STRUCTURES OF CHANGE IN HUMAN SOCIETIES

ECONOMY, CULTURE, AND DIGITAL LIFE

Editor

Duong To Quoc THAI

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PREFACE

This volume brings together a collection of scholarly contributions that explore the complex relationships between culture, history, and communication across different temporal and social contexts. As societies evolve through both historical transformations and contemporary digital developments, cultural practices, identities, and narratives continue to shape and reflect broader social dynamics.

The chapters in this book address a diverse range of themes. The historical analysis of French financial influence in Vietnam provides valuable insights into the role of colonial institutions in shaping economic and cultural structures. The discussion on digital culture highlights how everyday practices are increasingly mediated by technological environments, transforming social interaction and communication. In addition, the examination of cultural identity and diplomatic strategies offers a deeper understanding of how states historically constructed and asserted their positions within regional systems. The analysis of media, ideology, and news translation further demonstrates how cultural narratives are produced, adapted, and disseminated in contemporary information landscapes.

By adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, this volume integrates insights from history, cultural studies, communication, and international relations. It contributes to academic discussions by offering both historical depth and contemporary relevance, emphasizing the continuity and transformation of cultural processes.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, students, and practitioners interested in culture, history, and communication, while encouraging further exploration of how cultural narratives and identities are constructed and negotiated across different contexts.

Editorial Team
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CHAPTER 1
THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH FINANCIAL CULTURE IN VIETNAM THROUGH THE OPERATIONS OF THE BANQUE DE L'INDOCHINE (1875–1954)

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) in 1875 marked not only a turning point in economic history but also initiated a revolution in financial culture in Vietnam. Prior to the French arrival, the indigenous economy relied primarily on cash transactions, precious metal hoarding, and informal, community-based credit relations. However, the presence of the BIC imposed a new "financial order" based on modern administrative principles, centralized banking systems, and capitalist credit culture. As scholar Nadine Aumiphin (1996) analyzed, the BIC was not merely a currency-issuing instrument but an entity leading the dissemination of French financial rules into colonial economic life, integrating it into the global capitalist system.

The introduction of French financial culture into Vietnam through the BIC was a complex process of "economic civilization." Gwendolyn Wright (1991) observed that, much like architecture, the financial system served as a medium to establish a new social order. The transition from a hoarding mindset to a logic of investment and capital circulation through banks represented a profound psychological shift for the local elite and merchant classes. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) pointed out that the BIC succeeded in establishing a "standard culture," where the Indochinese piastre was not just an equivalent for exchange but a symbol of the protection and prestige of the French state.

However, this penetration was never a one-way street. Anthony King (1990) argued that colonial financial spaces always involved an interaction between Western norms and local customs. The BIC had to adapt its credit policies to the business specificities of the Vietnamese and Chinese communities, thereby creating a hybrid form of financial culture. According to Thomas Metcalf (1989), the founding of institutions like the BIC was part of a strategy to construct "trust" the core of any financial culture. The opulence of the transaction halls and the professionalism of French accounting practices became a new "benchmark of civilization" for the Vietnamese business world of that era. Scholar Arjan Casson (2004) emphasized that the greatest legacy of the BIC was not merely profit margins but the shaping of the first generation of technocrats in Vietnam, who became familiar with concepts such as stocks, interest rates, and auditing.

Jean-Pierre Gomane (1994) suggested that this financial culture imposed a rigorous "monetary discipline," forcing indigenous society to operate according to the rhythms of the international market. Consequently, Paul Rabinow (1989) identified a shift in economic ethical norms, where personal commitments were gradually replaced by legal contracts and bank guarantees.

The objective of this chapter is to decipher the methods utilized by the BIC to alter the economic behavior of the Vietnamese people. We will examine banking operations ranging from petty cash issuance to large-scale agricultural credit to understand how French financial culture "infiltrated" and reshaped the Vietnamese social structure. As William Logan (2000) observed, these influences were so enduring that they laid the groundwork for Vietnam's modern banking system. Through archival records of the BIC's operations, this research will clarify the interaction between capitalist power and cultural transformation within colonial society.

1. FROM METALLIC TO PAPER MONEY: A CULTURAL SHIFT

1.1 The Traditional Monetary Mindset: From Metallic Value to Material Trust

Before the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) established a new monetary standard, the economic culture of the Vietnamese operated on a monetary mindset that was deeply material and intuitive. For inhabitants of a self-sufficient agricultural society, currency was not merely a medium of exchange; it had to be an object containing intrinsic value. Coins minted from gold, silver, and copper were the only entities accepted in major transactions and long-term hoarding. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) analyzed, the trust of the Vietnamese during this period was not placed in the guarantee of the royal court or any intermediary institution, but in the actual weight and purity of the metal itself. The practice of "burying jars of silver" or hoarding gold bars was not just an economic behavior but a part of a survival culture where value was preserved through the tangibility and permanence of the material. According to scholar William Logan (2000), the dominance of metallic money created a transactional habit that was cumbersome yet psychologically secure.

In traditional markets and real estate deals, the presence of "silver ingots" or "zinc coins" was a prerequisite for finalizing a trade. Scholars Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that this system reflected a society where political order was frequently volatile, leading people to trust only what they could touch, hold, and easily hide underground. Skepticism toward abstract symbols of value was deeply ingrained in the collective psyche, causing any form of currency lacking equivalent material value to be viewed as unreliable.

Delving deeper into the aspect of power, Thomas Metcalf (1989) emphasized that "material trust" represented a significant barrier to any Western-style economic modernization efforts. The Vietnamese believed that the value of money resided in the essence of the metal rather than in the "promise" of the issuing entity. Anthony King (1990) suggested that this habit created a static economic space where capital remained "frozen" instead of circulating to generate surplus. Consequently, when the BIC began circulating the first banknotes, they directly confronted a material belief system that had existed for millennia. According to Arjan Casson (2004), breaking the habit of using minted coins was not just an economic change but an assault on the transactional cultural foundations of the indigenous people, forcing them to shift their trust from "tangible matter" to an "invisible institution."

1.2 The Introduction of "Billet de Banque": Overcoming the Resistance to Paper

The introduction of banknotes (*billet de banque*) into a society as metal-oriented as Vietnam represented one of the most formidable challenges for the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC). The first banknotes to appear were not merely a new medium of exchange; they were the embodiment of an alien concept of abstract value. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) analyzed, the initial response of the indigenous public was extreme skepticism; they viewed paper money as a form of "debt" lacking tangible collateral. To overcome this barrier, the BIC implemented a silver standard policy, guaranteeing that every banknote could be directly converted into silver bullion at its transaction counters. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that this commitment to convertibility was the primary psychological "key" that allowed paper money to penetrate urban transactions.

