

## **The school was built by the French colonialists in the southwest of Cochinchina – Vietnam**

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### **Abstract**

*In 1858, the French colonialists invaded Vietnam and quickly established their rule throughout Vietnam, including education. In the southwest of Cochinchina, where the French colonialists controlled since 1867, educational activities were established, including building a school system. The schools built by the French colonialists in the southwestern of Cochinchina were largely completed in the early twentieth century. This school system has marked fundamental changes in education in the region, from traditional Confucian education to education following the European model. Research on this school system contributes to clarifying the contributions of the colonial school system in the process of educational development in the Southwest of Cochinchina.*

**Keywords:** French colonialists, education, southwest of Cochinchina, school, Vietnam

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

When the French colonialists invaded Vietnam, they quickly established an education system throughout Vietnam, of which the southwestern region of Cochinchina was one of the earliest places to be established. Here, provinces considered central such as Can Tho, My Tho, Vinh Long, Rach Gia were established by the French with a system of schools from primary to secondary schools. The education system established by the French colonialists has partly changed the old educational elements here. It can be said that the schools built by France were the first modern educational foundations. Although the construction of schools and the establishment of an educational system served French rule in Vietnam in general and the southwestern region of Cochinchina in particular, it also left positive results. This research is based on a survey of schools built by France in the early 20th century, thereby contributing historical documents to the study of colonial education in Vietnam in the early 20th century.

### **II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. France occupied the southwest of Cochinchina and established an education system**

In 1858, the French colonialists opened fire and attacked Da Nang. The beginning of the war of invasion in Vietnam. The French army entered Cochinchina and quickly captured the southeastern province of Cochinchina. After taking control of this place, the French army quickly advanced to the southwestern provinces of Cochinchina. Taking advantage of the concessions of the Hue court, on the morning of June 20, 1867, the French colonialists marched troops to Vinh Long citadel. They forced Phan Thanh Gian to surrender unconditionally. After capturing Vinh Long citadel, within just 5 days, the French colonialists occupied An Giang's capital city, Chau Doc (June 21, 1867), and occupied Ha Tien (June 24, 1867) without spending a single penny. bullet. On June 25, 1867, the French colonialists declared 6 provinces of Cochinchina as their territory.

After occupying Cochinchina, France began to build a governing apparatus. With the 1874 Treaty, the French colonialists took control of Cochinchina in general and the southwestern provinces of Cochinchina in particular. These are considered large, rich lands with rich natural products and important strategic positions that have now fallen into the hands of the French colonialists.

During the first days of organizing educational activities in Cochinchina, the French colonialists encountered many difficulties and confusion. Furthermore, the French colonialists encountered a huge language barrier with the indigenous people who previously used Chinese and Nom scripts (Burlette, 2007). The French colonialists replaced Confucian schools with National Language schools, teaching “Quoc ngu” and a little French language to quickly assimilate the Cochinchina people. To encourage students to learn the national language and French, the French colonialists introduced many attractive policies to attract learners: Opening schools, granting scholarships, allowing boarding, providing books, but the results were poor. In the end, we are

still picky about our learners (Bau, 2015). It was difficult for local people to accept the new education system of the French colonialists in the early stages. However, since the "Can Vuong Movement" failed, French rule in Vietnam gradually stabilized and France became more favorable in its management of education.

## **2. The school was built by the French colonialists in the southwest of Cochinchina**

### *- Vinh Long Primary School*

Vinh Long Primary School was built around 1870, named Internat Primaire. Over many periods, today the school is called Luu Van Liet High School, located on 30/4 Street, Ward 1, Vinh Long City.

After basically pacifying Cochinchina, the French began to establish the first school systems. According to the regulations of the governor of Cochinchina, almost every province will have a primary school. In Vinh Long, in 1870 the French built a primary school (Internat Primaire) in the northwest suburb of Vinh Long. Later, the school was named Élémentaire Supérieur. At that time, the school only had two rows of classrooms, one located next to Xuan Bich Minor Seminary, the other located opposite the Cao Dai temple in Vinh Long province on Nguyen Thai Hoc street. In 1910, this was the largest school in Vinh Long province at that time with about 16 classrooms, the maximum capacity could be up to 400 to 500 students.

In August 1945, Japan surrendered to its allies, France returned to recapture Vinh Long province, and the French army stationed troops on the campus. In 1949, the French army withdrew from here and the school continued to operate. On December 2, 1949, the school was named College de Vinh Long. According to Decree 189/GD-ND dated September 24, 1954 under the "National Government of Vietnam", College de Vinh Long was renamed Nguyen Thong High School. The school offers training from the "first" level (de nhat) to the "fourth" level (de tu). Also this year the school was repaired, with 2 floors but the number of students can accommodate up to 2,000 with nearly 50 classes. On January 23, 1961, Nguyen Thong High School was renamed Tong Phuoc Hiep High School (Department of Records and Archives, 2016).

Experiencing many ups and downs, in 1977 the school was renamed Luu Van Liet High School. Having spent more than 100 years of construction, formation and development under the French colonial period, the school has devoted itself to the development of education in the Southwest region in general and Vinh Long province in particular. Today, although Luu Van Liet High School no longer has much of the traditional architecture previously built by France, it is a living testament to the education system that the French colonialists established in Southwest of Vietnam.

