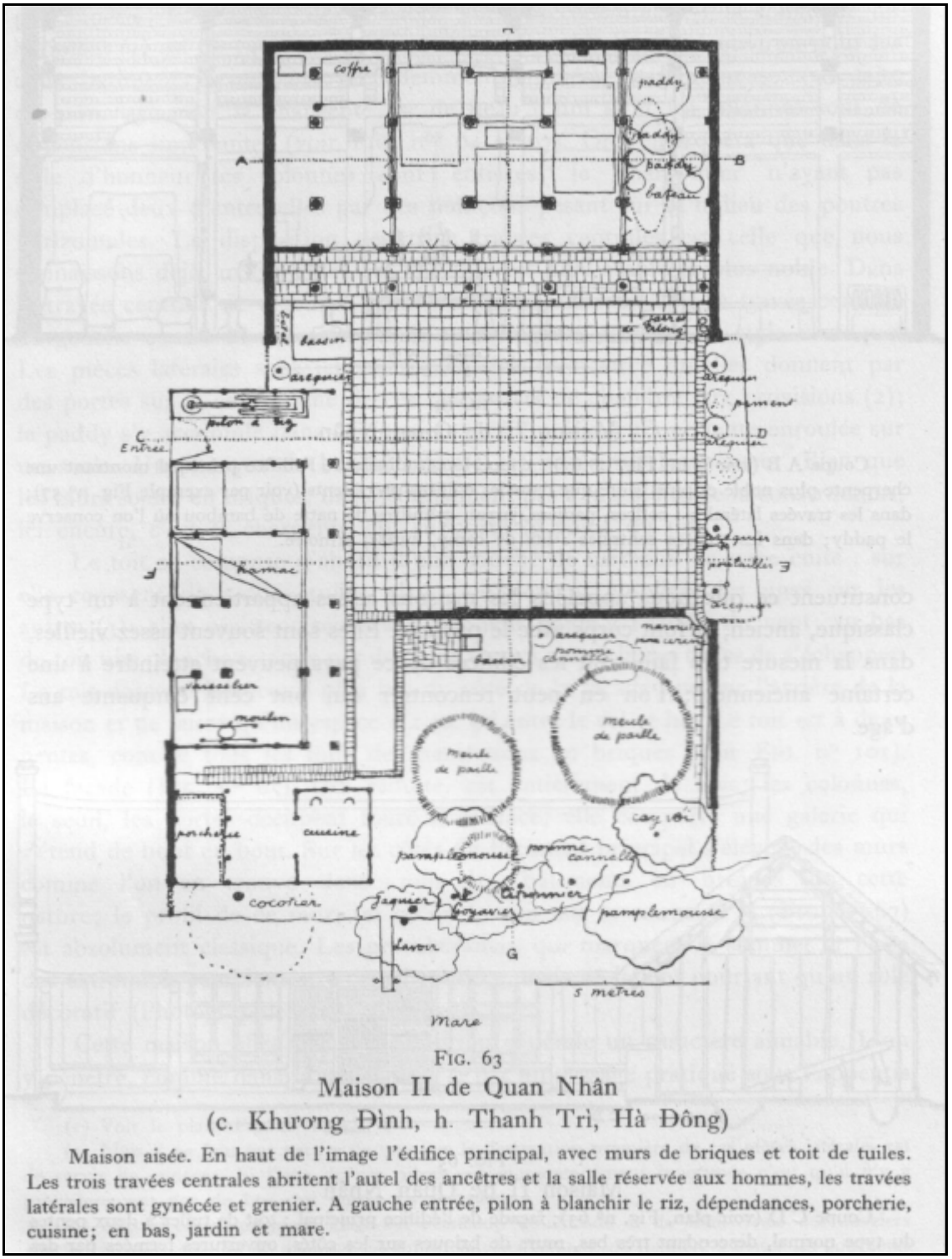


FIG. 63
Maison II de Quan Nhân
(c. Khương Đình, h. Thanh Trì, Hà Đông)

Maison aisée. En haut de l'image l'édifice principal, avec murs de briques et toit de tuiles. Les trois travées centrales abritent l'autel des ancêtres et la salle réservée aux hommes, les travées latérales sont gynécée et grenier. A gauche entrée, pilon à blanchir le riz, dépendances, porcherie, cuisine; en bas, jardin et mare.

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Fig.63, p.289

"Well-off house. On the top of the drawing, the main edifice, with brick walls and tiled roof. The three central bays hold the ancestors' altar and the room for the men. The lateral bays are the room for the women and the attic. On the left, the entrance, pestle to bleach the rice, outbuildings, pigsty, kitchen; at the bottom, garden and pond." Pierre Gourou maned as well the trees (grapefruit tree etc), pointed out the location of the hammock, the cupboard and the mill in the outbuilding room and some other details.

House II of Quan Nhan, section AB

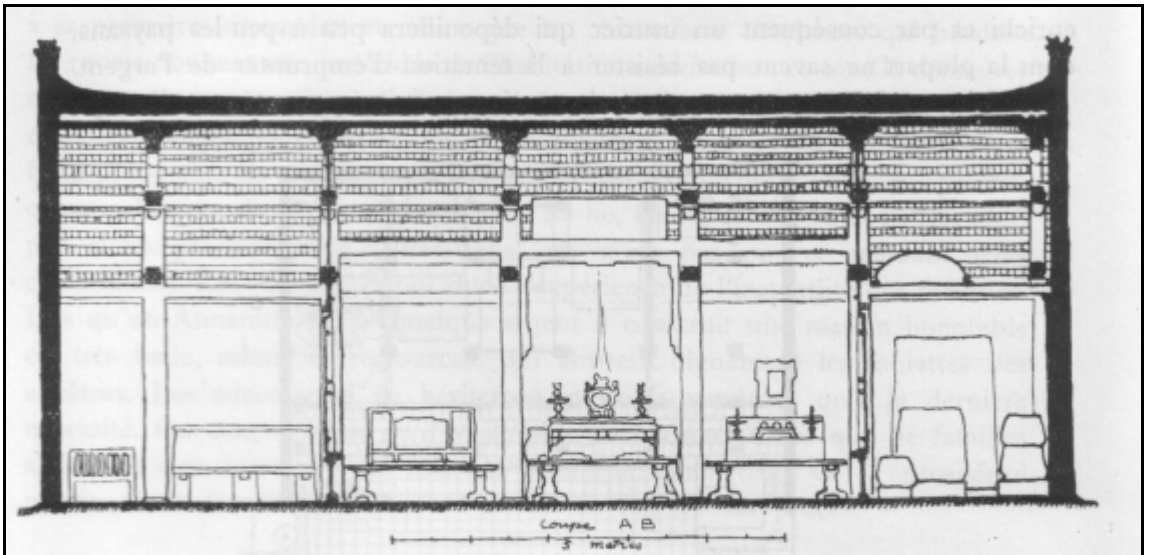


FIG. 64
Maison II de Quan Nhân

Coupe A B (voir plan, Fig. nº 63) : coupe longitudinale de l'édifice principal montrant une charpente plus noble et plus haute que dans les édifices précédents (voir par exemple Fig. nº 57); dans les travées latérales : coffres, paniers, jarres, cylindres de natte de bambou où l'on conserve le paddy; dans les travées centrales : lits de camp, autels, armoire.

"Section A-B (see the plan, Fig.n.63). Longitudinale section of the main building …in the lateral bays, trunks, baskets, jars, cylinders made of bamboo matting where the paddy is kept; in the central bays: campbeds, altars, cupboard."

House II of Quan Nhan, sectionCD

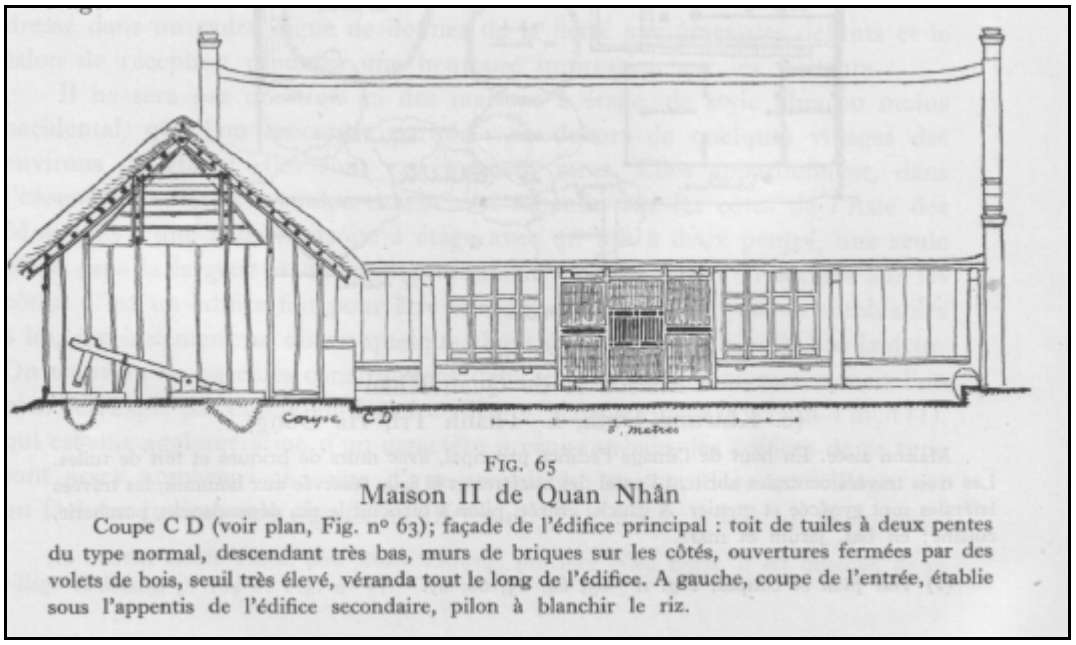


FIG. 65
Maison II de Quan Nhân

Coupe C D (voir plan, Fig. nº 63); façade de l'édifice principal : toit de tuiles à deux pentes du type normal, descendant très bas, murs de briques sur les côtés, ouvertures fermées par des volets de bois, seuil très élevé, véranda tout le long de l'édifice. A gauche, coupe de l'entrée, établie sous l'appentis de l'édifice secondaire, pilon à blanchir le riz.

Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Fig. 64-65, p.290

"Section C-D (see the plan, Fig.n.63). Front of the main building…openings closed with wooden shutters…On the left, section of the entrance… pestle to bleach the rice."

House II of Quan Nhan, section EF

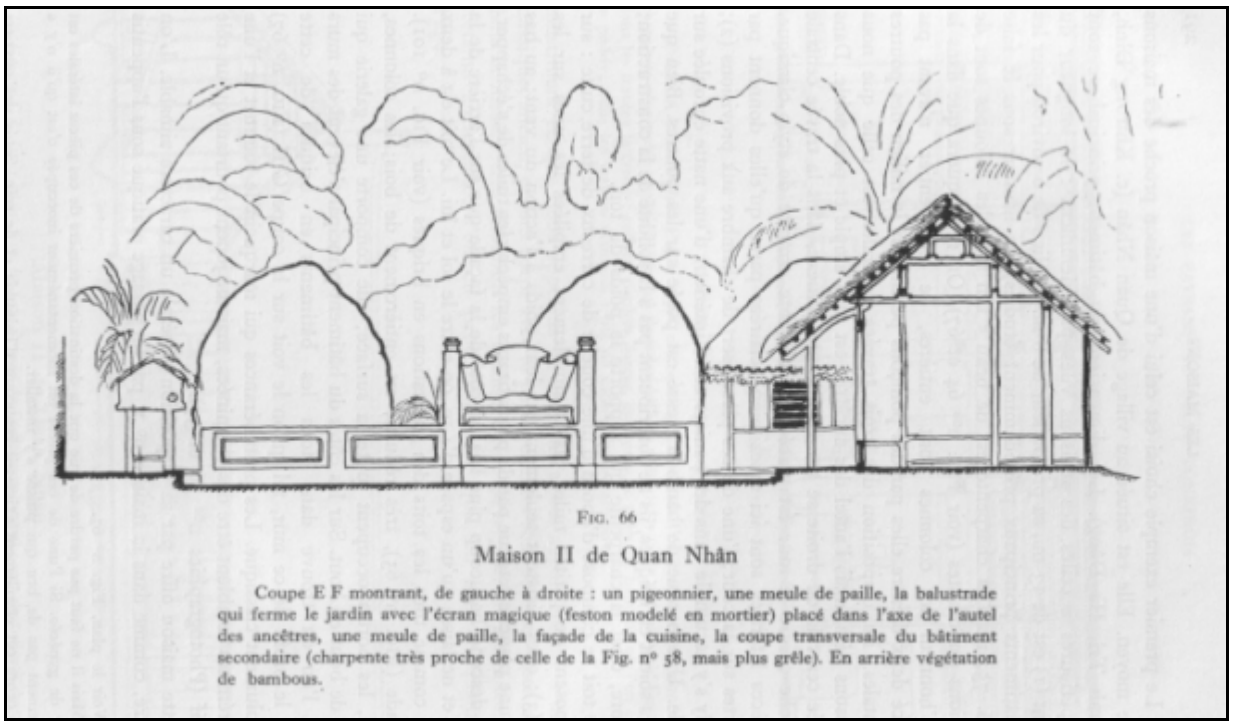


Fig. 66

Maison II de Quan Nhân

Coupe E F montrant, de gauche à droite : un pigeonnier, une meule de paille, la balustrade qui ferme le jardin avec l'écran magique (feston modelé en mortier) placé dans l'axe de l'autel des ancêtres, une meule de paille, la façade de la cuisine, la coupe transversale du bâtiment secondaire (charpente très proche de celle de la Fig. n° 58, mais plus grêle). En arrière végétation de bambous.

"Section E-F showing from the left to the right: a dovecote, a stack of straw, the balustrade which closes the garden with a magic screen (garland moulded in mortar) which is located in the axis of the ancestors' altar, a stack of straw, the façade of the kitchen, the transverse section of the subsidiary building…Behind bamboo vegetation."