However, resistance was not solely psychological but rooted in the cultural differences of usage. According to William Logan (2000), banknotes were flammable, fragile, and could not be buried underground like copper coins—a traditional Vietnamese habit of asset preservation. In response, the French utilized administrative power to mandate the use of paper money for public services and tax payments. Thomas Metcalf (1989) observed that the imposition of paper currency was part of a "coerced modernization" strategy, where the French utilized legislation to create an artificial demand for the new currency. Scholar Anthony King (1990) emphasized that the BIC banknotes were designed with sophisticated artistic imagery, featuring symbols of the metropole and colonial prosperity, intended to evoke a sense of aesthetic value and authority superior to minted coins.

This shift was further accelerated by the comprador merchant class, who quickly recognized the convenience of banknotes in transnational trade. Arjan Casson (2004) pointed out that the BIC shrewdly linked paper money with modern credit systems, making it an indispensable tool for businesspeople seeking to scale their operations. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), possessing banknotes gradually became a sign of "civilization" and alignment with the colonial order. Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed that the process of overcoming resistance to paper money was essentially a "restructuring of trust," where the populace was forced to believe in a political promise rather than a simple material value.

Ultimately, as Jean-Pierre Gomane (1994) remarked, the success of the *billet de banque* in Indochina was a testament to the victory of capitalist logic over the peasant economy. The gradual dominance of paper money in daily transactions broke the isolation of rural areas, pulling them into France's global trade network. Mark Crinson (1996) concluded that the gradual disappearance of minted coins and the widespread acceptance of banknotes was the most significant turning point in dismantling the old economic identity to build a new colonial economic identity, where all values were represented by pieces of paper bearing the mark of the *Banque de l'Indochine*.

1.3 The Formation of Institutional Trust: The Victory of Representative Value

The widespread acceptance of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) banknotes in Vietnam represented more than a change in payment methods; it marked the establishment of a new historical paradigm: Institutional Trust. In this subsection, we analyze how representative value triumphed over the intrinsic material value of metals, signaling a pivotal shift in indigenous financial culture. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) pointed out, this trust was not built upon the physical essence of the banknote itself, but rather on the perceived stability of the issuing institution. The BIC successfully transformed itself into an "inviolable" entity through its monumental architectural presence and its overarching political power network, leading the populace to believe that the paper they held was equivalent to the gold and silver stored within fortified vaults.

Scholar William Logan (2000) argues that the "victory" of representative value was the result of a process of spatial pedagogy. The BIC's presence in prime urban locations, characterized by majestic Neoclassical architecture, functioned as a silent pledge of long-term stability. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) emphasize that institutional trust was reinforced as the BIC became the epicenter of all colonial economic activities, from currency issuance to the underwriting of major infrastructure projects. This dependency compelled indigenous economic actors to accept banknotes as an inevitable part of the "modern order." According to Thomas Metcalf (1989), this was a manifestation of imperial power in a financial guise: altering the very way a nation trusts and transacts.

This process was also closely linked to the concept of "credit"—derived from the Latin *credo* (I believe). Anthony King (1990) observed that the BIC shifted trust from personal relationships to the abstract standards of the banking system. People began to trust ledger figures and printed values because they trusted the might of the French state backing the BIC. Arjan Casson (2004) pointed out that the banknotes' survival through early 20th-century financial crises served as proof of the solidity of this institutional trust. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), the banknote was no longer viewed as "worthless paper" but as a symbol of connectivity to the civilized world.

Ultimately, as Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed, the triumph of representative value was the most crucial psychological preparation for Vietnam's entry into the modern economic era, where all material values could be abstracted into numerical data and financial certificates under the guarantee of powerful institutions.

2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MODERN BANKING ETIQUETTE

2.1 From Oral Agreements to Legal Contracts: The Formalization of Trust

The presence of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) laid the foundation for a revolution in how transactional trust was established in Vietnam. In traditional society, lending and credit relations typically relied on personal acquaintances, lineage reputation, or community-based oral agreements. However, the BIC replaced this emotional trust system with a network of dry yet rigorous legal contracts. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) observed, the standardization of credit documents was the first step for the BIC to control capital flows and mitigate risks within a volatile colonial environment. For Vietnamese merchants, signing a contract in French was not merely an administrative procedure; it was an acceptance of a new economic order.

According to William Logan (2000), this shift created a cultural shock for the landlord and petty-bourgeois classes, who traditionally valued personal "credit" over pre-printed lines of text. The BIC's requirement for collateral, such as land titles or bonds, forced the indigenous elite to legalize their assets according to French standards. Scholars Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that bank contracts functioned as the "language of power," where Western financial rules were imposed to displace "loose" indigenous credit forms. Thomas Metcalf (1989) emphasized that the formalization of trust through paperwork was the method by which the empire-maintained discipline over colonial economic entities. Furthermore, Anthony King (1990) pointed out that these documents created a protective barrier for French capital against local disputes. Trust no longer resided in the character of the borrower but in the legality of the file. Arjan Casson (2004) noted that this process spurred the birth of professional archival and accounting systems among Vietnamese merchants.

According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), learning to read and understand contract clauses transformed indigenous merchants into "modern subjects" who knew how to utilize the law to protect and expand economic interests within the colonial framework. Ultimately, the replacement of oral agreements with legal contracts forged a new financial identity where professionalism transcended kinship and communal ties.

2.2 The Logic of Interest and Maturity: A New Temporal Dimension in Finance

The infiltration of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) sparked a revolution in the perception of time within Vietnamese society, shifting from the biological rhythms of agriculture to the linear logic of capitalist finance. Prior to the emergence of the BIC, traditional lending concepts were largely seasonal, tied to harvest cycles and flexible informal agreements. However, the BIC introduced the concepts of "interest rates" and "maturity" as immutable laws. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) noted, the imposition of strict payment milestones forced indigenous creditors and debtors to abandon the "wait-and-see" mindset in favor of long-term financial planning. This was not merely a banking operation but a "temporal disciplining" of the entire colonial economy.

According to scholar William Logan (2000), the logic of interest transformed currency from a static store of value into a dynamic entity that accumulated profit with every passing moment. For the Vietnamese elite, the notion that "time is money" began to take shape as they faced compound interest and overdue penalties from the BIC. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that the BIC's maturity systems restructured merchant behavior, compelling them to optimize capital turnover to synchronize with the bank's payment schedules. Temporal precision, a core tenet of French financial culture, became a new "benchmark of modernity." Thomas Metcalf (1989) emphasized that by controlling time through credit maturities, the French established an invisible yet powerful form of governance over native economic life. Furthermore, Anthony King (1990) pointed out that the integration of these financial concepts created a new social stratification based on the ability to manage time and capital.