### *- Can Tho High School*

Can Tho High School is the most typical high school in the Southwest of Vietnam, with a long history. Today the school is named Chau Van Liem High School, located at 58 Ngo Quyen, An Cu Ward, Ninh Kieu District, Can Tho City. Before Can Tho High School was built, students in the Southwest of Vietnam who wanted to study higher had to go to Saigon or My Tho to study, causing many difficulties. Students have to study far from home, it is expensive, and most of the wealthy students have access to higher education. On the other hand, the increasing number of students at My Tho High School causes overload for teaching and learning. Therefore, in 1917, the French built a school called Can Tho High School.

In 1917, France built a row of houses along Capitaine d'Herbes Street, with a white stone sign, engraved with gold letters "Collège de Can Tho", but the school was not yet in operation, that row of buildings was displayed. Used as a boarding house for elementary school students. In mid-1921, the second floor was completed. On February 20, 1921, Can Tho High School went into operation, the school began opening a class called Cours Complémentaire (also known as an elementary supplementary class) with 36 students transferring back from Saigon and My Tho, mainly Mainly boarding students.

When they finish studying, these students will be transferred to Collège de My Tho to continue studying for up to 4 years to take the graduation exam to get an elementary college diploma. Although it is called Collège de Can Tho, in fact the school is a branch of Collège de My Tho. Over the years, the number of students at Can Tho High School has increased, the school continued to build the third set of floors facing Saintenoy Street (now Ngo Quyen Street). As the school's facilities were increasingly improved and expanded, in 1924 the school officially opened a full elementary college program. Now students can study from first to fourth grade without having to go to Saigon or My Tho.

In 1926, on the occasion of Phan Chau Trinh's funeral and the French arrest of journalist Nguyen An Ninh, Collège de Can Tho joined other purple-shirted girls' schools (now Nguyen Thi Minh Khai High School) and Collège de My Tho organized strikes demanding the release of Mr. Phan Boi Chau, the release of journalist Nguyen An Ninh, and organized a memorial ceremony for Mr. Phan Chau Chinh. Therefore, at the beginning of the 1926-1927 school year, some students at Can Tho High School were expelled, others were allowed to read again but had to stay in class or lose their scholarships, and others went abroad to study.

In the 1927-1928 school year, each class opened a pedagogical department for 10 teachers who originally belonged to the Saigon Pedagogical School but were from the Southwest region of Vietnam. These

teachers study the same curriculum as high school students, the only difference being the pedagogical hours. After graduating, these people will become teachers serving schools in the Southwest region. At the beginning of the 1928-1929 school year, students from Can Tho High School transferred to My Tho High School and Lycée Pétrus Ky Saigon, the school had only 21 students with the 4th year class. In mid-1929, the High School Can Tho officially sent students to Saigon to take the Brevet Elémentaire exam and Diplôme exam, the results were very positive with 20/21 candidates passing, 1 candidate failed due to giving up. In 1933, fourth-year students of Can Tho High School could take the written test at school without having to go to Saigon. Any candidates who passed the written test could go to Saigon to continue taking the oral exam.

In the 1936-1937 school year, for the first time, there were 2 female students at Can Tho High School. By 1944, the number of female students studying at the school was about 20 people. On August 3, 1941, due to the war between the French and Thai troops, the school was requisitioned by the French army as the headquarters of the French Army's Western Command. The school had to relocate to a new facility (Tu, 2016). On March 9, 1945, Japan overthrew France and the school's boarding regime was abolished. After 1945, Collège de Can Tho officially changed its name to Phan Thanh Gian High School. In November 1985, the school was renamed Chau Van Liem High School.

Like French-Vietnamese high schools in Cochinchina, Can Tho high school is under French management and teaches according to the French educational program. Although the school's students grew up from French education, they still nurture and nurture the spirit of patriotism. Can Tho High School has trained many generations of excellent students for Vietnam.

- *Community Primary School - Kien Giang for boys*

Community Primary School-Kien Giang for boys was built in 1918 and designed and completed by French architects. Having gone through many ups and downs, today the Community Primary School for Boys is named Hung Vuong Secondary School, located on Nguyen Hung Son Street, Vinh Thanh Van Ward, Rach Gia City, Kien Giang Province.

During the French colonial period, boys and girls were not allowed to go to the same school, boys had their own school and the same for girls. In 1918, France built a primary school for boys called Community Primary School for Boys in Rach Gia (Kien Giang) to train male students (Tu, 2016).

This school was a provincial school and was a modern, large, and standard school in Rach Gia at that time. The school's predecessor was a row of ground-floor houses built in traditional French architecture, with 21 classrooms, able to teach more than 800 male students. The school is located in the center of Rach Gia province, where the headquarters of the French army is located, so the school is less damaged by war and bombs.

After 1975, the school was named Vinh Thanh Van High School. Today, although it has undergone many renovations, the school still retains the old French architectural features. The school is considered a historical vestige of French colonial education in the Southwest of Vietnam.

### III. CONCLUSION

The school system built by the French colonialists in the southwestern provinces of Cochinchina was not large, but in the early twentieth century it contributed to changing people's awareness of the new education system. Although the school system only stopped at the secondary level, it demonstrated the importance of the Western region of Cochinchina in the French colonial system. It is a testament to the interference of French culture and Vietnamese culture, or more specifically, East-West culture (Cooper, 2004). Today, these schools still exist, they are still used by localities as one of the key facilities of the province. The architecture and landscape may not be as perfect as before, but they still recall old values, associated with Vietnam in the early twentieth century.

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