House II of Quan Nhan, section GH

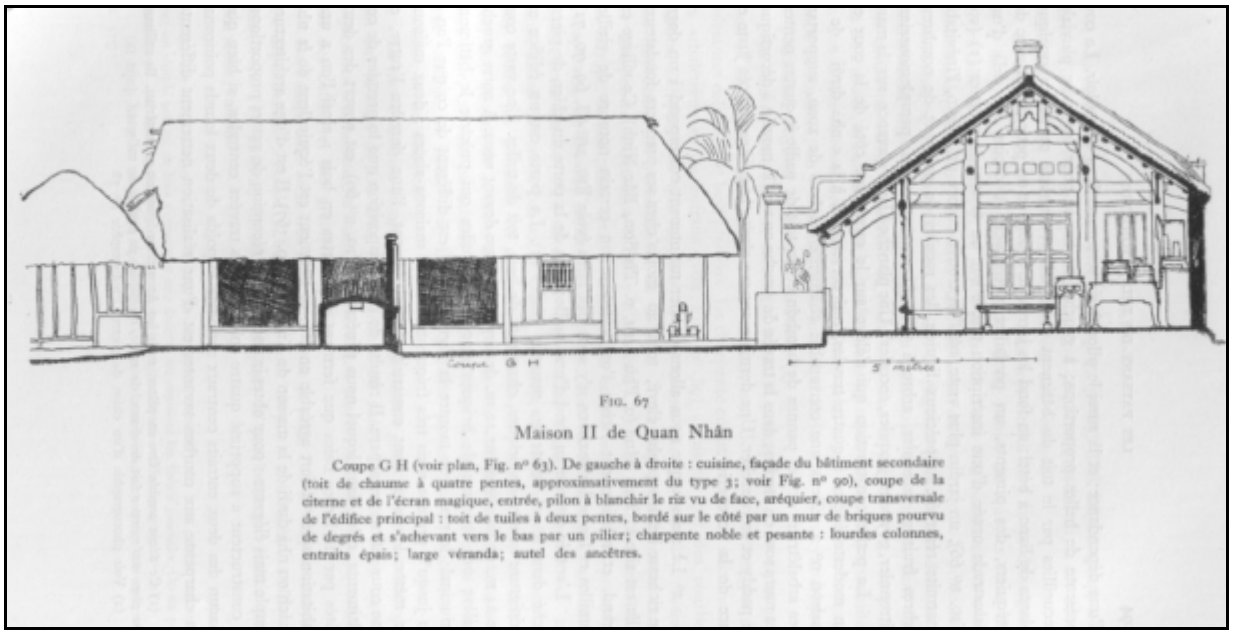


Fig. 67

Maison II de Quan Nhân

Coupe G H (voir plan, Fig. n° 63). De gauche à droite : cuisine, façade du bâtiment secondaire (toit de chaume à quatre pentes, approximativement du type 3; voir Fig. n° 90), coupe de la citerne et de l'écran magique, entrée, pilon à blanchir le riz vu de face, aréquier, coupe transversale de l'édifice principal : toit de tuiles à deux pentes, bordé sur le côté par un mur de briques pourvu de degrés et s'achevant vers le bas par un pilier; charpente noble et pesante : lourdes colonnes, entraits épais; large véranda; autel des ancêtres.

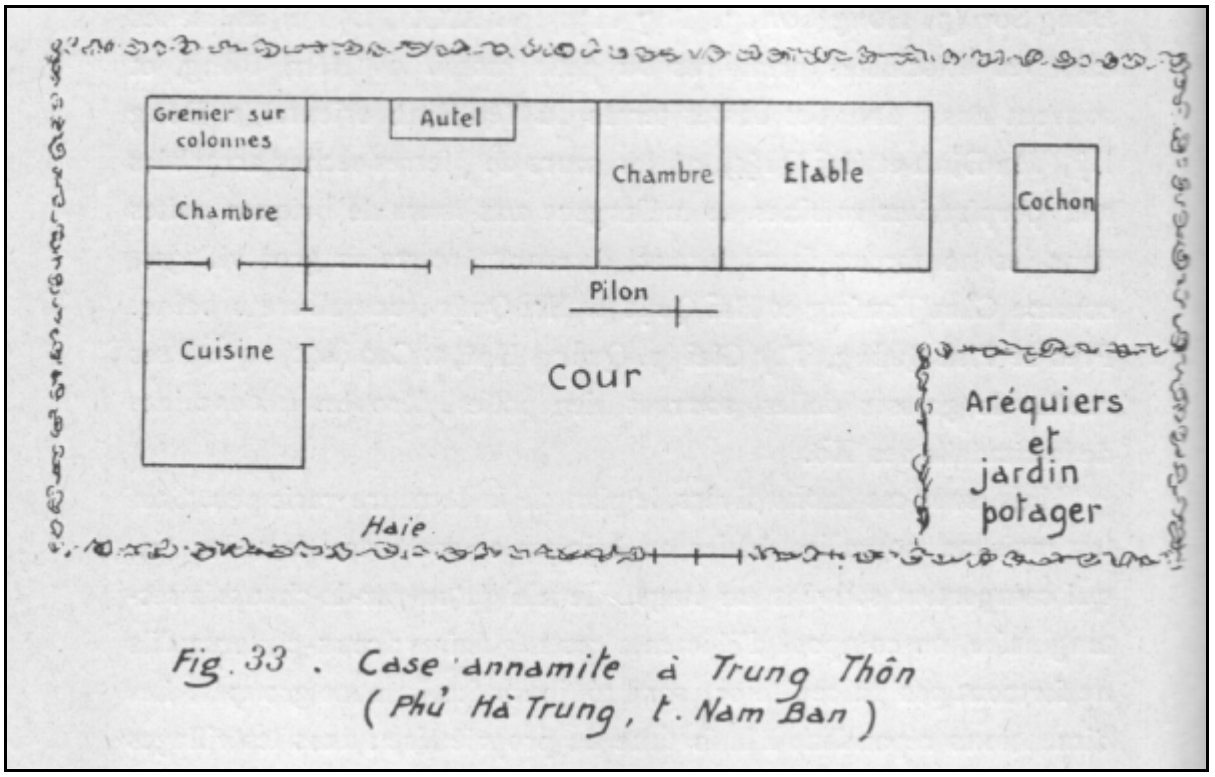
Source: Gourou, P. (1936). **Les Paysans du Delta Tonkinois Etude de géographie humaine** (Les Editions d' Art et d' Histoire). Paris: Publications de l'École Française D' Extrême-Orient, Fig.66-67 p.292

"Section G-H (see the plan, Fig.n.63). From the left to the right: kitchen, front of the subsidary buildings (straw roof with four slopes…section of the water tank and the magic screen, entrance, pestle to bleach the rice from its frontage, areca palm, transverse section of the main building…heavy columns…"

Appendix G.5: Representation of an "Annamite hut" in Charles Robequain's thesis

Charles Robequain provided some simplified plans of housing, but not with all the details and illustrations that we find in Pierre Gourou. The plan below is a typical example of his style.

"Annamite hut at Trung Thon"



Robequain, C. (1929). **Le Thanh Hoá, Etude géographique d'une province annamite** (Les Editions G.Van Oest, Vol. 1 and 2). Paris et Bruxelles: Publications de l' Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient, Fig.33, p.494

Appendix H

INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE GOUROU, BRUXELLES 29 AUGUST 1995

English translation

This interview was conducted in Brussels by the author of this thesis, in Pierre Gourou's home, *in the afternoon of the 29th August 1995*.

Q. You are born in Tunisia. Did you have relatives there? When did you leave Tunisia?

P.G. I was born in Tunis on August 31, 1900, in the 19th century! My father had made his military service in Tunisia. After his military service, he married in Tunisia. But my parents are French from the South. They did not have relatives in Tunisia. Me either, although I spent 18 years of my life there. I made my secondary studies there. Then I was a professor with the college of Tunis after the Agrégation of history and geography. I left there in 1926 to go to Indo-China.

Q. When did you leave to make your higher studies in France and in which university did you prepare your Agrégation?

P.G. In 1918, when the war was finished, I was in Lyon to prepare my diplomas of the superior, my licence in three years. Then I prepared the Agrégation.

Q. And who were your professors?

P.G. In geography, Zimmerman. He was a specialist on Scandinavia especially. He was a Germanist as his name indicates a little. Thus, he was familiar with the German geography. In the Universal Geography, he wrote the book on Scandinavia. He was a very sympathetic and very intelligent fellow. But he absolutely did not look after his students. We were listening to him, took his advice, we were glad to listen him because he had a clear spirit. But he did not deal with the training of students.

Q. How was the geography taught? What did one learn in geography? How was the regional geography taught?

P.G. By listening to lectures, by reading, by giving talks during the bachelor degree. But I did not do a diploma of geography, because with Zimmerman, it was dangerous. He left his students scampering along all alone. I made a diploma of history, on the economic policy of Louis XI, I remember, very interesting however. Thus, I had a historian's training as much as geographer's one. It was an historian and geographer's training. But after that, I directed myself. I knew that I wanted to make geography. I did not want to be a historian, I wanted to be a geographer. Why? By curiosity of child, as a baby charmed by descriptions of foreign countries. It is how I started in geography and tropical geography. It is certain that when I was 6-7 years, I read romantic things on India and that impassioned me. The tropical climate, there is an orientation which started at a very early stage for me.

Q. And the Far East?

P.G. The Far East, it is China (…) There was a tropical and a Far-Eastern bearing. That, there is no doubt. When I was a professor with the college of Tunis, after Agrégation, in 1926, I did not want to stay there, I wanted to go towards the things that I liked, i.e. the tropical Far East. Not to go to Japan, that, I did not want. But I went to Indo-China. I stayed one year in Saigon. Then, all the remainder of the time, in Hanoï.

Q. To return to your studies, was there a course of colonial geography in Lyon? And how did you know Demangeon, your supervisor?

P.G. There was no colonial geography course in Lyon's university. I have never attended the courses of Demangeon, but he was for me a friend and a professor by what he wrote. He was very good for me. Once per annum, he wrote a small letter to me while saying to me " continue ", " it is very well ",
our relations consisted of that.

Q. But you chose him as your supervisor for which reason?

P.G. At the start, Demangeon accepted my thesis at the time of the International Congress of Geography in Paris in 1931. I knew Demangeon like that, I had never seen it. It is there that he said to me "good for your thesis subject". He was always very nice. I knew his work well. I was directed on this side there (…) with a more systematic thought than him.

Q. But Demangeon had already a systematic way of thinking.

P.G. I mean I made at a very early stage the departure between what was physical and what was civilization. By not leaving in vagueness the relationship between all that. It is there that I became acquainted with a great geographer, Dion, who wrote this very beautiful book "the Vine in France" and his thesis on the Loire Valley.

Q. Besides you quote his work on the formation of the French rural landscape in the bibliography of the peasants of the Delta tonkinois.

P.G. Yes, it is passionate. He was an impressive fellow. But I never had, all things considered, a director in geography. Dion was a friend, Demangeon was a pleasant supervisor, very kind. I arrived one day at his place with my thesis finished at the beginning of 1936. He never had seen anything until then.

Q. In this thesis, you have a new regional approach compared with the other theses of the time: you start from the problem of the remarkably high rate of the density of the population.

P.G. It was a way of starting, to cling to something. And then, after that, you follow. For me, the density of the population was the handling of the original thing of Vietnam, i.e. its civilization.

Q. In an interview that you granted to the Journal Hérodote in 1984, you also say: "the scientific problem was born in connection with the Far East". What do you mean by "scientific problem"?

P.G. It was a problem to be solved. Why are they so numerous? A scientific problem by studying the physique and the human [conditions], because both contribute to it. But without the human one, there would have been nothing. I would like to say that civilization was almost more significant than the [physical] environment. But one should not exaggerate. Without the [physical] environment, Vietnamese civilization could not have been brought to bear. Vietnamese civilization could not apply in the mountains. The Vietnamese leave the mountain to others (ethnic groups). Vietnamese are disciples of the Chinese. In China, it is like that. Very populated plains and easily neglected mountains.

Q. To analyze " scientifically " the density of the population, you question the value and the reliability of the figures of the census, operate in the village of Dông Lai a checking of the official figure, probe yourself the Vietnamese authorities of other villages. But you could only make this analysis with the collaboration of the French colonial administration and the Vietnamese mandarin authorities. How did these two types of authorities collaborate with you?

P.G. They all were very nice. The sub-prefects who directed a district, a part of a province were very pleasant people of which some were my students in the college Albert Sarraut.
Thus, it was very pleasant, they were always very nice, very qualified, very devoted.

Q. But, were there no contradictions with the collaboration between these two types of administration?

P.G. But it was the same thing. Tonkin was not like Annam…the Vietnamese administration was entirely dependent on the French hierarchy… But all that was very nice. I never noted large differences between reality and the figures given. The means of checking was not easy. I had the figure of the inhabitants, the houses, it was very difficult to make the census myself again. But, without appearing to do that, by making in the same village controls after an interval of several weeks where I had the figure that the mayor of the village had given me, and then that people had

given me, all that agreed. To 5 or 6 people near, there was not much special imagination. And then, we controlled also easily through the land register of all the communes, with the plan on a large scale of all the pieces. The membership of all the lands was very easily reconstituted. That made it possible to find the number of inhabitants, the number of owners. The figures of the population are suitable. We have checked. It was well. The administration was well made. It was because of the tax.

Q. But was there not a certain mistrust of the administration and Vietnamese population with respect to the questionnaires?

P.G. The administration Vietnamese made a point of collecting their taxes. Although poor, the peasants paid a tax on the land, cadastral (…).

Q. To include/understand this density, you call upon the ingeniousness of the peasant Annamite to produce by taking advantage of everything, and you also speak about the organization political and social of the villages. It is what you called later " techniques of production " and " framing ". Weren't these concepts which are at the base of your tropical geography already implicitly present in your thesis?

P.G. I had not yet extracted the personal concept of civilization, of technique of production and technique of framing. But, it was my way of thinking, my way of seeking. Now, I live on top of that. It was a very advanced civilization.

Q. What do you understand by " very advanced civilization "? The concept of civilization? Why do you use this concept of civilization and why you do you not use the Vidalian concept of way of life?