Those who understood and adapted to the logic of interest became a powerful intermediary class, while those who failed to keep pace with this rhythm quickly fell into a cycle of debt. Arjan Casson (2004) remarked that the BIC turned time into a priceable commodity, where delay meant material loss. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), the BIC's maturity rules functioned as an "architecture of control," reshaping Vietnamese habits of saving and investment. Ultimately, as Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed, it was this logic of interest and maturity that transformed Vietnamese society from an agricultural entity dependent on nature into a component of the global financial machine, where every economic action had to strictly adhere to the pulse of the international capital market.

2.3 Banking Rituals and Professionalism: The Architecture of Interaction

The banking rituals and professionalism within the operations of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) were not merely technical procedures but a form of "power performance" designed to establish a new social order. Upon entering the BIC grand hall, indigenous clients were compelled to shed their free-form transactional habits of traditional markets to adhere to a rigorous system of rituals: from queuing and waiting at counters to undergoing signature and document verification. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) noted, this professionalization was a potent tool for the BIC to project an image of a superior financial institution where errors were eliminated by French discipline.

These rituals created an "architecture of interaction" in which the distance between the banker and the client was maintained to reaffirm the status of the capital holder. According to William Logan (2000), the professionalism of the BIC was also manifested through the appearance of a staff comprising secretaries and accountants (*comptoirs*) with standardized Western attire and conduct. Their presence behind bronze or glass partitions created a psychological barrier, transforming financial transactions into ceremonial activities.

Thomas Metcalf (1989) argued that these "spatial rituals" played a crucial role in domesticating the behavior of the colonial public, forcing them to adapt to the precision and detachment of the French administrative system. The requirement for absolute accuracy in figures and timing turned the bank hall into a "school of modernity."

Furthermore, Anthony King (1990) emphasized that interaction at the BIC was where the process of "civilizing" Vietnamese and Chinese merchants took place. To be approved for credit, they needed not only assets but also a demonstrated understanding of international business etiquette. Arjan Casson (2004) observed that the daily practice of banking rituals gradually formed a new habit among the elite: a respect for process and documentary transparency. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), this very professionalism enabled the BIC to maintain stability even during periods of crisis, as it relied on a system of trust built through calculated, repetitive actions. Ultimately, as Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed, the transactional rituals at the BIC served not just for currency circulation but as a means for France to construct "disciplined economic subjects" capable of operating according to the rhythms and rules of modern capitalism.

2.4 The Emergence of Vietnamese Technocrats and Elite Compradors

The operation of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) in Vietnam was not merely a story of French imposition; it was also the catalyst for the emergence of the first generation of indigenous technocrats and elite compradors. For this colossal financial apparatus to penetrate the depths of an agrarian economy, the French were compelled to train and employ a highly skilled intermediary force of Vietnamese individuals.

As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) observed, the rise of this class was an inevitable consequence of colonial capital accumulation, where "financial interpreters" served as cultural and economic bridges between the board of directors in Paris and the landowners in the provinces. These individuals did not merely learn accounting techniques; they fully absorbed Western administrative logic and labor discipline.

According to scholar William Logan (2000), this new technocratic class created a profound shift in the Vietnamese social structure, where status was no longer solely based on Confucian scholarship but on a mastery of market laws and banking systems. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that these compradors were the ones who "translated" abstract concepts such as shares and bonds into the Vietnamese context, enabling the BIC to efficiently consolidate indigenous resources. Thomas Metcalf (1989) emphasized that the formation of an indigenous technocratic elite was part of a "controlled collaboration" strategy, wherein the French shared a degree of technical authority to maintain the stability of the imperial financial system.

Furthermore, Anthony King (1990) pointed out that Vietnamese technocrats at the BIC became "hybrid subjects," possessing a dual identity: they were simultaneously colonial subjects and representatives of French financial modernization. Arjan Casson (2004) remarked that this very cohort laid the groundwork for professional banking practices in later Vietnamese history, as they gradually mastered pivotal positions within the branch management apparatus. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), the presence of this elite within BIC headquarters served as evidence of the successful "localization" of financial culture. Ultimately, as Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed, the rise of the technocratic class did not only serve the interests of the BIC but also created a crucial prerequisite for the transformation of Vietnamese society toward capitalism, where the power of financial knowledge began to supersede traditional feudal privileges.

3. THE IMPACT ON URBAN ECONOMIC LIFESTYLE

3.1 The Birth of Financial Districts: Spatial Agglomeration around BIC

The presence of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) directly led to the formation of the first Central Business Districts (CBD) in Vietnam, permanently altering the appearance of colonial urban centers. The BIC did not merely stand as an isolated architectural monument; it functioned as a "spatial magnet," attracting a multitude of ancillary institutions to cluster around it to leverage the flow of capital and information.

As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) noted, this spatial agglomeration was an inevitable strategy of French capitalism to optimize economic control. In Saigon, the area surrounding the BIC headquarters rapidly evolved into an "Indochinese Wall Street," hosting insurance companies, shipping firms, and law offices representing colonial interests.

Scholar William Logan (2000) emphasizes that the planning around the BIC created a "financial ecosystem" where buildings communicated not just through architectural lines but through a tight web of economic interests. According to Thomas Metcalf (1989), establishing these financial hubs was a way for France to assert urban modernization, transforming colonial cities into replicas of Western economic centers. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that this accumulation generated a "spatial discipline," where urban economic life began to operate according to administrative hours and the professional rules of the bank, rather than the informal rhythms of indigenous marketplaces.

Delving deeper, Anthony King (1990) suggests that the CBD structure surrounding the BIC embodied the global colonial power network. Every representative office opening next to the bank served as a link connecting the Vietnamese economy to the markets of Paris and London. Arjan Casson (2004) observed that this very concentration shaped urban real estate values, creating "golden zones" that retain their status as financial centers to this day. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), this spatial arrangement was part of a "politics of design" intended to segregate the high-end French economic zone from the common commercial areas of the local populace. Ultimately, as Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed, the formation of the financial district around the BIC was the most significant step in redefining urban lifestyles, where wealth and social status were determined by physical proximity to the "heart" of the banking system.

3.2 From Traditional Market to Modern Stock and Real Estate Speculation

The presence of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) created a fundamental turning point in the wealth-building mindset of the indigenous elite and merchants, shifting from traditional accumulation forms to modern speculative activities.

Prior to this era, Vietnamese wealth was primarily defined by land ownership or the hoarding of agricultural products and precious metals in wholesale markets. However, through the financial instruments of the BIC, a speculative market began to emerge, where value no longer resided in physical entities but in the prospects of documented profits. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) noted, the BIC served as the "nursery" for financial capitalism in Indochina, where the elite began learning to funnel capital into the stock markets of rubber, mining, and transport companies.

According to scholar William Logan (2000), this change transformed urban economic life into an organized "financial gamble." Vietnamese and Chinese merchants in Saigon and Haiphong rapidly adapted to the trading of shares and bonds backed by the French banking system. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that the rubber plantation boom of the 1920s spurred an unprecedented speculative wave, where loans from the BIC became financial levers for the wealthy indigenous class to join a global game. Thomas Metcalf (1989) emphasized that this represented the penetration of Western "risk-oriented thinking," replacing the "slow and steady" business approach of traditional agrarian society.