P.G. The concept of way of life, I do not retain the expression. I dealt with farmers and at the same time handicraft industrial people, because the trades were numerous. The life of much of these peasants was not a way of life. It was at the same time agriculture, industry and trade sometimes too. Their life style was complex. It is voluntarily that I never used the concept of way of life. As soon as a way of life is a little complex, it is not any more one way of life, or it is necessary to say complex way of life. That does not mean anything any more.

Q. And the concept of natural area, you use it a little too.

P.G. The concept of natural area, it was obvious. The delta is obviously a natural area. As soon as one goes out of the delta from 2 meters, it is another area. But the concept of natural area is a dangerous concept since the delta is a natural area but it was also an area of civilization. It is not simply a natural area. It is also and especially an area of civilization. It is a complex whole of natural facts and facts of civilization, civilization being for me the essence of the whole. I am writing a book "geography and civilization" where I show that without civilization, one can understand nothing facing geography, wherever where it is, except in the North Pole.

Q. Certain geographers spoke about "determinism of civilization".

P.G. It is word abuse. When one is in a civilization, one cannot do anything else other than nursing in it.

Q. And the concept of possibilism?

P.G. Inside a civilization, everything is not possible. The action of Man is determined by the civilization to which he belongs. Nothing can be done against this.

Q. In your thesis, the concept of civilization is already implicitly the key of your geography.

P.G. It is already that, you know. I slipped into this way of looking at geography. I worked enormously. Oh that! But I had a passion for that. Then, I was well surrounded. Everyone was very nice for me. The geographical service was kind to me, manufacturing my maps, draw them for me.

Q. Thus, for your sources of information, the people of the colonial administration helped you quite a lot.

P.G. Yes, they did all they could do. It was sometimes me who told to them on what they have to think about.

Q. Thus, your thesis could be also a means for the French administration to work better.

P.G. Ah yes, certainly, I hope that they used it. But finally, the events which followed carried all away the possible efforts in a better administration.

Q. Thus, your geography contributed to the work of development of France

P.G. Yes

Q. You evoked the service of the land register and the geographical service with its maps. You quote in your bibliography captains who made observations on these maps.

P.G. They were all very good for me, they helped me much, without them, I could not have succeeded. The cards to the 1/25,000 were wonderful, in color, with hypsometric curves every 50cm.

Q. And the collection of photographs of the military aeronautics which appear in your thesis?

P.G. Ah yes, that was marvellous.

Q. With the problem of the density, you emerge with a conclusion about the problem of overpopulation. Was there a debate on this subject? an opening on this problem by the colonial administration?

P.G. No. It estimated that it was not its business, that it was a civilization like that. It needed many children. It is certain that there are much more people now.

Q. The projections that you made on the increase in the population in your thesis were very close to reality.

P.G. Between 1930 and 1995, the population has perhaps doubled. I do not have a considerable confidence in the figures that Vietnamese give. I do not know if the census is well made, and if they would not find beneficial to inflate the number. I have no control on that. But the given figures are certainly lower than the reality today, despite the war. Some think that it could have doubled.

Q. The problem of overpopulation was a theme which began to be discussed in the 1930s. For example, the International Congress of Geography in Amsterdam in 1938 tackled it.

P.G. It was a very unpleasant congress because there were many unbearable representatives of the fascists of Germany and of Italy, which had their small idea on the people without spaces. We could not have scientific conversation with them because for them Germany was a poor country without space, and Italy also, and their neighbors were supposed to give them space. Well, we were totally in the Nazism period. I was there with Robequain (…). There was also Weulersse, died prematurely, poor man. He never could finish his thesis. It was on the Middle East. He was a long time in Beirut and Lebanon and in Syria. When he brilliantly passed Agrégation, he was rewarded with a purse for the Turn for the World. He was “normalien”, he passed his Agrégation in 1924. He published his very interesting memories on its African itinerary which I prefaced. Moreover, I have just re-examined the foreword. He did not mark much because he did not publish much. He was intelligent.

Q. If the people of the colonial administration did not tackle the problem of overpopulation, they expressed their views on the problem of the economic development of French Indo-China like Paul Bernard who was administator of Crédit mobilier indochinois did, or on the peasant question.

P.G. The improvement of the fate of the peasants, it is a problem to which we do not see a solution. Villages which have more than 1000 inhabitants per square kilometre, one cannot say that we will export 500 of them! The economic development, the solution is the industry. The economic solution, it is the industrialization. The possible solution in a country like Tonkin, it is the systematic and general electrification. So that, in the villages, people who are handcraft industrialists and who are numerous can multiply with the electric force the activities that they can make. The first stage, it is that one, but that needs many capital.

Q. Had the electrification of the delta started at the time of colonization?

P.G. It was vaguely started. But that commenced in the delta with the electrification of the cities. Actually, the country houses of the delta were not going along with the electrification. They were too combustible. The least spark of fire would endanger these houses made of straw. It would have been necessary to make non combustible workshops where Vietnamese could have done all that can be done with electricity more quickly than with the hand.

Q. In your bibliography, you quote also René Dumont who had his idea on the peasant question.

P.G. Yes, but he was an agronomist, he saw the things differently.

Q. Did you know him? Do you have discussions with him? What do you think of his reflections on the economic development in the villages of the delta of Tonkin?

P.G. I know the work of René Dumont. It is an interesting spirit, but a little systematic, a little simplifying. I.e. that he is not enough a geographer, he does not see all the aspects of a problem. Well, it is very old, like me! After his thesis on the delta, he did not work in Tonkin, he worked in Africa especially.

Q. To understand the Indochinese settlements' figures and the strong densities of the delta compared with the mountains, you also used works of doctors who worked on malaria.

P.G. Yes, there are many people who help me. From time to time, there was a little paludism in the delta in villages at the seaside. On the ranges there were small ponds half salt with sea water and rainwater which could correspond to certain races of anophèles mosquitoes. But, in the delta, healthiness was quite good. There was no epidemic disease while I was there.

Q. Your principal source of information was however the Ecole française d' Extrême-Orient and its library.

P.G. Yes, there was an excellent library, especially the reviews. It is for this that it was interesting to be in Hanoi. There were also many mosquitos! (…)

Q. Were you a member of the School?

P.G. I was not a member. Robequain was a member of the E.F.E.O. He had a 3 years' mission at the School. But the School paid for the impression of my thesis. All these photographs, all these maps, the costs were very expensive (…).

Q. Who were your friends at the School?

P.G. My great friend was Paul Mus. He was my very intimate friend, very fascinating.

Q. Yes, he wrote " Sociology of a war " about Vietnam.

P.G. Yes, he died in the hospital of Avignon, he had a heart disease. He was an impressive fellow. Mrs
Mus and her sister, Mrs Drouin also (…). They developed a very intelligent, alive and social environment. I was surrounded by people who all helped me a lot. I was also helped by Grandjean, who was a great person of the gouvernement général, a high-ranking civil servant of the administration, aggregate of history. I had many Vietnamese pupils whom I loved much, including Giap, whom I had for 2 years at the lycée. He was very interesting. We saw each other often.

Q. You could discuss with your pupils about your thesis or other problems?

P.G. No, (…) I taught all that I knew to them (…). But I found one of my alumni of the lycée who is now retired in Paris and who became a rather significant character in the businesses. But fine, other question?

Q. You quoted Paul Mus. And Maspéro? You knew him?

P.G. No, he is not from my generation, he was older, he was member of the Institute. He was not in Hanoï when I was there (…)

Q. Coedès?

P.G. No, he was a remarkable man

Q. Chassigneux?

P.G. Chassigneux was sent on a mission by the E.F.E.O., it was the same case as Robequain. He re-entered France in 1917, but his boat and his documents were run down by a German submarine. But I knew him, because he was the geographer of the lesson of geography at the Agrégation when I passed it. He put a very good note to me however, it was a lesson of geography on the torrents. It was an easy lesson (…). Chassigneux published on Tonkin.

Q. He published a study on the irrigation in the delta of Tonkin?

P.G. On the climate of Tonkin. He had joined together documents to make a more thorough study of it, but that was lost in torpedoing (…). But I did not meet him after the Agrégation.

Q. In your thesis for including/understanding well the life and Annamite civilization, you speak about the Annamite cultural beliefs. You evoke the magic and religious influences, the géomancy, i.e. of concepts which are foreign to our Western culture [ ]. How did you approach these concepts?

P.G. I will explain you. First, the géomancie, I know nothing about it.

Q. Yes, but you evoke it, you write a little about it.

P.G. Yes, but I have the impression that these are beliefs of imagination, all these beliefs on the parts of the house, in fact, they are representations which do not correspond to any material element. It is a kind of metaphysical sight of the house which are not explained by the house itself, such as one can see it. It is an application of metaphysics diagrams on a house which has nothing to do with metaphysics.
But I was helped much by my friend Inguimberty who is dead now, and who made all the sketches of houses which are in my thesis. That helped me a lot: how were the houses made? I have all his originals (…)

Q. Yes, the rural settlement was a regional geographical theme at the time. But you chose to make a very detailed and illustrated analysis of the various types of Annamites houses.

P.G. To the houses quantities of beliefs are attached, almost religious. It is not like our house, which, all things considered, are fixed on nothing. But, in the delta, it is a very complex unit that I did not understand entirely, is not this. It is difficult to get a Vietnamese to explain it because he feels it prior to understanding it (…).

Q. It is all the problem of the cultural differences.

P.G. Oui, it is especially difficult to get somebody to explain this in the construction of common houses such as temples with the genius of the village. The town hall, it is a temple with the village's genius. Thus, there is a genius of the village, that nobody ever saw, of course (…) To describe these cultural differences gave me worries without being convinced that I had said exactly what it had to be said, because it is very difficult. One can write volumes on the beliefs attached to the house. I was very sensitive. A certain beam posed in a certain way, it had a belief attached to that there. I give the names of all the pieces of the houses, which correspond to Vietnamese beliefs. But, to go further, it would be necessary to be an intelligent and cultivated Vietnamese (…).

Q. And how, according to you, do the Vietnamese people approach the Western concepts of progress, of modernization?

P.G. Educated Vietnamese were converted to them very easily. But basically, they had an inner-directed Chinese characteristic doubt. In China, there are all kinds of reserves. If you read Lao Tzu, there is the doubt, so much doubt about what is the universe (…). It is very negative this philosophy, very enthralling besides. I remember the words of a old 3rd century old famous Chinese before our era which, contrary to the usual Chinese practice, required to have funeral reduced to nothing. No music, no detonators, nothing similar. " I want to be lying naked in the naked ground, without monument, because ", he says , " I want to join immediately the great indetermination ". The background of 3rd century BC Chinese philosophy is a great indetermination (…). For that, it is necessary that I am naked, that there is no ceremony, nothing (…). It is a philosophy which can be considered. Isn't the world a great indetermination in its eternity? If the world is eternal, it is that it is unspecified. If it were determined, it would be necessary that it stops (…).

Q. To return to this concept of progress, you are yourself cautious. You speak about the Annamite world like a moral and social world, and in your conclusion, you say that one should not transform all too quickly under penalty of distressing this moral and social world.

P.G. Communism tried to destroy the old Annamite morals. However, it must not have succeeded.

Q. What gave you this impression of morality?

P.G.. Fidelity with the family, fidelity with the ancestors. That is enough however. Fidelity with the ancestors, i.e. fidelity with the morals of the ancestors. The religion of the ancestors is very significant (…).

Q. When you arrived in Indo-China, did you have already ideas on the country and its inhabitants? You did not have any concept on Indo-China (?)

P.G. I did not read anything on Indo-China, but a lot on China. That helped me.

Q. You started to read on Indo-China in the library of the E.F.E.O. Were there other publications than the French ones?

P.G. There were books of all the languages, and all the bibliography on the Far East. It was very pleasant because I was alone, there was practically nobody. I was often the only customer (…) with the
mosquitos! Now, the School exists in Paris, and opened a small pied-à terre
in Hanoï. It is the School which looked after Angkor, of all the civilizations of IndoChina.
It had excellent Vietnamese well-read men, of which one was my Vietnamese professor.

Q. You learned Vietnamese?

P.G. That, it is difficult. It is easy and fantastically difficult time. It is easy because there is no grammar. The words are connected like that, with facility (…), But, it is terribly difficult because of the recognition of the 5 tone (…). More especially as from one village to another, the pronunciation changes a little. When men speak very quickly, it is very difficult to recognize the words which have only one syllable. A tone, a word, two consonants and a vowel. I learned a little. But one needed great practice to draw some. I always had interpreters, if not, I could not have understood what occurred in the village.

Q. Who were your interpreters? Well-read men of the E.F.E.O?

P.G. No, it was a Vietnamese friend, a pupil, someone of the administration glad to come with me. Without that, I could not have achieved it (…). Especially when they speak with a tremendous speed. Perhaps I did not have a lot of skills to learn Vietnamese, I tried, but that was not easy (?). Chinese also, it is not easy to learn (...).

Q. In the delta, you were struck by the beauty of the landscapes and their harmony.

P.G. They are very beautiful [Pierre Gourou shows a painting which represents the delta and its green rice fields and a peasant with his buffalo in the cloudy sky, painted by his friend Inguimberty[1]].

Q. To describe these landscapes, you question their beauty, while speaking about harmony, bucolic landscapes, the ratios of colors, impressionist paintings. In one of your letters, you evoke also its purity and the absence of foreign elements.

P.G. Yes, it is a very beautiful country, there was no constructions which obstruct, there was no smoke of factory, nothing similar.

Q. For you, the landscape was beautiful because deprived of foreign elements

P.G. But I believe that it is less beautiful now because during Ho Chi Minh' s time, we cut the hedges of bamboos which surrounds the villages, with the result that one sees the houses (…).
It is very beautiful, the landscapes with rice fields under clouds (…).

[1] Later, Pierre Gourou showed another painting where "toddlers were playing cheerfuly in a Chinese village, with their split pants which help the cleaning of their underwear and reveal innocently their sex and their little bottoms". He evoked the streets brimming with children in the Tonkin villages. He spoke with warmth about his great grand children, some of them almost adults already, adding: "I have to hurry to die to avoid becoming a trouble for French Academy. There is no official word to name a great great grand father!"

Q. You describe the landscapes, the work of the peasants but also of the Vietnamese women in your thesis. There are photographs of them.

P.G. Very hard working and very skilful women, as hard-working and as skilful as the men. They are a very sympathetic people. I remember these young country-women who walked in large ponds, assembled on the back of a buffalo which swam and they stood up with the horusof the buffalo to direct it. That continues, because Vietnamese man who writes to me from time to time and who lives Paris has returned to Tonkin and photographed that, where I saw it, girls of 12-13 years old up on a buffalo (…). They are equal to men.

Q. You describe also the work of these country women. Actually, you begin your chapter on agriculture with the agricultural property, that the study of the land register enabled you to analyze. But apart from the land register, it would have been more difficult to inform you on the monetary value of the land, the conditions of loans, usury practices.

P.G. There was work on that, Vietnamese articles in local reviews. The transactions were not done on credit, they were done using money cash. But all that was very refined, very to the point, usually honest.

Q. You describe also the intensity of agriculture and the agricultural calendar, which is another traditional theme of regional geography. You evoke accurately the gestures of the peasants and country-women. Your descriptions let appear your desire and your concern to understand and appreciate the Annamite peasant. It was your geographical curiosity.

P.G. Yes, I was very interested. I did that with a lot of interest.

Q. How did the other geographers perceive your thesis (…)

P.G. I never spoke about my thesis to anybody, I did not discuss my thesis with anyone among the geographers. I never wondered about what other geographers would think of my thesis. They found probably that it was quite long! It is a little long, a little big. Maybe (...). I never worried.

Q. In your bibliography, you quote articles of Sion, who wrote his thesis on the Peasants of Normandy Orientale, of Demangeon, and Augustin Bernard is also quoted. How do you appreciate the writings of these geographers?

P.G. I looked at them. That anyway did not have any relationship with the environment that I was studying. I had a very different environment, another world.

Q. To return to the concept of civilization. This concept was used by the historians of the Annales School such as Lucien Fèbvre, who made a report on your article “la civilisation du végétal”.

P.G. He made a very pleasant report. I do not know if Lucien Fèbvre read my thesis, but he was interested in my small book Land and Man in the Far East (La Terre et l’ Homme en Extrême-Orient). It is a small book, easy to read, it appeared at the same time as Land utilization in French Indochina, another way of dealing with the problem.

Q. The land utilization in French Indochina has been published also parallel to Robequain’s economic evolution of French Indochina

P.G. Oui. I also published an article in Annals on the figure of the settlement in Cochinchine in the Mekong delta. I do not know why, La Terre et l’ Homme en Extrême-Orient has just been republished by Flammarion. I do not see the need for that. They are wrongly republishing it in my opinion.

Q. It is undoubtedly an essential book to understand how you apprehend the peasant reality in the Far East.

P.G. Maybe, but it is obsolete according to me. It does not matter. Other question?

Q. In connection with Robequain’s thesis, you write in your bibliography: "the only regional study which has a great geographical value is the one that Mr Charles Robequain devoted to a province bordering on Tonkin."

P.G. It is kindness.

Q. You also write: "the problems which arise in the Thanh Hoa are not appreciably different from those which arise in the Tonkin, and Mr Robequain examines them with a method and a penetration which are models and guides."

P.G. But his study of the plain of Thanh Hoa is very different from my study of the delta of Tonkin, because it is much shorter and less deep. It is not the same point of view even if obviously, the Thanh Hoa plain looks like the Tonkin plain (…).

Q. How did you appreciate his thesis?

P.G. I found that his thesis was excellent, it was very good. But, finally, it is certain that I wanted to go much further by limiting mine spatially. Robequain studied all the mountains of Tanh Hoa. It was an interesting idea. But they are not the same civilizations. When we go in the mountain, we change (of civilization). It is true as well in Tonkin. In my thesis, there is the sketch of a house, which is not Vietnamese. This is a Muong house which is a house on piles, just at the edge of the Tonkin delta. Thus, we see immediately that we changed country. The Vietnamese house, it is a house on the ground, the Muong house, it is a house on pile. Nature did not change, but the style of the houses changed (…). In SouthEastern Asia, it is like that, in Laos, in Kampuchea (…). It is an enormous difference.

Q. For how long did you remain in Vietnam?

P.G. I arrived there in 1926 and left for the last time in 1935

Q. You did not wish to return?

P.G. No, my life was directed differently. Once my thesis passed, I did not know where to settle in Indochina. I was not a member of the E.F.E.O. Moreover, the actual fields of the E.F.E.O. were archaeology and the religious beliefs (…). But it was not my kind of thing. Then, I did not have anything to do (…), Therefore, I re-direct myself differently.

Q. And for how long did Robequain stay in Indochina?

P.G. Three years. He became a professor at the university of Rennes immediately afterwards. He remained 3 years in Indochina, far less than me. But, during these 3 years, he was at least during 2 years completely free, he had only to study his subject (…). He had only that to make, with expenses of mission. Once his mandate was expired, (…) to stay one more year, he taught at the lycée Albert Sarraut. And there, I replaced him (…). I taught at the lycée and in a small school of higher education, a small higher teacher training school.

Q. Were your pupils mainly of French origin, or Vietnamese origin?

P.G. With the lycée, they were Vietnamese, French and a bit of everything, while at the small training school for teachers, they were Vietnamese who intended themselves to be professors in Vietnamese colleges.

Q. Were there outstanding pupils?

P.G. I had an excellent pupil who was called Giap who became Maréchal General, head of the Vietnamese army. I taught him at the lycée during 2 years, in year first and philosophy [year 11 and 12]. It is a man whom I saw often. He was a very intelligent, communist sort already (…), he was no more a pure Vietnamese, he was Vietnamese Bolshevik, an intellectual Bolshevik. It is a little different. When I knew him, he could hold neither a knife nor a fork and it is me who taught that to him, in fact. He was very fascinated, very hard working, very informed, very intelligent. He did some work for me also, in a corner of Annam, an Annamite commune of a province in the south of Thanh Hoa. It is a province that has always been revolutionary (…). He was very clear-sighted. I look after him a lot. Now, he is a marshal in retirement. He did not give any more sign of life. I met him in 1946 when I returned to Indochina, to Saigon. In Dallas there was a conference franco-tonkinoise, franco-bolshevik to try to arrange things actually. It was not arranged at all since the war started after! Giap was there like representative of the Vietnamese PC, like his companions. Very nice fellows, who spoke very good French. But, in fact, no more Vietnamese. He was completely communist, that is to say no more Vietnamese (…)
I had good pupils, there was a lot of work (…). I was free during the holidays, from June to September. The remaining days of the year, I was on Sunday in the delta. I had a car, which enabled me to go anywhere. Well, anywhere where there were roads. If not, it was necessary to leave the car and to go by foot in the paths of the delta. In the mud, it is not always funny (…) especially because the buffaloes are everywhere (…) and always put their

feet in the same holes. Consequently, the paths are damaged with deep holes. It is necessary to put your foot between the holes of the buffaloes. If not, you fall, (…) in the mud.
And you arrived in the villages like that. You left the car far away on the dike.

Q. And in the villages, how were you welcome?

P.G. Always very well because I was never alone. Or I was accompanied by a Vietnamese pupil, or by a Vietnamese person of the administration. They served me in translating (…). Sometimes, it was a fellow from the village who was used to translate (…). I spent hours walking in villages, to observe, to ask questions. They were very nice. As soon as they had understood that I was not a kind of inspector of the taxes who could increase their taxes, it was OK. They had to be informed gently that I did not belong to this kind of support of the administration.

Q. When you said to them that you were doing a research on their peasant's life, how did they react?

P.G. I said to them that I was interested in the life of the village and then from time to time [I gave] a small gift, cigarettes, something like that. Sometimes, the meetings were rather noisy, they discussed between them, the one who wanted to answer to me was spoken to, while the other ones were pushing uncontested lamentation (…), and it was becoming a hubbub. Actually, I spent days and days in them (in the villages of the delta). It was essential to give an account of the atmosphere of the villages. It was very sympathetic all that.

Q. This aspiration to know and this interest in another culture, it is an approach which can be described as humanistic.

P.G. Montaigne, he is obviously my man (…). the opening of Montaigne is obviously very impressing. When Montaigne speaks about the Indians whom he met in Rouen, who were coming from Rio, he makes a portrait which is impressing.

Q. In an article published in the Bibliothèque Imaginaire du Collège de France, you evoke other authors whom you like. Victor Ségalen for example.

P.G. Yes, of course, René Leys, it is a very beautiful book. What an opening, what an enormous interest! It does not happen in Indochina, it is in Peking.

Q. I will give you a little provocation! The famous works on Indochina, they were those of Dorgelès, the route mandarine, or those of Jean Marquet[2], or Ajalbert

P.G. Very bad, it is not worth while. They are completely beside the question. It is an exotic literature without interest. There is a book which is called " kilometer 83 " of a polytechnician who was an engineer of Public works and opium addict. He made a trip around the Tonkin (…)[3] He walked but especially in the mountain. But it is well what he says. It was well perceived.
All things considered, about literature, no, I did not have anything behind me. Nobody had worked much in the area (…)

Q. The General Governor at your time was Pasquier. Did you know him?

P.G. Wait, Pasquier, yes, the one who died in a plane. But I never knew him. I never saw him. That did not interest him what I did. There was a historian geographer with the general Government which was interested in my work and who was called Grandjean (…). But, in general, all the administration was extraordinary kind to me all the time. I never had any difficulty with it. Everywhere, I had a very nice welcome. People help me, as soon as they understood that I was not a journalist going by and about to tell things in a newspaper (…). That went very well. The administration, it functioned very very well.

[2] Jean Marquet wrote several novels where the main characters are Annamite people. He received two awards for his book *De la rizière à la montagne, mœurs annamites* %%496(Marquet, 1920)%%

[3] Pierre Gourou tried to remember the name of the author (he read the novel more than 70 years ago!) and suggested Pierre Mille. In fact, "*Le kilomètre 83*" is by Henry Daguerches. The main character is an engineer, Tourange, working in the Siam-Upper Cambodia Railways Company. The book is written in the first person, where Tourange describes the life the engineers who built the railway in the marshy forest of the Tonle Sap region near Battambang (Cambodia) and the tensions between the engineers Vigel, who is sensitive and idealistic, Moutier, who is taciturn and loyal, and himself, who is more mystical.

Q. Some geographers consider that you study the local scale but not higher levels of managing, that you describe people in societies which are defined on a local scale, but not on the higher level of management, not at the State level.

P.G. Yes, a world vision of people. All that depends on civilizations. When I study Vietnamese people, I study them in their civilization. If not, I do not understand. When I study African people, it is necessary that I study them in their civilization. It is what I try to achieve: a large chapter on the Black Africa to show that there is a very original civilization, particular, that one does not see, but who exists, very closed, which is not the consequence of natural situations. It is the consequence of mechanisms of civilization which go back up to the prehistory. Because the African man is the only direct descendant of the prehistoric men who lived there. Never an invasion. It is not like us, poor Europeans, who saw going through heaps of invasions. There, nothing, except their ancestors, which can go up to 5 millions years. It rests there, the mystery of this civilization. They live on these roots, not on borrowings. It is very difficult to understand (…) It is strange, I do not understand it (?). But finally, it is [civilization] the only way by which one could understand something. Anyway, it does not matter, another question!

Q. To return to your thesis, other geographers consider that you do not evoke the contradictions that French colonization brought.

P.G. France and Vietnam have not the same civilization. All my thesis is founded on the original character of a geography based on a civilization which was not ours. The factor civilization is the principal, there is no doubt about that. It is an unthinkable geography somewhere else. Mind you, we can have fun saying: if Chinese civilization had established in the plain of Pô, it would be only rice fields. There are, but not a lot. There would not have been an extraordinary succession of architectural modes, they would be always pagodas with the horned roofs. There would not have been a Greek, Roman, Vénitian style (…). It would be a Chinese landscape. And if China would have been occupied by Europeans, Chinese would have cultivated corn, drunk milk, made cheese (…). Physical environment allows perfectly one or another civilization. And that, it is my point of view (…). We can understand the delta only if we see what is the civilization which spreads on it. Don’t you?

Q. Yes, and it is for this reason that it is difficult for me to conceive what could represent in this thousand-year-old civilization " the work of France ".

P.G. In my opinion, the work of France is null. When we walk in the delta from village to village, France does not exist. They lived in their civilization, poorly in their civilization. If there had not been a Vietnamese civilization of Chinese inspiration, there would have been another human geography of the delta. One needed all the Chinese organization adopted by the Vietnamese, transformed through their tastes, to manufacture this very ordered landscape, with indexed villages, precise limits. When we leave the Vietnamese country, it is another landscape.

Q. I enter this logic of civilization to see spaces like spaces of civilization and it is for this that I can’t imagine how the French administration managed to find its place.

P.G. You know, in Tonkin, it was a kind of Protectorate, i.e. that there was a complete Annamite administration (…). France exerted only a control. In Cochinchine, it was a little different, it was a French colony, another world.

Q. To study the Cochinchine would have interested you less than the delta

P.G. I did not want to work in Cochinchine. I did not see a great interest there. The European intervention was too large. It was not an original geography. It was not a mature country, it was a country in the process of growth and change (…). The country was not yet ‘vietnamized’ in a total way (…).

Q. To study the village industry, you sent questionnaires to the villages.

P.G. In all the villages. We had to go through 8.000 questionnaires. Fortunately, in most of the delta, there was nothing. In certain parts of the delta, there was a great deal of industries. It was necessary that I checked. It was rather interesting (…). There were villages that had developed an industry, which was profitable. An industry without machine, manual.

Q. You tried to find a logic for their distribution.

P.G. Ah yes, it is necessary to see the map of the industries.

Q. You say that their distribution depends more on chance than on something rational.

P.G. Yes, it is like that. An industry was established in a village, we do not know why. Everyone imitated. In fact, it was always very simple industries, but they brought money.

Q. Because of these industries, there was trade. How did you study the trade of the villages?

P.G. There were markets everywhere. Daily, in the middle of the countryside, in places where the villages of the surroundings came to the market. It was a meeting place. Everything was sold. Then, there were small restaurants, they roasted dog's sausages. But the most curious industry was that which was able to repair the cast iron teapots. I do not know how they made, but they managed to do it. Out of pig iron, molten in a mould, that made a teapot. But sometimes, there was a hole, and they could repair that. I do not know how they made (…) the villages were especially villages making basket, or textile (…). There was a group of villages, which manufactured all the pottery of the delta. The pottery was not manufactured in any place. Clay was needed (…) this must still exist (…) There was a very active trade, on tiny sums. There was only the villages close to Hanoï which wove and which spun silk (…). They were very skilled in making basket (…).