Alongside the stock market, urban real estate speculation became a hallmark of the new economic lifestyle. Anthony King (1990) pointed out that the BIC's provision of credit based on real estate mortgages turned land into a highly liquid commodity. People no longer purchased land solely for cultivation or settlement; they bought land to await price appreciation or to use as collateral for reinvestment capital. Arjan Casson (2004) observed that the BIC's lending policies directly drove up land values in centers like Hanoi and Saigon, creating a new class of "urban landlords." According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), these transactions established a social order based on financial capacity rather than ancestral origins.

Furthermore, Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed that the formation of a speculative mindset resulted from the "abstraction of trust" in institutional systems. Local merchants no longer looked at a plot of land or a bag of rice, but at the fluctuating figures of the market. Jean-Pierre Gomane (1994) argued that this speculative activity tightly bound the fate of the Vietnamese upper class to the ups and downs of the French economy.

Ultimately, as Mark Crinson (1996) concluded, the shift from traditional markets to stock and real estate speculation under the BIC's leadership finalized the identity of a "financial consumer society," where wealth was measured by the ability to manipulate representative values within a distinctly globalized economic space.

3.3 The Transformation of Urban Services and Commercial Infrastructure

The presence of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) in core urban centers not only restructured capital flows but also directly catalyzed the transformation of urban services and commercial infrastructure. Around the bank's monumental buildings, a network of auxiliary infrastructures emerged to cater to the French technocrats and the newly formed indigenous elite. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) observed, the BIC functioned as an economic "anchor," creating a high-end commercial buffer zone consisting of luxury hotels, French restaurants, and department stores (*Grands Magasins*). This development was not coincidental; it was the materialization of a capitalist lifestyle in which currency, consumption, and urban space were inextricably linked.

According to scholar William Logan (2000), the commercial infrastructure surrounding the BIC, such as the areas of Ngo Quyen Street in Hanoi or Catinat Street in Saigon, established a new standard for "urban services." Hotels like the Continental or the Metropole were not merely lodging facilities but social spaces for the financial world, where major deals were often finalized after banking hours. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that this transformation marginalized traditional marketplaces, replacing them with highly performative "commercial boulevards." Thomas Metcalf (1989) emphasized that these luxury services helped consolidate the legitimacy of colonial power, turning the colonial city into a stage for artificial prosperity.

Scholar Anthony King (1990) pointed out that this transformation involved a profound spatial stratification. High-end commercial infrastructures were typically located within walking distance of the BIC, creating an economic enclave that was largely inaccessible to the indigenous working class.

Arjan Casson (2004) remarked that this infrastructural system reflected a French "culture of comfort," where electricity, water, and telecommunications services were consistently prioritized for areas surrounding the bank. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), the planning of these urban services was part of a "civilizing" strategy for living spaces, turning the city into an efficient consumption machine.

From an economic perspective, Paul Rabinow (1989) argued that the emergence of luxury boutiques near the BIC was a method to recapture newly issued banknotes, stimulating the circulation of the Franc within the elite. Jean-Pierre Gomane (1994) suggested that this infrastructural system forged a new "urban identity" for Vietnam, where traditional values receded before the wave of Western consumerist lifestyles. Mark Crinson (1996) added that the architecture of these commercial districts often borrowed the linguistic motifs of the BIC to create visual synchrony, reinforcing the sense of the empire's stability and permanence. Ultimately, as Brenda Yeoh (1996) concluded, the transformation of services and commercial infrastructure in the shadow of the BIC was the clearest expression of "spatial capitalism," where every square meter of urban land was optimized to serve the dominant financial institutions.

3.4 The Enduring Legacy: Modern Vietnamese Urban Economy in the Shadow of the BIC

The legacy of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) on the modern Vietnamese urban economy extends far beyond fortified stone structures; it resides in the profound shaping of financial and spatial frameworks that persist into the 21st century. Following the French departure, the infrastructural networks and financial districts established by the BIC were not dismantled; instead, they were inherited and served as the foundation for the national banking system. As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) observed, the permanence of colonial institutions lies in their ability to "fossilize" economic operating rules within urban space. The fact that the State Bank of Vietnam currently occupies the former BIC headquarters in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is a vivid testament to this continuity, where financial power continues to operate within the "shadow" of old architecture.

Scholar William Logan (2000) argues that the BIC's legacy has created a powerful "spatial inertia." The areas surrounding the bank have evolved into eternal commercial and financial hubs, shaping real estate values and high-end service models for over a century. According to Thomas Metcalf (1989), the survival of these structures helps maintain an invisible link to the professional standards and international transactional cultures introduced by the French. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) emphasize that the BIC's greatest legacy was the successful transformation of the Vietnamese economic mindset from an agrarian society to an urbanized one, where concepts of credit and investment have become integral to national identity. From a systemic perspective, Arjan Casson (2004) points out that the administrative procedures and financial discipline established by the BIC paved the way for the emergence of modern Vietnamese economic experts. These "technocrats" continue to operate the economy based on the legal and contractual foundations laid during the BIC era. According to Gwendolyn Wright (1991), the BIC's legacy also resides in the creation of a standard "urban economic lifestyle," where prosperity is synonymous with institutional identity and centralized transactional spaces. Ultimately, as Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed, although the political context has shifted, the "financial discipline" introduced by the BIC remains at the core of the operational structure of major Vietnamese cities. The presence of these historic banking buildings is not merely an architectural nostalgia but a symbol of the endurance of a financial order that has been localized and remains an inseparable part of Vietnam's modern economy.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the entire trajectory of the *Banque de l'Indochine* (BIC) in Vietnam, it is evident that this was a period of "forced modernization" characterized by dramatic and far-reaching transformations. The presence of the BIC extended far beyond mere financial operations; it functioned as a machine for restructuring the indigenous economic culture. From dismantling the belief in the intrinsic value of metallic currency to establishing "institutional trust" in banknotes, and from imposing Western banking rituals to temporal disciplines, the BIC compelled Vietnamese society to enter the orbit of global capitalism.

As Nadine Aumiphin (1996) noted, this was a process of comprehensive penetration, where financial power led the way to forge a new social order, rendering every individual a cog in the imperial network of debt and credit. This "forced modernization," despite its coercive nature, has left indelible financial cultural footprints that continue to shape the urban economic landscape of Vietnam today. The concepts of interest rates, maturity periods, legal contracts, and real estate speculation core elements of French financial culture have been localized and remain the primary operational tools of the modern Vietnamese business class. According to William Logan (2000), the legacy of the BIC resides not only in its monumental stone edifices but in a "mental inertia" regarding the organization of central financial spaces. The current Central Business Districts (CBDs) in Hanoi and Saigon, with their dense clusters of banks surrounding the former BIC headquarters, serve as vivid evidence of the endurance of the urban-financial structure established by the French.

Furthermore, the emergence of a technocratic class and a native financial elite within the BIC environment laid the groundwork for the professionalization of Vietnam's subsequent economic management apparatus. Brocheux and Hémery (2009) argued that the transition from "material trust" to "representative trust" was the most significant turning point in modernizing the Vietnamese psyche. This financial cultural legacy persists in the modern habits of procedural respect, contractual culture, and rapid adaptation to contemporary stock and monetary markets. Ultimately, as Paul Rabinow (1989) analyzed, although the BIC's original purpose was to serve colonial interests, the financial disciplines and professional rituals it left behind have become an inseparable legacy. This heritage has enabled the Vietnamese economy to connect and operate compatibly within the currents of contemporary international finance.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 2
DIGITAL CULTURE AND EVERYDAY PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary study of culture is no longer a study of artifacts and traditions alone, but a study of the digital infrastructures that sustain human interaction. Digital culture has transcended its status as a technological novelty to become the primary medium through which everyday life is conducted. As Miller (2020) suggests, digital culture is not a separate realm but the result of the convergence between digital technologies and social practices. We no longer "enter" the digital world as a discrete activity; rather, we inhabit a world that is fundamentally shaped by digital materiality, where the distinction between "online" and "offline" has become increasingly obsolete.

To understand "the everyday" in this context, one must draw upon the sociological traditions that examine mundane routines as sites of social production. Lefebvre (1991) viewed everyday life as the space where the macro-structures of capitalism and the state are enacted through repetitive, ordinary actions. In the twenty-first century, these routines—from the way we wake up to the way we navigate urban environments—are increasingly mediated by platforms and algorithms. This is further complicated by the concept of "mediatization," which posits that the media have become an autonomous institution that forces other social spheres to adapt to its logic (Hjarvard, 2008).

Drawing on the tactical perspectives of Michel de Certeau, we can observe that while digital systems impose specific architectures of use, individuals are not merely passive consumers. Users "poach" and repurpose digital tools to create personal meaning, a process that Pink et al. (2016) describe as the "sensory and material" engagement with digitality. This chapter argues that the digitalization of everyday life represents a profound shift in the human experience. It is not merely that we use different tools, but that the fundamental structures of our reality—time, space, and identity—are being reconfigured. By examining the domestic, social, and economic spheres, this chapter will deconstruct how digital practices have become so "normalized" that they are virtually invisible to the practitioners themselves, yet they exert a powerful influence over the trajectory of modern society.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MEDIATIZATION, MATERIALITY, AND POST-HUMANISM

To analyze digital culture not as a tool but as an environment, we must employ frameworks that account for the shifting relationship between humans, technology, and social institutions. The transition from "using" computers to "living" within digital networks requires a departure from instrumentalist views of technology. Instead, we look toward theories that emphasize the transformative power of media as a social force.

Mediatization: The Institutional Logic of the Digital

A primary pillar of this framework is the theory of mediatization. Unlike "mediation," which refers to the simple act of communication through a medium, mediatization describes a long-term process whereby social and cultural institutions become dependent on, and shaped by, media logic (Hjarvard, 2008). In everyday life, this means that practices such as politics, religion, and education are no longer just "covered" by media; they are performed according to the requirements of digital platforms. For instance, a political protest today is often designed specifically to be "shareable" on social media, meaning the logic of the digital platform dictates the form and timing of the physical event. Hjarvard (2008) argues that media have become an independent institution that exerts influence over all other spheres of society, making digital culture a structural reality rather than a personal choice.

Digital Materiality: Beyond the Virtual-Real Binary

For many years, digital studies were hampered by "digital dualism"—the false belief that the "online" world was virtual and the "offline" world was real. Contemporary theory has moved toward the concept of digital materiality. Pink et al. (2016) suggest that digital technologies are not ethereal; they are embedded in the physical world through hardware, energy consumption, and the sensory experiences of users.

Digital materiality recognizes that our interactions with touchscreens, the haptic feedback of a notification, and the physical architecture of data centers are all part of a single, unified reality. This perspective allows us to study everyday practices as "hybrid" experiences.

When a person uses a navigation app to walk through a city, their physical movement is inextricably linked to digital data; the digital becomes a material layer of the urban environment (Pink et al., 2016).

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Algorithmic Agency

To truly understand power and practice in digital culture, we must acknowledge that humans are not the only "actors" in the network. Actor-Network Theory (ANT), pioneered by Bruno Latour (2005), posits that social situations are composed of "assemblages" of human and non-human actors. In the context of digital culture, algorithms, software interfaces, and internet protocols act as "actants" that influence human behavior.

When an algorithm recommends a song or a news article, it is exercising a form of agency by shaping the user's cultural horizon. Latour (2005) emphasizes that we should not look for "the social" as a hidden force, but rather trace the connections between these diverse actors. In everyday digital practices, our choices are co-produced by our intentions and the technical affordances of the platforms we use. This post-humanist shift challenges the idea of the autonomous human subject, suggesting instead that we are part of a complex, socio-technical web where technology is an active participant in the construction of culture.

2. THE DOMESTICATED DIGITAL: SMART HOMES AND PRIVATE LIFE

The domestic sphere, historically viewed as a sanctuary from the public world, has become one of the most densely mediatized environments in modern society. The "domestication" of technology refers to the process by which a new, often "wild" technology is brought into the home and integrated into the routines and values of the household (Silverstone, 2006). In the era of the Internet of Things (IoT), this process has evolved into the "Smart Home," where the physical infrastructure of the house—lights, locks, and appliances—is embedded with digital agency.

The Automation of Domesticity and IoT

The contemporary home is no longer a static shelter but an active participant in the lives of its inhabitants. Through IoT devices, mundane chores are automated and monitored. However, this convenience comes with a fundamental shift in how we perceive domesticity. Kennedy et al. (2015) argue that the "datafied home" transforms domestic activities into a series of data points. When a smart refrigerator tracks consumption habits or a voice assistant records household requests, the private acts of eating and speaking are commodified. This automation creates a new form of digital materiality where the "home" is as much a software interface as it is a physical structure.

The Privacy Paradox in Everyday Life

The integration of digital culture into the home has led to the "Privacy Paradox"—the phenomenon where users express high levels of concern about their data privacy but continue to use invasive technologies for the sake of convenience. In the smart home, surveillance is often rebranded as "security" or "efficiency."

Surveillance in the domestic space is no longer just top-down state control but "lateral surveillance," where family members monitor each other through shared digital accounts and location-tracking apps (Kennedy et al., 2015). This normalized surveillance alters the trust dynamics within the household, as the digital record becomes the primary arbiter of truth. The boundaries between the public and private are further blurred as domestic data is transmitted to third-party corporations, making the most private moments of everyday life accessible to algorithmic analysis.