Q. And the working migrations.

P.G. There were coal mines in Tonkin. The coal mines were recruiting miners (…). They spent some time in the mine. Then they were coming back home. I have not dwelled on that. They [the miners] were people from the delta. I could have examined that more closely. But I did not study the functioning of the North coal mines. It was no more the delta.
There were not large-scale industries. There was a textile factory in Nam Dinh which employed people of the city and the surroundings (…). They manufactured raincoats and hats. The women were sewing up their clothing themselves (…)

Q. It was a closed economy which you considered in survival?

P.G. Yes, they lived on themselves (…). It was difficult to find in a village an object which was not purely local. In a village, we could find sometimes a man who smoked a cigarette manufactured in a factory (…). But the teapots were of local manufacture. They made themselves their sandals etc ... There were also the floating villages, only in boat (…). There was a boat which was the temple of the genius of the fisher and conveyor village. I have sketches of boat-dwelling (…). the fish was a significant source of food. It contributed to make the sauce with which they ate rice. They did not eat meat, sometimes dog's sausages, rice and fish. Milk was unknown.

Q. You will speak about "La civilisation du végétable".

P.G. "La civilisation du végétable", it reigns in Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos, therefore in all the Black Africa: no breeding, therefore neither meat, nor milk (…)

Q. You also speak in your thesis also about a civilization which lives in harmony with its environment, about harmonious relationship with the environment.

P.G. That, I can't reply to you. The concept of harmony, that goes beyond me. If the milk of the cows is drunk, that does not mean that we are not in harmony with nature. Notice that Vietnamese make working their animals, and they eat their meat when it is possible. That is not part of the usual menu, but obviously, when a buffalo dies and they can eat it, they eat it. But in any Vietnamese village, you will not find butchery. However, there is no shop, the trade is done at the market, not in the village. As in the African villages (…) Well, all that was interesting, but now, I cannot go any more on the spot, I am too old (…). I am at the end of the circle. (…)

Q. Which are your best memories of Vietnam?

P.G. Memories of landscape, very beautiful landscapes, and of the Vietnamese life which interested me, of an architecture which interested me (…). I was in sympathy with the country, I keep a very good memory of it.

Q. You have kept friends of this period?

P.G. Oh! Such events! That is not possible that (…) Poor people, they suffered often a lot. Well, it is like that.

Q. You are still writing a book

P.G. But perhaps I am wrong (…) I distract myself. If not I would be bored, since I cannot read a long time and a lot. I cannot read the newspaper, I do not see very well (…).
And Australia? You have a beautiful subject, you know. I imagine a book in three parts: First part: the landscape before the Europeans landing, which would allow to settle the physical geography and to speak about the aboriginal civilization before the Europeans settlement. Second part: the period of occupation, with a certain disorder. Third part: The present stability, the order. Before, during, afterwards. The aboriginals, of the gatherers, hunters, fishermen (?). That would be a very good geography.
And Adelaide (…)?

Original interview, in French

Q. Vous êtes né en Tunisie. Y aviez-vous des attaches? Quand avez-vous quitté la Tunisie?

P.G. Je suis né à Tunis le 31 août 1900, au XIXème siècle! Mon père avait fait son service militaire en Tunisie. Après son service militaire, il s'est marié en Tunisie. Mais mes parents sont des français du Midi. Ils n'avaient pas d'attache en Tunisie. Moi non plus, bien que j'y aie passé 18 ans de ma vie. J'y ai fait mes études secondaires. Puis j'ai été professeur au lycée de Tunis après l'Agrégation d'histoire et géographie. J'en suis parti en 1926 pour aller en Indochine.

Q. Quand êtes-vous parti faire vos études supérieures en France et dans quelle université avez-vous préparé votre agrégation?

P.G. En 1918, quand la guerre a été finie, j'ai été à Lyon pour préparer mes diplômes du supérieur, ma licence en trois ans. Puis j'ai préparé l'Agrégation.

Q. Et qui ont été vos professeurs?

P.G. En géographie, Zimmerman. Il était spécialiste surtout sur la Scandinavie. C'était un germaniste, comme son nom l'indique un peu. Donc, il était familier de la géographie allemande. Dans la géographie universelle, il a écrit sur le livre sur la Scandinavie. C'était un type très sympathique et très intelligent. Mais il ne s'occupait absolument pas de ses étudiants. On l'écoutait, on suivait ses conseils, on était content de l'entendre parce qu'il avait un esprit clair. Mais il ne s'occupait pas de la formation d'étudiant.

Q. Comment était enseignée la géographie? Qu'apprenait-on en géographie? Comment apprenait-on la géographie régionale?

P.G. En écoutant, en lisant, en faisant des exposés en licence. Mais je n'ai pas fait un diplôme de géographie, parce qu'avec Zimmerman, c'était dangereux. Il laissait ses étudiants trottiner tous seuls. J'ai fait un diplôme d'histoire, sur la politique économique de Louis XI, je me rappelle, très intéressant d'ailleurs.

Q. Vous avez donc eu une formation d'historien tout autant que de géographe

P.G. C'était une formation d'historien et de géographe. Mais après cela, je me suis orienté. Je savais que je voulais faire de la géographie. Je ne voulais pas être historien, je voulais être géographe.

Q. Pourquoi?

P.G. Par curiosité d'enfant, de bébé charmé par les descriptions de pays lointains. C'est comme cela que je me suis lancé dans la géographie et la géographie tropicale. Il est certain que lorsque j'avais 6-7 ans, j'ai lu des tas de trucs romanesques sur l' Inde et cela m'a passionné. Le climat tropical, il y a une orientation qui a commencé très tôt pour moi.

Q. Et l'Extrême-Orient?

P.G. L'Extrême-Orient, c'est la Chine (…) Il y avait une orientation tropicale et aussi extrême-orientale. Cela, il n'y a pas de doute. Quand j'ai été professeur au lycée de Tunis, après l'Agrégation, en 1926, je ne voulais pas rester là,

je voulais aller vers les choses que j'aimais, c'est à dire l'Extrême-Orient tropical. Pas aller au Japon, ça, je n'en avais pas envie. Mais j'ai été en Indochine. Je suis resté un an à Saïgon. Puis tout le reste du temps à Hanoï.

Q. Pour revenir à vos études, aviez vous suivi des cours de géographie coloniale à Lyon? Et comment avez-vous connu Demangeon, votre directeur de thèse?

P.G. Il n' y avait pas de chaire de géographie coloniale à Lyon.
Je n'ai jamais entendu les cours de Demangeon, mais il a été pour moi un ami et un professeur par ce qu'il écrivait. Il a été très bon pour moi. Une fois par an, il m'écrivait une petite lettre en me disant "continuez", "c'est très bien", nos relations consistaient en cela.

Q. Mais vous l'avez choisi comme directeur de thèse pour quelle raison?

P.G. Dès le début, Demangeon avait accepté mon sujet de thèse, au moment du Congrès international de géographie à Paris en 1931. Je connaissais Demangeon comme cela, je ne l'avais jamais vu. C'est là qu'il m'a dit "bon pour votre sujet de thèse". Il était toujours très gentil.

Q. Mais vous le connaissiez aussi par ses ouvrages.

P.G. Oui, je connaissais bien son œuvre. J'ai été orienté de ce côté là. Avec un esprit plus systématique que lui.

Q. Mais Demangeon avait déjà un esprit systématique

P.G. C'est à dire que j'ai fait très tôt le départ entre ce qui était physique et ce qui était civilisation. En ne laissant pas dans le vague les rapports entre tout cela. C'est là que j'ai fait connaissance d'un grand géographe, Dion, qui a fait ce très beau livre *la Vigne en France* et sa thèse sur le Val de Loire.

Q. Vous citez d'ailleurs son essai sur la formation du paysage rural français dans la bibliographie des paysans du Delta tonkinois

P.G. Oui, c'est passionnant. C'était un type épatant. Mais je n'ai jamais eu, en somme, j'oserais dire, de directeur en géographie. Dion était un ami, Demangeon était un patron agréable, très bienveillant. Je suis arrivé un jour chez lui avec ma thèse finie au début de 1936. Il n'avait jamais rien vu encore.

Q. Dans cette thèse, vous avez une approche régionale nouvelle comparé aux autres thèses de l'époque: vous partez du problème du taux remarquablement élevé de la densité de la population.

P.G. C'était une façon de commencer, s'accrocher à quelque chose. Et puis, après cela, on suit. Pour moi, la densité de la population était la manipulation de la chose originale du Vietnam, c'est à dire sa civilisation.

Q. Dans une interview que vous avez accordée à Hérodote en 1984, vous dites aussi: "Le problème scientifique naissait à propos de l'Extrême-Orient". Qu'entendez-vous par "problème scientifique"?

P.G. C'était un problème à résoudre. Pourquoi sont-ils si nombreux? Un problème scientifique en étudiant le physique et l'humain, car les deux y contribuent. Mais sans l'humain, il n' y aurait rien eu. Je voudrais dire que la civilisation était presque plus importante que le milieu. Mais il ne faut pas exagérer. Sans le milieu, la civilisation vietnamienne n'aurait pas pu s'appliquer. La civilisation vietnamienne ne pouvait pas s'appliquer dans les montagnes. Le Vietnamien a laissé la montagne à l'autre. Les Vietnamiens sont des disciples des chinois. En Chine, c'est comme cela. Des plaines très peuplées et des montagnes négligées facilement.

Q. Pour analyser "scientiquement" la densité de la population, vous questionnez la valeur et la fiabilité des chiffres du recensement, opérez dans le village de Dông Lai une vérification du chiffre officiel, sondez vous-même les autorités vietnamiennes d'autres villages. Mais vous n'avez pu faire cette analyse qu'avec la collaboration de l'administration coloniale française et des autorités vietnamiennes mandarinales. Comment ces deux types d'autorités ont-elles collaboré avec vous?

P.G. Ils étaient tous très gentils. Les sous-préfets qui dirigeaient une circonscription, une partie d'une province, étaient des gens très aimables dont certains ont été de mes anciens élèves au lycée Albert Sarraut. Alors, c'était très agréable, ils étaient toujours très gentils, très compétents, très dévoués mêmes.

Q. Mais, n'y avait-il pas des contradictions dans la collaboration entre ces deux types d'administration?
P.G. Mais c'était la même chose. Le Tonkin n'était pas l'Annam (…) pratiquement, l'administration vietnamienne dépendait entièrement de la hiérarchie française (…) Mais tout cela était très bienveillant.
Je n'ai jamais constaté de grosses différences entre la réalité et les chiffres donnés. Le moyen de vérifier n'était pas facile. J'avais le chiffre des habitants, des maisons, il était très difficile de refaire le recensement moi-même. Mais sans en avoir l'air, en faisant des contrôles à plusieurs semaines de distance dans le même village où j'avais le chiffre que le maire du village m'avait donné, et puis que m'avaient donné des personnes, cela concordait. A 5 ou 6 personnes près, il n'y avait pas de fantaisie très spéciale. Et puis, on contrôlait aussi facilement par le cadastre de toutes les communes, avec le plan à grande échelle de toutes les parcelles. On reconstituait très facilement l'appartenance de toutes les terres. Cela permettait de retrouver le nombre d'habitants, le nombre de propriétaires.
Les chiffres de la population sont convenables. On a fait des vérifications (…). C'était bien. L'administration était bien faite. Elle y tenait à cause de l'impôt.

Q. Mais n'y avait-il pas une certaine méfiance de l'administration et de la population vietnamienne vis à vis des questionnaires?

P.G. L'administration vietnamienne tenait à toucher son argent. Bien que pauvres, les paysans payaient un impôt sur la terre, cadastral (…)

Q. Pour comprendre cette densité, vous faites appel à l'ingéniosité du paysan annamite à produire en tirant parti de tout, et vous parlez aussi de l'organisation politique et sociale des villages (…) C'est ce que vous appèlerez plus tard les "techniques de production" et "d'encadrement". Les concepts qui sont à la base de votre géographie tropicale n'étaient-ils pas déjà implicitement présents dans votre thèse?

P.G. Je n'avais pas encore dégagé la notion personnelle de civilisation, de technique de production et de technique d'encadrement. Mais, c'était ma façon de penser, ma façon de rechercher. Maintenant, je vis là-dessus.
C'était une civilisation très avancée.

Q. Qu'est ce que vous entendez par "civilisation très avancée?" Le concept de civilisation? Pourquoi utilisez-vous ce concept de civilisation et que vous n'utilisez pas le concept vidalien de genre de vie?

P.G. Le concept de genre de vie, je ne retiens pas l'expression. J'avais affaire à des cultivateurs et en même temps des industriels, car les métiers étaient nombreux. La vie de beaucoup de ces paysans n'était pas un genre de vie. C'était à la fois de l'agriculture, de l'industrie et du commerce parfois aussi. Leur style de vie était complexe. C'est volontairement que je n'ai jamais utilisé le concept de genre de vie. Dès qu'un genre de vie est un peu complexe, ce n'est plus un genre de vie ou il faut dire genre de vie complexe. Cela ne signifie plus rien.

Q. Et le concept de région naturelle, vous l'utilisez peu aussi.

P.G. Le concept de région naturelle, cela allait de soi. Le delta est évidemment une région naturelle. Dès que l'on sort de 2 mètres du delta, on est dans une autre région. Mais la notion de région naturelle est une notion dangereuse puisque le delta est une région naturelle mais c'était aussi une région de civilisation. Ce n'est pas simplement une région naturelle. C'est aussi et surtout une région de civilisation. C'est un ensemble complexe de faits naturels et de faits de civilisation, la civilisation étant pour moi l'essentiel du tout. Je suis entrain d'écrire un bouquin "géographie et civilisation" où je montre que sans la civilisation, on ne peut rien comprendre à la géographie, où que ce soit, sauf au pôle Nord.

Q. Certains géographes ont parlé de "déterminisme de civilisation".

P.G. C'est un abus de mot. Quand on est dans une civilisation, on ne peut pas faire autrement que de vivre en elle (…).