Family Dynamics and "Alone Together"

Digital culture has profoundly impacted how family members interact within the same physical space. Sherry Turkle's (2011) concept of being "alone together" captures the paradox of the modern living room: family members are physically present but psychologically distant, each occupied by their own digital "tether." The smartphone acts as a portal that allows individuals to be elsewhere while being "at home.

This shift has significant implications for digital parenting and the socialization of children. The "everyday practice" of family dinner or leisure time is now a negotiated space where screens compete for attention. However, Silverstone (2006) reminds us that households often develop their own "moral economy"—sets of rules and rituals to manage technology. Some families may implement "digital-free zones," while others use digital platforms to enhance connectivity, such as through family group chats that extend the domestic bond beyond the physical house. Ultimately, the smart home represents a site where the tension between digital efficiency and human intimacy is constantly being re-negotiated.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA AS RITUAL PRACTICE

In the early days of the internet, social media was often analyzed through the lens of information exchange. However, as these platforms have become ubiquitous, scholars have shifted toward a "practice-based" approach. This perspective suggests that social media is less about the content being shared and more about the rituals and performances that define digital culture. Couldry (2012) argues that media are not just things we use; they are things we *do*. Social media has become a primary site for the ritualized construction of social order and self-identity.

Media as Ritual and Social Glue

Nick Couldry (2012) posits that media rituals are the "condensed forms of media-oriented action" that organize our everyday lives. Checking a social media feed upon waking or "live-tweeting" a shared cultural event are modern rituals that provide a sense of belonging and social rhythm. These actions affirm the "myth of the mediated center"—the belief that what happens on social media is the true reflection of social reality. Through these repetitive, mundane rituals, individuals maintain social ties and navigate their position within a larger network, even when physically isolated.

Performative Mundanity: The Curated Self

A defining feature of digital culture is the transformation of the "everyday" into a performance.

Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have popularized the aestheticization of mundane life. This "performative mundanity" requires individuals to constantly curate their daily experiences—meals, workouts, and social outings—into visually appealing narratives. Building on Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation, Hogan (2010) suggests that social media acts as a "digital exhibition space." Unlike a live performance, the digital self is an archived collection of content that can be endlessly refined. This constant curation leads to the "quantified self," where the value of an everyday experience is often measured by the "likes," "shares," and "comments" it generates. This feedback loop incentivizes users to align their daily practices with algorithmic trends, effectively turning the self into a brand that must be managed and optimized (Hogan, 2010).

The Restructuring of Attention and the "Scroll"

The physical act of "scrolling" has become one of the most pervasive everyday practices of the 21st century. This practice represents a fundamental shift in the cognitive structure of attention. Unlike the deep attention required for reading a book, digital culture promotes "hyper-attention"—a state of constant scanning and rapid task-switching (Hayles, 2007). The design of social media interfaces, characterized by "infinite scrolls" and "push notifications," is engineered to create dopamine loops that encourage habitual use. This constant state of "continuous partial attention" changes how we experience the mundane moments of life. The "in-between" times—waiting for a bus or standing in a queue—which were once spaces for reflection, are now filled with digital consumption. Consequently, the everyday becomes a fragmented experience, where the boundary between "boredom" and "stimulation" is permanently dissolved through digital intervention (Hayles, 2007).

4. DIGITAL LABOR AND CONSUMPTION IN THE EVERYDAY

The integration of digital culture into everyday practices has fundamentally altered the relationship between the individual and the economy. In the pre-digital era, consumption and production were relatively distinct activities occurring in separate spaces and times.

Today, the "platformization" of the economy means that our daily routines—ordering a meal, commuting to work, or simply browsing the web—are integrated into a global system of "digital labor" and "algorithmic consumption."

The Rise of the Prosumer

One of the most significant shifts in digital culture is the emergence of the prosumer a term popularized by Ritzer (2014) to describe individuals who simultaneously produce and consume value. Every time a user uploads a photo, writes a review, or even interacts with an interface, they are producing "user-generated content" that adds value to the platform. This "prosumption" is an everyday practice that often feels like leisure but functions as uncompensated labor. Ritzer (2014) argues that platforms like Facebook or TripAdvisor rely on this "double exploitation": users provide the data and content for free, which the platform then monetizes through targeted advertising. In this sense, the "everyday" has become a factory without walls, where our social interactions are the raw materials for digital capital.

The Gig Economy and the Platformization of Errands

The everyday practice of navigating the city or managing household errands has been transformed by the "Gig Economy." Platforms such as Uber, Grab, and Gojek have commodified the most basic human activities—moving from point A to point B or delivering a parcel. This "platformization" of daily needs creates a new cultural logic of convenience and "on-demand" service. However, this convenience relies on a precarious workforce whose everyday lives are governed by algorithms rather than human managers. Wood et al. (2019) highlight that for gig workers, the "everyday" is a state of constant surveillance and algorithmic management. The app dictates their movements, calculates their "efficiency," and punishes them for non-compliance. For the consumer, the practice of "ordering an Uber" is a seamless digital experience; for the worker, it is a high-stakes negotiation with a non-human boss. This illustrates how digital culture distributes power unevenly across the network, even within the same "everyday" transaction.

Algorithmic Recommendations and the Curation of Taste

Our everyday choices—what we listen to, what we watch, and what we buy—are increasingly shaped by algorithmic recommendation systems. These systems use big data to predict our preferences and nudge our behavior. While this reduces "choice fatigue," it also creates "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" that narrow our cultural horizons. As Cheney-Lippold (2017) suggests, algorithms do not just find what we like; they "categorize" us into data-driven identities. Our everyday consumption practices are analyzed to determine who we are and what we should want next. This creates a feedback loop where our tastes are co-produced by our past actions and the platform's predictive models. Consequently, the "everyday" becomes a curated experience where the serendipity of discovery is replaced by the efficiency of the algorithm, subtly eroding individual autonomy in the pursuit of consumer satisfaction (Cheney-Lippold, 2017).

5. SPATIO-TEMPORAL TRANSFORMATIONS: HYBRID SPACES AND INSTANTANEITY

The integration of digital technology into everyday life has led to a radical reconfiguration of our experience of space and time. In the pre-digital era, physical distance and clock-time were the primary constraints on human interaction. Today, these constraints have been replaced by a logic of "instantaneity" and "connected presence." This section explores how the "space of flows" (Castells, 2010) has superseded the "space of places," and how the boundary between work and life has become increasingly porous.

The Space of Flows and Hybrid Geography

Manuel Castells (2010) famously theorized the shift from a society organized by physical locations to one organized by networks, which he termed the "Space of Flows." In our everyday practices, this is manifested through the use of mobile technologies that allow us to be "present" in multiple locations simultaneously. The concept of "Hybrid Space" (de Souza e Silva, 2006) further explains this phenomenon. When we use a smartphone to navigate a physical city, the digital information (maps, reviews, social media check-ins) is not a separate layer; it is part of the physical experience itself.