Q. Et la notion de possibilisme?
P.G. A l'intérieur d'une civilisation, tout n'est pas possible. L'action de l'homme est déterminée par la civilisation à laquelle il appartient. Cela, il n'y a rien à faire.

Q. Dans votre thèse, la notion de civilisation est déjà implicitement la clé de votre géographie.

P.G. C'est déjà cela, vous savez. Je glissais dans cette façon de voir la géographie.
J'ai travaillé énormément. Oh là là! Mais cela me passionnait. Puis, j'étais bien entouré. Tout le monde était très gentil pour moi. Le service géographique a fait des prouesses de gentillesse pour moi, pour me fabriquer mes cartes, me les faire tirer.

Q. Pour vos sources d'information, les personnes de l'administration coloniale vous ont donc beaucoup aidé.

P.G. Beaucoup, tout ce qu'elles ont pu. C'était parfois moi qui leur signalais ce sur quoi ils devaient réfléchir.

Q. Donc, votre thèse pouvait être aussi un moyen pour l'administration française pour mieux travailler.

P.G. Ah oui, certainement, j'espère qu'elle l'a utilisée. Mais enfin, les évènements qui ont suivi ont emporté tous les efforts possibles dans une meilleure administration.

Q. Donc, votre géographie participait à l'œuvre de mise en valeur de la France

P.G. Oui

Q. Vous avez évoqué le service du cadastre et le service géographique avec ses cartes. Vous citez dans votre bibliographie des capitaines qui firent des observations sur ces cartes.

P.G. Ils étaient tous très bons pour moi, ils m'ont beaucoup aidé, sans eux, je n'aurais pas pu aboutir.
Les cartes au 1/25,000 étaient une merveille, en couleur, avec des courbes hypsométriques à 50cm (…).

Q. Et la collection de photographies de l'aéronautique militaire qui figurent dans votre thèse?

P.G. Ah oui, c'était merveilleux.

Q. Avec le problème de la densité, vous débouchez en conclusion sur le problème du surpeuplement. Y avait-t-il un débat à ce sujet? Une prise de conscience de ce problème par l'administration coloniale?

P.G. Non. Elle estimait que ce n'était pas son affaire, que c'était une civilisation comme cela. Il fallait beaucoup d'enfants (…) Il est certain qu'il y a beaucoup plus de monde maintenant.

Q. Les projections que vous avez faites sur les chiffres d'augmentation de la population dans votre thèse se sont révélées très proches de la réalité.

P.G. Entre 1930 et 1995, la population a peut-être doublé. Je n'ai pas une confiance considérable dans les chiffres que donnent les Vietnamiens. Je ne sais pas si le recensement est bien fait, et s'ils n'ont pas intérêt à gonfler. Je n'ai pas de contrôle là-dessus. Mais les chiffres donnés sont certainement inférieurs à la réalité d'aujourd'hui, malgré la guerre. Certains pensent qu'elle aurait doublé.

Q. Le problème du surpeuplement était un des thèmes des années 1930. Par exemple, le congrès International de Géographie à Amsterdam en 1938 l'aborde.

P.G. C'était un congrès très désagréable parce qu'il y avait de nombreux représentants de l'Allemagne fascistes insupportables, de l'Allemagne et de l'Italie, qui avaient leur petite idée sur les peuples sans espace. On ne pouvait pas avoir de conversation scientifique avec eux car pour eux l'Allemagne était un pays de pauvres types sans espaces, l'Italie aussi, et leurs voisins devaient leur donner de l'espace. Enfin, on était en plein nazisme. J'y étais avec Robequain (…) Il y avait aussi Weulersse, mort prématurément, le pauvre, qui n'a jamais pu finir sa thèse. C'était sur le Proche-Orient. Il a été longtemps à Beyrouth, et au Liban, et en Syrie. Quand il a eu passé l'Agrégation brillamment, il a été récompensé par une bourse du Tour du Monde. Il était normalien, il était sorti en 1924. Il a publié ses souvenirs très intéressants sur son parcours de l'Afrique que j'ai préfacés. Je viens de revoir la préface d'ailleurs.
Il n'a pas beaucoup marqué parce qu'il n'a pas beaucoup publié. Il était intelligent (…)

Q. Si les personnes de l'administration coloniale ne débattaient pas de problème du surpeuplement, elles pouvaient s'exprimer sur celui du développement économique de l'Indochine française comme Paul Bernard, administrateur du crédit mobilier indochinois, le faisait ou bien sur la question paysanne.

P.G. L'amélioration du sort des paysans, c'est un problème auquel on ne voit pas de solution. Des villages qui ont plus de 1000 habitants par kilomètre carré, on ne peut pas dire qu'on va en exporter 500!
Le développement économique, c'est l'industrie la solution. La solution économique, c'est l'industrialisation. C'est pensable (…) La solution dans un pays comme le Tonkin, c'est l'électrification systématique et générale, pour que, dans les villages, les gens qui sont industrialiseux et qui sont nombreux puissent multiplier avec la force électrique les activités qu'ils savent faire. La première étape, c'est celle-là, mais cela fait beaucoup de capitaux.

Q. L'électrification du delta avait-elle commencé au temps de la colonisation?

P.G. C'était vaguement commencé. Mais cela consistait dans le delta à l'électrification des villes. En réalité, les maisons campagnardes du delta ne se prêtaient pas à l'électrification. Elles étaient trop combustibles. La moindre étincelle de feu mettrait le feu à ces maisons de pailles. Il aurait fallu faire des ateliers non combustibles où les Vietnamiens auraient pu faire tout ce qui peut se faire avec l'électricité plus vite qu'à la main.

Q. Dans votre bibliographie, vous citez aussi René Dumont qui avait son idée sur la question paysanne.

P.G. Oui, mais il était agronome, il voyait les choses différemment.

Q. Le connaissiez-vous? Avez-vous discutez avec lui? Que pensez-vous de ses réflexions sur le développement économique dans les villages du delta du Tonkin?

P.G. Je connais l'œuvre de René Dumont. C'est un esprit intéressant, mais un peu systématique, un peu simplificateur. C'est à dire qu'il n'est pas assez géographe, il ne voit pas tous les aspects d'un problème. Enfin, il est très vieux, comme moi! Après sa thèse sur le delta, il n'a pas travaillé au Tonkin, il a travaillé en Afrique surtout.

Q. Pour comprendre la répartition des populations indochinoises et les fortes densités du delta comparé aux montagnes, vous avez aussi utilisé les travaux de médecins qui ont travaillé sur le paludisme.

P.G. Oui, il y a beaucoup de gens qui n'ont aidé. De temps en temps, il y avait un peu de paludisme dans le delta dans des villages au bord de la mer. Sur les plages, il y avait des petites marres à demi salées d'eau de mer avec des eaux de pluie qui pouvaient correspondent à certaines races d'anophèles. Mais, dans le delta, la salubrité était à peu près convenable. Il n'y a jamais eu d'épidémies pendant que j'étais là. (…).

Q. Votre principale source d'information était cependant l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient et sa bibliothèque.

P.G. Oui, il y avait une excellente bibliothèque, surtout les revues. C'est pour cela que c'était intéressant d'être à Hanoi.
Il y avait aussi beaucoup de moustiques! (…)

Q. Etiez-vous membre de l'Ecole?

P.G. Je n'étais pas membre. Robequain était membre de l'E.F.E.O. Il avait une mission de l'Ecole de 3 ans. Mais l'Ecole a payé l'impression de ma thèse. Toutes ces photographies, toutes ces cartes, cela a coûté très cher (…).

Q. Qui était vos amis à l'Ecole?

P.G. Mon grand ami était Paul Mus. C'était mon ami très intime, très passionnant.

Q. Oui, il a écrit "Sociologie d'une guerre" sur le Vietnam

P.G. Oui, il est mort à l'hôpital d'Avignon, il avait une maladie du cœur. C'était un type épatant. Madame Mus et sa sœur, Madame Drouin, aussi. C'était un milieu très intelligent et très vivant.
J'étais entouré de gens qui m'ont tous beaucoup aidé. J'ai été aidé par Grandjean aussi, qui était un grand personnage du gouvernement général, un haut fonctionnaire de l'administration, agrégé d'histoire. J'ai eu beaucoup d'élèves vietnamiens que j'aimais beaucoup dont Giap, que j'ai eu 2 ans au lycée. Il était très intéressant. On se voyait beaucoup.

Q. Vous pouviez discuter avec vos élèves de votre thèse ou d'autres problèmes?

P.G. Non, (…) Je leur apportais tout ce que je savais (…) Mais j'ai retrouvé un de mes anciens élèves du lycée qui est maintenant à la retraite à Paris et qui était devenu un personnage assez important dans les affaires. Mais enfin, autre question.

Q. Vous avez cité Paul Mus. Et Maspéro? L'avez vous connu?

P.G. Non, ce n'est pas de ma génération, Il était plus ancien, il était membre de l'Institut. Il n'était pas à Hanoï quand j'y étais

Q. Coedès?

P.G. Non, c'est un homme remarquable

Q. Chassigneux?

P.G. Chassigneux était envoyé de mission par l'E.F.E.O., c'était le même cas que Robequain. Il est rentré en France en 1917, mais son bateau et ses documents ont été coulés par un sous-marin allemand. Mais je l'ai connu, car il était le géographe de l'Agrégation de la leçon de géographie quand je l'ai passée. Il m'a mis une très bonne note d'ailleurs, c'était une leçon de géographie sur les torrents. C'était une leçon facile (…).
Chassigneux a publié sur le Tonkin.

Q. Il a publié une étude sur l'irrigation dans le delta du Tonkin

P.G. Sur le climat du Tonkin. Il avait réuni des documents pour en faire une étude plus poussée, mais cela a été noyé dans le torpillage (…) Mais je ne l'ai pas rencontré après l'Agrégation.

Q. Dans votre thèse, pour bien comprendre la vie et la civilisation annamite, vous êtes amené à parler des croyances culturelles annamites. Vous évoquez les influences magiques et religieuses, la géomancie, c'est à dire des notions étrangères à notre culture. Comment approchiez-vous ces notions?

P.G. Je vais vous expliquer. D'abord, la géomancie, je n'y connais rien.

Q. Oui, mais vous l'évoquez, vous en parlez un peu.

P.G. Oui, mais j'ai l'impression que ce sont des croyances de l'imaginaire, toutes ces croyances sur les parties de la maison, ce sont des représentations qui ne correspondent à aucun élément matériel. C'est une sorte de vues métaphysiques de la maison qui ne sont pas expliquées par la maison elle-même, telle qu'on la voit. C'est une application de schémas métaphysiques sur une maison qui n'a rien à voir avec la métaphysique.
Mais j'ai été beaucoup aidé par mon ami Inguimberty qui est mort maintenant qui a fait tous les croquis de maisons qui sont dans ma thèse. Cela m'aidait beaucoup: comment étaient faites les maisons? J'ai tous ses originaux (…)

Q. Oui, l'habitat rural était un thème de la géographie régionale de l'époque. Mais vous avez choisi de faire une analyse très détaillée et illustrée des différents types de maisons annamites.

P.G. Aux maisons sont rattachées des quantités de croyances, presque religieuses. Ce n'est pas comme notre maison à nous, qui, au fond, n'est accrochée à rien. Mais, dans le delta, c'est un ensemble très complexe que je n'ai pas compris entièrement, n'est-ce pas. C'est difficile de se le faire expliquer par un vietnamien parce que lui le sent sans le comprendre (…).

Q. C'est tout le problème des différences culturelles

P.G. Oui, c'est difficile de se faire expliquer cela surtout dans la construction des maisons communes qui sont des temples au génie du village. La mairie, c'est un temple au génie du village. Donc, il y a un génie du village, que personne n'a jamais vu, bien entendu (…).
Décrire ces différences culturelles, cela me donnait de la peine sans me convaincre que j'avais dit exactement ce qu'il fallait dire, parce que c'est très difficile. On peut écrire des volumes sur les croyances rattachées à la maison. J'étais très sensible. Une certaine poutre posée d'une certaine façon, il y avait une croyance rattachée à cela. Je donne les noms de tous les morceaux de la maison qui correspondent à la véritable pensée vietnamienne. Mais, pour aller plus loin, il faudrait être un vietnamien intelligent et cultivé (…).

Q. Et les notions occidentales de progrès, de modernisation, comment selon vous les Vietnamiens les abordaient-ils?

P.G. Les Vietnamiens instruits s'y convertissaient très facilement. Mais au fond d'eux-mêmes, ils concevaient un doute, mais qui était de style chinois. En Chine, il y a toutes sortes de réserves. Si vous lisez Lao Tseu, il y a le doute, tellement de doutes sur ce qui est l'univers (…). C'est très négatif cette philosophie, très passionnant d'ailleurs. Je me rappelle les mots d'un célèbre chinois du IIIème siècle avant notre ère qui, contrairement à l'habitude chinoise, a exigé d'avoir des funérailles réduites à rien. Pas de musique, pas de pétards, rien de semblable. "Je veux être couché nu dans la terre nue, sans monument, parce que", dit-il, "je veux rejoindre immédiatement la grande indétermination". Le fond de la philosophie chinoise du III siècle avant notre ère est une grande indétermination (…). Pour cela, il faut que je sois nu, qu'il n'y ait aucune cérémonie, ni rien (…). C'est une philosophie qui se défend. Le monde n'est-il pas une grande indétermination dans son éternité? Si le monde est éternel, c'est qu'il est indéterminé. S'il était déterminé, il faudrait bien qu'il s'arrête (…).

Q. Pour revenir à cette notion de progrès, vous êtes vous-même prudent. Vous parlez du monde annamite comme d'un monde moral et social, et dans votre conclusion, vous dites qu'il ne faut pas tout transformer trop vite sous peine de bouleverser ce monde moral et social.
P.G. Le communisme a essayé de détruire cette vieille morale annamite. Il n'a pas dû y arriver d'ailleurs.

Q. Qu'est ce qui vous donnait cette impression de moralité?

P.G. La fidélité à la famille, la fidélité aux ancêtres. Cela suffit d'ailleurs. La fidélité aux ancêtres, c'est à dire la fidélité aux mœurs des ancêtres. Le culte des ancêtres est très important (…).

Q. Lorsque vous êtes arrivé en Indochine, aviez-vous déjà des idées sur le pays et ses habitants?

P.G. Je n'avais aucune notion sur l'Indochine (…) Je n'avais rien lu sur l'Indochine, mais beaucoup sur la Chine. Cela m'a aidé.

Q. Vous avez commencé à lire sur l'Indochine à la bibliothèque de l'E.F.E.O. Y avait-il les publications autres que françaises?
P.G. Il y avait des livres de toutes les langues, et toute la bibliographie sur l'Extrême-Orient. C'était très agréable parce que l'on était seul, il n'y avait pratiquement personne. J'étais le seul client souvent, …avec les moustiques!
Maintenant, l'Ecole existe à Paris, et a ouvert un petit pied à terre à Hanoï.
C'est l'Ecole qui s'occupait d'Angkor, de toutes les civilisations de l'Indochine. Elle avait d'excellents lettrés vietnamiens, dont l'un était mon professeur de vietnamien.

Q. Vous avez appris le vietnamien?

P.G. Cela, c'est difficile. A la fois facile et fantastiquement difficile. C'est facile parce qu'il n'y a pas de grammaire. Les mots s'enchaînent comme cela, avec beaucoup de facilité (…), Seulement, c'est terriblement difficile à cause de la reconnaissance des 5 tons (…). D'autant plus que d'un village à l'autre, la prononciation change un peu. Quand les hommes parlent très vite, c'est très difficile de reconnaître les mots qui n'ont qu'une syllabe. Un ton, un mot, 2 consonnes et une voyelle.
J'ai appris un peu. Mais il fallait une grande habitude pour s'en tirer. J'avais toujours des interprètes, sinon, je n'aurais pas pu comprendre ce qui se passait dans le village.

Q. Qui étaient vos interprètes? Des lettrés de l'E.F.E.O?

P.G. Non, c'était un ami vietnamien, un élève, quelqu'un de l'administration content de venir avec moi. Sans cela, je n'aurais pas pu m'en tirer (…). Surtout qu'ils parlent avec une vitesse folle. Peut-être n'étais-je pas très doué pour apprendre le vietnamien, j'essayais, mais cela n'était pas facile (…). Le chinois aussi, ce n'est pas facile à apprendre (...)

Q. Dans le delta, vous avez été frappé par la beauté des paysages et leur harmonie.

P.G. Ils sont très beaux [Pierre Gourou montre un tableau qui représente le delta et ses rizières vertes, avec un paysan et son buffle sous un ciel voilé de nuages sombres, peint par son ami Inguimberty][4].

[4] Plus tard, Pierre Gourou montra un autre tableau où "des petits enfants jouant joyeusement dans un village de Chine, portent des pantalons fendus qui simplifient le nettoyage de leur linge et révèlent innocemment leur sexe et leurs petites fesses" (Pierre Gourou rapporte aussi cette scène dans son livre *La Terre et l'Homme en Extrême-Orient*). Il évoqua les rues pleines d'enfants

Q. Pour décrire ces paysages, vous questionnez leur beauté, en parlant d'harmonie, de paysages bucoliques, des rapports de couleurs, des tableaux impressionnistes. Dans une de vos lettres, vous évoquez aussi sa pureté et l'absence d'éléments étrangers.

P.G. Oui, c'est un pays très beau, il n'y a pas de constructions qui gênent, il n'y a pas de fumée d'usine, rien de semblable.

Q. Pour vous, le paysage était beau parce que dépourvu d'éléments étrangers?

P.G. Mais je crois qu'il est moins beau maintenant parce que du temps de Ho Chi Minh, on a coupé les haies de bambous qui entourent les villages, ce qui fait que l'on voit les maisons (…).
C'est très beau, ces paysages de rizières sous des nuages (…).

Q. Vous décrivez les paysages, le travail des paysans mais aussi des femmes vietnamiennes dans votre thèse. Il y a des photos d'elles.

P.G. Des femmes très travailleuses et très adroites, aussi travailleuses et aussi habiles que les hommes. C'est un peuple très sympathique. Je me rappelle ces petites paysannes qui se promenaient dans de grandes mares, montées sur le dos d'un buffle qui nageait et elles, debout avec les rênes du buffle pour le diriger.
Cela continue, car un vietnamien, qui m'écrit de temps en temps et qui habite Paris, est retournée au Tonkin et a photographié cela, là où je l'ai vu, des filles de 12-13 ans debout sur un buffle etc. (…) Ce sont les égales des hommes.

Q. Vous décrivez aussi le travail de ces femmes paysannes. En faite, vous commencez votre chapitre sur l'agriculture par la propriété agricole, que l'étude du cadastre a dû vous permettre d'analyser. Mais, en dehors du cadastre, il devait être plus difficile de vous informer sur la valeur vénale des terres, les conditions de prêts, les pratiques usurières.

P.G. Il y avait des travaux là-dessus, des articles de vietnamiens dans des revues locales.
Les transactions ne se faisaient pas sur crédit, elles se faisaient en argent comptant. Mais tout cela était très raffiné, très au point, habituellement honnête.

Q. Vous décrivez aussi l'intensité de l'agriculture et le calendrier agricole, ce qui est un thème classique de la géographie régionale. Vous évoquez précisément les gestes des paysans et paysannes. Il ressort de toutes ces descriptions votre désir et votre souci de faire connaître et comprendre le paysan annamite. C'était cela, votre « curiosité géographique » ?

P.G. Oui, cela m'avait beaucoup intéressé. J'ai fait cela avec beaucoup d'intérêt.

Q. Comment les autres géographes ont-ils perçu votre thèse ?

P.G. Je n'ai jamais parlé de ma thèse à personne, je n'ai pas discuté de ma thèse avec qui que ce soit parmi les géographes. Je ne me suis jamais interrogé sur ce que pensaient les autres géographes de ma thèse. Ils ont dû trouver que c'était bien long! C'est un peu long, un peu gros. Je n'en sais rien. Je ne m'en suis jamais inquiété.

Q. Dans votre bibliographie, vous citez des articles de Sion, qui a écrit sa thèse sur les Paysans de la Normandie Orientale, de Demangeon, et Augustin Bernard est aussi cité. Comment appréciez-vous les écrits de ces géographes?

P.G. Je les avais regardés. Cela n'avait quand-même aucun rapport avec le milieu que j'étudiais. J'avais un milieu très différent, un autre monde.

Q. Pour revenir au concept de civilisation. Ce concept a été utilisé par les historiens de l'Ecole des Annales. Connaissez-vous Lucien Fèbvre, qui avait fait un bon compte-rendu sur votre article « La civilisation du végétal »?

P.G. Il a fait un compte-rendu très aimable.

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des villages tonkinois. Il parla chaleureusement de ses arrières petits enfants dont certains étaient déjà presque adultes en ajoutant: "Il faut que je me dépêche de mourrir pour ne pas embarrasser l' Académie française. Il n'existe pas de mot pour désigner un 'arrière arrière grand père'!".

Je ne sais pas si Lucien Fèbvre a lu ma thèse, mais il s'est intéressé à mon petit bouquin *La Terre et L'Homme en Extrême-Orient*. C'est un petit bouquin facile à lire, paru en même temps que *l'Utilisation du Sol en Indochine*, une autre façon de traiter le problème

Q. *L'Utilisation du sol en Indochine* a paru aussi parallèlement à celui de Robequain sur *l'évolution économique de l'Indochine*

P.G. Oui. J'ai aussi publié un article dans les Annales sur la Répartition de la population en Cochinchine dans le delta du Mékong.
Je ne sais pas pourquoi, on vient de republier *La Terre et l'Homme en Extrême-Orient*, chez Flammarion. Je n'en voyais pas la nécessité. On a eu tord à mon avis.

Q. C'est sans doute un livre essentiel pour comprendre comment vous appréhendez la réalité paysanne de l'Extrême-Orient

P.G. Peut-être, mais c'est démodé à mon avis. Peu importe. Autre question?

Q. A propos de Robequain, vous écrivez dans votre bibliographie: "La seule étude régionale qui ait une grande valeur géographique est celle que Monsieur Charles Robequain a consacrée à une province limitrophe du Tonkin."

P.G. C'est de la gentillesse.

Q. Vous écrivez aussi: "Les problèmes qui se présentent au Thanh Hoá ne sont pas sensiblement différents de ceux qui se posent au Tonkin, et Monsieur Robequain les examine avec une méthode et une pénétration qui sont des modèles et des guides"

P.G. Mais son étude de la plaine du Thanh Hoá est très différente de celle de mon étude du delta du Tonkin, car elle est beaucoup plus brève et moins approfondie. Ce n'est pas le même point de vue, même si, évidemment, la plaine du Thanh Hoá ressemble à la plaine du Tonkin (…)

Q. Comment avez-vous apprécié sa thèse?

P.G. J'ai trouvé que sa thèse était excellente, c'était très bien. Mais, enfin, il est certain que je désirais aller beaucoup plus loin en me limitant territorialement. Robequain a étudié toutes les montagnes du Tanh Hoá. C'était une idée intéressante. Mais ce ne sont pas les mêmes civilisations. Quand on passe dans la montagne, on change [de civilisation].
D'ailleurs, c'est vrai au Tonkin aussi. Dans ma thèse, il y a un croquis d'une maison qui n'est pas vietnamienne, une maison Muong qui est une maison sur pilotis, juste au bord du delta du Tonkin. Alors, on voit tout de suite que l'on a changé de pays. La maison vietnamienne, c'est la maison à terre, la maison Muong, c'est la maison sur pilotis. La nature n'a pas changé, mais le style des maisons a changé (…) Dans le domaine de l'Asie Sud-Orientale, c'est comme cela, au Laos, au Cambodge (…) C'est une différence énorme (…).

Q. Combien de temps de temps êtes-vous resté au Vietnam?

P.G. J'y suis arrivé en 1926 et parti pour la dernière fois en 1935

Q. Vous n'avez pas souhaité y retourner?

P.G. Non, ma vie s'est orientée autrement. Une fois ma thèse passée, je ne savais pas où me mettre en Indochine. Je n'étais pas membre de l'E.F.E.O. D' ailleurs, (…) les vrais domaines de l' E.F.E.O. ce sont l'archéologie et les croyances religieuses (…) Mais moi, ce n'était pas mon genre. Alors, je n'avais plus rien à faire (…), Donc, j'ai été amené à m'orienter autrement.

Q. Et Robequain, combien de temps est-il resté en Indochine?

P.G. 3 ans. Il a été professeur à l'université de Rennes tout de suite après.
Il est resté 3 ans en Indochine, beaucoup moins que moi. Seulement, pendant ces 3 ans, il a eu au moins 2 ans complètement libres, où il n'avait qu'à étudier son sujet (…). Il n'avait que cela à faire, avec frais de mission. Une fois son mandat expiré, (…) pour rester un an de plus, il a enseigné au lycée Albert sarraut. Et là, je lui ai

succédé.(…). J'ai enseigné au lycée et dans une petite école d'enseignement supérieur, une petite école normale supérieure.

Q. Vos élèves étaient-ils plutôt originaires de France ou bien du delta ?

P.G. Au lycée, c'était des vietnamiens, des français et un peu de tout, tandis qu'à la petite école normale supérieure, c'était des vietnamiens qui se destinaient à être professeurs de lycée vietnamien.

Q. Certains élèves vous ont-ils marqués?

P.G. J'ai eu un excellent élève qui s'appelait Giap qui est devenu Maréchal Général, général en chef de l'armée vietnamienne. Je l'ai eu comme élève au lycée pendant 2 ans, en première et philosophie. C'est un homme que je voyais souvent. C'était un type très intelligent, communiste déjà à bloc (…), ce n'était plus un vietnamien pur, c'était un vietnamien bolchevick, un intellectuel bolchevick. C'est un peu différent. Quand je l'ai connu, il ne savait pas tenir ni un couteau ni une fourchette et c'est moi qui le lui ai appris, en faite. Il était très passionné, très travailleur, très instruit, très intelligent. Il a fait du travail pour moi d'ailleurs, dans un coin de l'Annam, dans une commune annamite d'une province qui se trouve au sud du Thanh Hoá. C'est une province qui a toujours été révolutionnaire (…) Il était très clairvoyant. Je m'en suis beaucoup occupé. Maintenant, il est maréchal à la retraite. Il n'a plus donné signe de vie. Je l'avais rencontré en 1946 quand je suis retourné en Indochine à Saïgon. Il y a eu à Dallas une conférence franco-tonkinoise, franco-bolchevick en somme pour essayer d'arranger les choses. Elles ne se sont pas arrangées du tout puisque la guerre a commencé après! Giap était là comme représentant du PC vietnamien, comme ses copains. Des types très très bien, qui parlaient très bien français. Mais, en somme, plus tellement vietnamien. Il était communiste à fond, ce qui n'est pas vietnamien (…).
J'ai eu de bons élèves, il y avait beaucoup de travail (…). J'étais libre pendant les vacances, de juin à septembre. Le reste de l'année, j'étais le dimanche dans le delta. J'avais une voiture qui me permettait d'aller n'importe où. Enfin, n'importe où il y avait des routes. Sinon, il fallait laisser la voiture et aller à pied dans les sentiers du delta. Dans la boue, ce n'est pas toujours rigolo (…) surtout que les buffles sont partout (…) et mettent toujours leurs sabots dans les mêmes trous. Par conséquent, les sentiers sont accidentés de trous profonds. Il faut mettre son pied entre les trous des buffles. Sinon, on se fout par terre, et on tombe dans la boue. Et on arrivait dans les villages comme cela. On laissait la voiture loin sur la digue (…).

Q. Et dans les villages, comment étiez-vous accueilli?

P.G. Toujours très bien parce que je n'étais jamais seul. Ou bien j'étais accompagné d'un élève vietnamien ou bien d'une personne vietnamienne de l'administration. Ils me servaient d'interprètes (…) Parfois, c'était un type du village qui servait de traducteur (…) Je passais des heures à me promener dans le village, à regarder, poser des questions. Ils étaient très gentils. Dès qu'ils avaient compris que je n'étais pas une sorte d'inspecteur des impôts qui arrivait pour leur faire payer plus d'impôts, alors cela allait. Il fallait les avertir en douce que je n'appartenais pas à ce genre de support de l'administration.