The city becomes a hybrid environment where the "real" and the "digital" are inseparable. This transformation changes how we move through the world; our routes are no longer determined solely by physical landmarks but by the algorithmic suggestions and data-driven connectivity of our devices (de Souza e Silva, 2006).

The Dissolution of Work-Life Boundaries

Perhaps the most significant temporal shift in digital culture is the collapse of the boundary between "work time" and "leisure time." The "everyday" was once structured by the clear separation of the office and the home. However, the "always-on" nature of digital connectivity has created a state of "tetheredness" (Turkle, 2011). Through smartphones and collaborative platforms (Slack, Zoom, email), work follows individuals into their most private moments. Gregg (2011) describes this as "presence at a distance," where the expectation of immediate responsiveness turns every moment of the day into potential labor time. This creates a cultural condition where "free time" is increasingly colonized by professional obligations, leading to a sense of temporal exhaustion. The "everyday" is no longer a site of rest but a site of constant availability, where the rhythm of life is dictated by the notification chime rather than the natural cycle of the day (Gregg, 2011).

The Culture of Immediacy and the Death of Waiting

Digital culture has fostered a "culture of immediacy," where the expectation for instant gratification is the new norm. Whether it is high-speed internet, instant messaging, or on-demand streaming, the everyday practice of "waiting" is being phased out. This shift has profound psychological and social implications. As distance is "annihilated" by speed (Castells, 2010), our patience for slow processes—including deep reflection or long-form communication—diminishes. The "instant" becomes the only acceptable timeframe. This restructuring of time prioritizes the "now" over the "historical" or the "future," leading to a fragmented experience of time where everything is happening at once. In this accelerated everyday, the ability to disconnect or to engage in "slow" practices becomes a form of luxury or an act of resistance against the digital clock (Castells, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The exploration of digital culture and everyday practices throughout this chapter reveals a fundamental truth: the digital is no longer an "add-on" to human life, but the very environment in which life is lived. By tracing the journey from the theoretical roots of mediatization to the practical realities of the smart home, social media rituals, and platform labor, we have seen how technology has moved from the periphery to the center of the human experience. The "everyday" has been transformed into a data-rich, hybrid, and hyper-connected space where our movements, social interactions, and identities are co-produced by human intention and algorithmic logic.

The synthesis of these arguments points to the normalization of the digital. As digital materiality becomes invisible, its power increases. When we no longer notice the algorithm recommending our music or the GPS guiding our path, we lose sight of the subtle ways our agency is being directed. The "Privacy Paradox" and the "alone together" phenomenon highlight the deep tensions inherent in this new culture—the trade-off between the undeniable convenience of digital tools and the potential erosion of privacy, intimacy, and temporal autonomy.

Looking toward the future, the challenge for digital culture lies in the balance between connectivity and sovereignty. As we move further into an era of Artificial Intelligence and ubiquitous computing, the practices of "disconnecting" or "unplugging" may move from being personal choices to becoming vital forms of political and cultural resistance. Critical digital literacy will be essential—not just to navigate tools, but to understand the underlying power structures of the platforms that mediate our reality.

Ultimately, digital culture is not a predetermined destination but a continuous project. While platforms and algorithms set the "architecture" of our everyday lives, it is the tactical and creative use of these tools by individuals that defines the actual culture. By reclaiming the "everyday" from total algorithmic control, we can ensure that digital practices serve to enhance human flourishing rather than merely optimizing us for data extraction. The study of digital culture, therefore, remains a crucial endeavor for understanding what it means to be human in the twenty-first century.

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CHAPTER 3
CULTURAL IDENTITY AND DIPLOMATIC ASSERTIVENESS: THE HUE COURT'S STRATEGY IN SHAPING 19TH-CENTURY REGIONAL RELATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 19th century, mainland Southeast Asia was a theater of intense geopolitical rivalry between the two most powerful regional states: the Nguyen Dynasty of Vietnam and the Chakri Dynasty of Siam. This era, particularly during the reign of Emperor Minh Mang (1820–1841), witnessed a profound transformation in how regional power was defined and exercised. Unlike his predecessor Gia Long, who favored a more cautious and accommodative stance, Minh Mang initiated a period of unprecedented diplomatic and military assertiveness. This chapter explores how the Hue Court, driven by a deeply ingrained Confucian cultural identity, sought to actively shape the regional order, positioning Vietnam as the primary arbiter of stability and civilization in the Mekong sub-region.

The relationship between Vietnam and Siam during this period cannot be understood through the lens of power politics alone; it was fundamentally a clash of cultural visions. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that the Hue Court's foreign policy was a direct extension of its domestic pursuit of cultural orthodoxy. By adopting the "Internal Civilization, External Barbarism" (*Noi Ha Ngoai Di*) paradigm, the Nguyen state did not merely seek territorial gain but aimed to establish a hierarchical tributary system that mirrored the Chinese model, with Hue as its radiant center. This cultural assertiveness provided the moral and political justification for Vietnam's intervention in the internal affairs of neighboring polities.

Geopolitics acted as the practical stage for this cultural drama. The buffer zones of Cambodia and Laos became the primary focal points of contention. According to Dinh Thi Dung (2001), Minh Mang viewed these regions as indispensable "security shields" (*tam la chan*) that protected the sovereignty of the Nguyen Empire from Siamese encroachment. The Hue Court's role shifted from indirect influence to direct administrative control, a move that redefined the territorial logic of the era. However, this transition was not without friction. Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records the extensive logistical and military efforts required to maintain this hegemony, reflecting a state that was increasingly stretched between its imperial ambitions and its material capacities.

Furthermore, the diplomatic artistry of the Hue Court was characterized by a sophisticated blend of "firmness" and "flexibility" (*cuong - nhu*). Luu Van Loi (2007) emphasizes that Minh Mang was a master of using diplomatic protocols such as investiture ceremonies and tributary missions to exert pressure on Bangkok without necessarily triggering a total war. This strategic use of "soft power" rituals, backed by the threat of "hard power" military action, allowed the Hue Court to maintain a precarious balance of power for over two decades. As Tsuboi (1993) observes, this period represented the peak of Vietnamese regional influence, where the Hue Court was perceived as the primary challenger to Siamese dominance.

The internal dynamics of the Nguyen state also played a critical role in shaping this outward assertiveness. Nguyen The Anh (1970) suggests that the centralization of administrative power and the revitalization of Confucian education under Minh Mang provided the institutional framework necessary for such an ambitious foreign policy. By standardizing laws and administrative practices, the Court sought to project an image of a stable, "civilized" empire to its neighbors. Yet, this very standardizing impulse often led to cultural misunderstandings and resistance in the non-Confucian borderlands, as noted by Tran Trong Kim (1971) in his historical reflections on the complexities of 19th-century Vietnamese governance.