Q. Lorsque vous leur disiez que vous faisiez une recherche sur leur vie de paysans, comment réagissaient-ils?

P.G. Je leur disais que je m'intéressais à la vie du village et puis de temps en temps un petit cadeau, des cigarettes, quelque chose comme cela. Parfois, c'était des réunions assez bruyantes, ils discutaient entre eux, celui qui cherchait à me répondre parlait, les autres poussaient des gémissements incontestés, (…), cela devenait un brouhaha. Enfin, j'ai passé des jours et des jours là-dedans [dans les villages du delta]. C'était indispensable pour rendre l'atmosphère des villages. C'était très sympathique tout cela.

Q. Ce désir de connaître et de s'intéresser à une autre culture, c'est une démarche que l'on pourrait qualifier d' humaniste.

P.G. Montaigne, c'est évidemment mon homme (…) L'ouverture de Montaigne est évidemment très épatante. Quand Montaigne parle des Indiens qu'il a rencontrés à Rouen, qu'on avait emmené depuis Rio, il fait un portrait qui est épatant.

Q. Dans un article publié dans la Bibliothèque Imaginaire du Collège de France, vous évoquez d'autres auteurs que vous aimiez bien. Victor Ségalen par exemple.

P.G. Oui, bien sûr, René Leys, c'est un très beau livre. Mais quelle ouverture, quel intérêt énorme. Cela ne se passe pas en Indochine, cela se passe à Pékin.

Q. Je vais faire un peu de provocation! Les ouvrages célèbres sur l'Indochine, c'étaient ceux de Dorgelès, la route mandarine, ou ceux de Jean Marquet, Ajalbert

P.G. Très mauvais, ce n'est pas la peine. Ils sont tout à fait à côté de la question. C'est une littérature exotique sans intérêt.
Il y a un bouquin qui s'appelle "le kilomètre 83" d'un polytechnicien qui était ingénieur des Travaux Publics et opiomane … Pierre Mille?[5]. Il a fait le tour du Tonkin (…) Il s'est promené mais surtout dans la montagne. Mais c'est bien ce qu'il dit. C'était bien senti.
En somme, comme littérature, non, je n'ai rien eu derrière moi.
Personne n'avait beaucoup travaillé dans la région (…)

Q. Le Gouverneur Général à votre époque était Pasquier. L'avez-vous connu?

P.G. Attendez, Pasquier, oui, celui qui est mort en avion. Mais je ne l'ai jamais connu. Je ne l'ai jamais vu. Cela ne l'intéressait pas ce que je faisais. Il y avait un historien géographe au Gouvernement général qui s'intéressait à mon travail et qui s'appelait Grandjean (…) Mais, dans l'ensemble, toute l'administration a été d'une gentillesse extraordinaire pour moi tout le temps. Je n'ai jamais eu de difficulté avec elle. Partout, j'ai eu un accueil très charmant. On m'a aidé toujours tant qu'on a pu, dès que les gens sentaient (…) que je n'étais pas un journaliste passant et allant raconter des choses dans un journal (…). Cela marchait très bien. L'administration, elle fonctionnait très très bien.

Q. Certains géographes considèrent que vous étudiez l'échelle locale mais non les échelons supérieurs de l'encadrement, que vous décrivez des hommes dans des sociétés qui sont définies à l'échelle locale, mais pas au niveau supérieur de l'encadrement, pas au niveau étatique.

P.G. Oui, une vision mondiale de l'homme. Tout cela dépend des civilisations. Quand j'étudie un vietnamien, je l'étudie dans sa civilisation. Sinon, je ne comprends pas. Quand j'étudie un africain, il faut que je l'étudie dans sa civilisation. C'est ce que je suis entrain de faire: un gros chapitre sur l'Afrique noire pour montrer qu'il y a une civilisation très originale, particulière, qu'on ne voit pas, mais qui existe, très fermée, qui n'est pas la conséquence de situations naturelles. C'est la conséquence de mécanismes de civilisation qui remontent à la préhistoire. Car les Africains sont les seuls descendants directs des hommes de la préhistoire qui ont vécu là. Jamais une invasion.
Ce n'est pas comme nous, pauvres européens, qui ont vu passer des tas de choses. Là, rien, sauf leurs ancêtres, ce qui peut remonter jusqu'à 5 millions d'années. C'est là le mystère de cette civilisation. Elle vit sur ces racines, pas sur des emprunts. C'est très difficile à comprendre (…). C'est bizarre, moi, je ne la comprends pas (…). Mais enfin, c'est [la civilisation] la seule voie par laquelle on pourrait comprendre quelque chose. Enfin, peu importe, alors à vous!

Q. Pour revenir à votre thèse, d'autres géographes considèrent que vous n'évoquez pas les contradictions que posait la colonisation française

P.G. Ce n'était pas les mêmes civilisations entre la France et le Vietnam. Toute ma thèse est fondée sur le caractère original d'une géographie fondée sur une civilisation qui n'était pas la nôtre. Le facteur civilisation est principal, cela il n'y a pas de doute. C'est une géographie impensable ailleurs. Remarquez, on peut s'amuser à dire: si la civilisation chinoise s'était établie dans la plaine du Pô, ce ne serait que rizières. Il y en a, mais pas beaucoup. Il n'y aurait pas eu une succession extraordinaire de modes architecturales, ce serait toujours des pagodes aux toits cornus. Il n'y aurait pas eu un style grec, romain, vénitien (…). Ce serait un paysage chinois. Et si la Chine avait été occupée par les Européens, les chinois auraient cultivé le blé, bu du lait, fait du fromage (…). Le milieu physique se prêtait parfaitement à l'une ou à l'autre civilisation.
Et cela, c'est mon point de vue (…). On ne peut comprendre le delta que si l'on voit ce qu'est la civilisation qui s'y applique. Vous ne croyez pas?

[5] Pierre Gourou essaya de se rappeler le nom de l'auteur de ce roman qu'il avait lu il y a plus de 70 ans. Il suggéra Pierre Mille. En fait, le kilomètre 83 est de Henry Daguerches (1995). Le personnage principal, Tourange, est "ingénieur à la compagnie des Railways du Siam-Haut-Cambodge" (p.107). Le roman est écrit à la première personne où c'est Tourange qui raconte la vie des ingénieurs qui vivent et travaillent dans la région marécageuse et forestière du Tonlé Sap. Les caractères s'opposent: Tourange est un peu mystique, l'ingénieur Vigel est sensible et idéaliste, l'ingénieur Moutier taciturne et loyal.

Q. Oui, et c'est pour cela qu'il m'est difficile de concevoir ce que pouvait représenter dans cette civilisation millénaire "l'œuvre de la France".

P.G. A mon avis, l'œuvre de la France est nulle. Quand on se promène dans le delta de village en village, la France n'existe pas. Ils vivaient dans leur civilisation, pauvrement dans leur civilisation.
S'il n'y avait pas eu la civilisation vietnamienne d'inspiration chinoise, il y aurait eu une autre géographie humaine du delta. Il a fallu toute l'organisation chinoise adoptée par les Vietnamiens, transformée à leurs goûts, pour fabriquer ce paysage très ordonné, avec des villages cadastrés, des limites précises. Quand on sort du pays vietnamien, c'est un autre paysage.

Q. J'entre dans cette logique de la civilisation pour voir les espaces comme des espaces de civilisation et c'est pour cela que je n'arrive pas à imaginer comment l'administration française arrivait à trouver sa place.

P.G. Vous savez, au Tonkin, c'était une sorte de Protectorat, c'est à dire qu'il y avait une administration annamite complète (…) La France n'exerçait qu'un contrôle. En Cochinchine, c'était un peu différent, c'était une colonie française, un autre monde.

Q. La Cochinchine vous aurait moins intéressé que le delta

P.G. Je ne voulais pas travailler dans la Cochinchine. Je n'y voyais pas un grand intérêt. L'intervention européenne était trop grande. Ce n'était pas une géographie originale. Ce n'était pas un pays mûr, c'était un pays en voie d'évolution (…). Le pays n'était pas encore vietnamisé de manière totale (…).

Q. Pour étudier l'industrie villageoise, vous avez envoyé des questionnaires dans les villages
P.G. Dans tous les villages. Il y eut 8000 questionnaires à dépouiller. Heureusement, pour la plus grande partie du delta, il n'y avait rien. Dans certaines parties du delta, il y en avait beaucoup. Il fallait que j'aille vérifier. C'était assez intéressant (…) Il y avait des villages qui avaient développé une industrie qui était rentable. Une industrie sans machine, manuelle.

Q. Vous avez essayé de trouver une logique à leur répartition.

P.G. Ah oui, il faut voir la carte des industries.

Q. Vous dites que leur répartition dépend plus du hasard qu'à quelque chose de rationnel

P.G. Oui, c'est comme cela. Une industrie s'est implantée dans un village, on ne sait pas pourquoi. Tout le monde a imité. C'était des industries toujours très simples, mais qui rapportaient de l'argent.

Q. A cause de ces industries, il y avait du commerce. Comment avez-vous étudié le commerce des villages?

P.G. Il y avait des marchés partout. Tous les jours, en pleine campagne, dans des endroits où les villages des environs venaient au marché. C'était un lieu de rencontre. On vendait de tout. Puis, il y avait de petits restaurants, ils grillaient des saucisses de chien.
Mais l'industrie la plus curieuse était celle qui était capable de réparer les théières en fonte. Je ne sais pas comment ils faisaient, mais ils y arrivaient. En fonte de fer, fondues dans un moule, cela faisait une théière. Mais parfois, il y avait un trou, et ils savaient réparer cela. Je ne sais pas comment ils faisaient (…).
Les villages étaient surtout des villages de vannerie, de textile (…). Il y avait un groupe de villages qui fabriquait toute la poterie du delta. On ne fabriquait pas la poterie n'importe où. Il fallait avoir de l'argile sur place (…). Cela doit exister encore (…)
Il y avait un commerce très actif, sur des sommes minuscules. Il y avait seulement près de Hanoï des villages qui tissaient et qui filaient de la soie (…) Ils étaient très callés en vannerie (…)

Q. Et les migrations de travail. Il y avait des mines de charbon au Tonkin

P.G. Les mines de charbon recrutaient des mineurs (…). Ils passaient un certain temps dans la mine. Puis ils retournaient chez eux. Je ne me suis pas bien appesanti là-dessus. C'était des gens du delta. J'aurais pu examiner cela de plus près. Mais je n'ai pas étudié le fonctionnement des mines de charbon du Nord. Ce n'était pas le delta.
Il n'y avait pas de grandes industries. Il y avait une usine de textile à Nam Dinh qui employait les gens de la ville et des environs (…) ils fabriquaient des manteaux de pluie et des chapeaux. Les femmes cousaient leurs vêtements elles-mêmes (…)

Q. C'était une économie fermée que vous considériez en survie?

P.G. Oui, ils vivaient sur eux-mêmes (…) On trouvait rarement dans un village un objet qui ne soit pas purement local.
Dans un village, on pouvait trouver un homme qui avait la chance de fumer une cigarette fabriquée dans une usine (…). Mais les théières étaient de fabrication locale. Ils faisaient eux-mêmes leurs sandales (…).
Et puis, il y avait les villages flottants, qui ne vivaient qu'en bateau (…) Il y avait un bateau qui était le temple du génie du village pêcheur et transporteur. J'ai des croquis de bateau-habitation (…). Le poisson était source importante de nourriture. Il contribuait à faire la sauce avec laquelle on mangeait le riz. Ils ne mangeaient pas de viande, des saucisses de chien parfois, du riz et du poisson. Et le lait était inconnu.

Q. Vous parlerez de civilisation du végétal

P.G. Ah oui. La civilisation du végétal, elle règne au Vietnam, au Cambodge au Laos, aussi dans toute l'Afrique noire: pas d'élevage, donc ni de viande, ni de lait (…).

Q. Vous parlez aussi dans votre thèse aussi de civilisation [la civilisation annamite] qui vit en harmonie avec son environnement, de rapports harmonieux avec le milieu.

P.G. Cela, je ne saurais pas vous le dire. La notion d'harmonie, cela me dépasse. Si l'on boit le lait des vaches, cela ne veut pas dire que l'on ne soit pas en harmonie avec la nature.
Remarquez que les Vietnamiens font travailler leurs animaux, et ils mangent leur viande quand c'est possible. Cela ne fait pas partie du menu habituel, mais évidemment, quand un bœuf meurt et qu'on peut le manger, on le mange. Mais, dans aucun village vietnamien, vous ne trouverez une boucherie. Il n'y a aucune boutique d'ailleurs, le commerce se fait au marché, pas dans le village. Comme dans les villages africains (…).
Enfin, tout cela était intéressant, mais maintenant, je ne peux plus aller sur place, je suis trop vieux (…). Je suis à la fin du rouleau.

Q. Quels sont vos meilleurs souvenirs du Vietnam?

P.G. Des souvenirs de paysage, de très beaux paysages, et d'une vie vietnamienne qui m'intéressait, d'une architecture qui m'intéressait (…). J'étais en sympathie avec le pays, j'en conserve un très bon souvenir.

Q. Vous avez conservé des amis de cette période?

P.G. Oh! Que d'évènements! Cela n'est pas possible cela (…) Pauvres gens, ils ont souvent beaucoup souffert. Enfin, c'est comme cela.

Q. Vous êtes encore entrain d'écrire un livre

P.G. Mais j'ai peut-être tord (…) Je me distrais, sinon je m'embêterais, puisque je ne peux pas lire longtemps et beaucoup. Je ne peux pas lire le journal, je ne vois pas assez bien (…).
Et l'Australie? Vous avez un beau sujet, vous savez. Je verrais bien un livre en trois parties: Première partie: le paysage avant l'arrivée des européens, ce qui permettrait de liquider la géographie physique et de parler de la civilisation aborigène avant l'arrivée des européens. Deuxième partie: la période d'occupation, avec un certain désordre. Troisième partie:La stabilité actuelle, l'ordre. Avant, pendant, après. Les aborigènes, des cueilleurs,, chasseurs, pêcheurs (…). Cela ferait de la très bonne géographie. Et Adélaïde (…)?