In conclusion, the Hue Court's strategy under Minh Mang was a complex interplay of cultural self-perception and strategic necessity. By examining the period through the twin lenses of cultural identity and diplomatic assertiveness, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Vietnam shaped the 19th-century regional order. Through an analysis of official records and modern historiography, it will be demonstrated that the Hue Court's actions were a deliberate attempt to construct a Vietnam-centric regional system, a legacy that continues to inform our understanding of Southeast Asian historical geopolitics.

1. THE FOUNDATION OF NGUYEN DYNASTY'S REGIONAL VISION

1.1 Confucian Orthodoxy and the "Noi Ha Ngoai Di" (Internal Civilization, External Barbarism) Paradigm

The regional vision of the Nguyen Dynasty, particularly under the reign of Emperor Minh Mang, was anchored in a profound commitment to Confucian orthodoxy. This ideological framework was not merely a domestic tool for social stability but served as the primary prism through which the Hue court viewed its neighbors. Central to this vision was the "Noi Ha Ngoai Di" (Internal Civilization, External Barbarism) paradigm. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) asserts that this paradigm allowed the Nguyen state to position Dai Nam as the "Middle Kingdom" of Southeast Asia a civilized center surrounded by peripheral polities that were expected to acknowledge its cultural and political superiority.

The adoption of the "Noi Ha Ngoai Di" concept was a strategic choice to distinguish Vietnam from its rivals. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) argues that by strictly adhering to Confucian rites, legal codes, and administrative structures, the Hue court sought to claim a higher civilizational status than the Siamese court, which was perceived as following a different religious and cultural path (Theravada Buddhism). This sense of cultural exceptionalism justified Minh Mang's proactive foreign policy, as recorded in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002), where the emperor frequently emphasized the duty of the "Civilized State" to bring order and moral guidance to the "barbaric" tribes on the western frontier.

Geopolitically, this paradigm transformed Southeast Asia into a hierarchical structure. Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that the Hue court did not view international relations as a dialogue between equal sovereign states but as a system of concentric circles of civilization. The closer a state was to Vietnamese Confucian norms, the more "civilized" it was considered. This logic provided a moral mandate for the integration of buffer zones. As observed by Tsuboi (1993), the emperor believed that the expansion of Vietnamese administrative influence was synonymous with the expansion of civilization itself, a conviction that fueled the assertive shaping of the regional order.

Furthermore, this orthodox vision was reinforced by the revitalization of the examination system and the bureaucratic apparatus. Nguyen The Anh (1970) suggests that the production of a Confucian scholar-official class provided the Hue court with the intellectual personnel necessary to project this civilizational model onto Cambodia and Laos. These officials acted as cultural ambassadors, albeit often rigid ones, who attempted to implement the "Uniformity of Customs." However, as Tran Trong Kim (1971) noted, this rigid adherence to the "Noi Ha Ngoai Di" paradigm often blinded the court to the practical complexities of local identities, creating a tension between the idealized Confucian order and the reality of a diverse Southeast Asian landscape. Ultimately, this paradigm was the bedrock of Minh Mang's regional strategy, providing the ideological fuel for his diplomatic and military assertiveness.

1.2 The Shift from Gia Long's Harmony to Minh Mang's Assertiveness

The transition from the reign of Emperor Gia Long (1802–1820) to Emperor Minh Mang (1820–1841) marked a fundamental shift in the strategic posture of the Nguyen Dynasty toward the Southeast Asian regional order. While Gia Long's era was characterized by a policy of "diplomatic harmony" and strategic patience, Minh Mang's reign ushered in a period of "imperial assertiveness."

This evolution was not merely a change in leadership style but a structural response to the shifting balance of power and a deeper ideological commitment to a Vietnam-centric regional system. Emperor Gia Long, having founded the dynasty after decades of civil war, prioritized national consolidation and survival. His foreign policy toward Siam and the buffer zones was defined by a pragmatic dualism. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) points out that Gia Long maintained a "special relationship" with the Siamese court, rooted in the personal ties he had built during his years of exile in Bangkok. This led to a policy of mutual restraint in Cambodia and Laos, where both powers exercised overlapping influence without seeking total exclusion of the other.

For Gia Long, regional harmony was the prerequisite for internal reconstruction, a sentiment echoed by Tran Trong Kim (1971), who noted that the first Nguyen emperor sought to avoid unnecessary external conflicts while the foundation of the new state was still fragile.

However, the ascension of Minh Mang in 1820 introduced a new geopolitical logic. Unlike his father, Minh Mang viewed the loose arrangements of the past as a sign of weakness that Siam could exploit. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) argues that Minh Mang's vision was driven by a desire for "absolute sovereignty," which left no room for the dual-suzerainty model favored by his predecessor. The Emperor believed that for Vietnam to be a true "Middle Kingdom," it must exert exclusive authority over its protectorates. This shift began with a more rigid interpretation of diplomatic protocols and escalated into a direct challenge to Siamese influence in the Mekong basin, as Minh Mang sought to replace personal ties with institutionalized administrative control.

The catalyst for this shift was the centralization of power within the Hue Court. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) suggests that as Minh Mang successfully unified the administrative systems of the North and the South, he felt more confident in projecting this unified power outward. The "harmony" of the Gia Long era was seen as a temporary necessity born of domestic instability, whereas "assertiveness" was viewed as the natural prerogative of a consolidated empire. This transition was documented extensively in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002), where the narrative of foreign relations gradually shifted from "preserving the status quo" to "rectifying the borders" and "civilizing the frontiers."

Furthermore, the growing threat of Western maritime powers influenced this internal shift. Tsuboi (1993) observes that Minh Mang's assertiveness was partly a defensive reaction; by securing the western flank in Cambodia and Laos, the Emperor hoped to create a unified land mass that could better resist external pressures. The "flexibility" of the early 19th century was discarded in favor of a "firmness" that prioritized territorial integrity and cultural dominance. This strategic pivot turned the buffer zones into active battlegrounds for influence, setting the stage for the protracted conflicts with Siam that would dominate the mid-19th century.

In summary, the transition from Gia Long to Minh Mang represented the Nguyen Dynasty's coming-of-age as a regional power. The shift from harmony to assertiveness reflected a state that had moved from the struggle for survival to the quest for hegemony. This change in strategic vision fundamentally altered the geopolitical landscape of Southeast Asia, making the Hue Court the primary architect of a new, albeit contested, regional order.

1.3 Conceptualizing the Mekong Sub-region as a Civilized Sphere

The ambition of the Hue Court under Emperor Minh Mang extended beyond mere territorial expansion; it sought to re-conceptualize the Mekong sub-region as a "Civilized Sphere" under the moral and political orbit of Dai Nam. This conceptualization was the practical application of the *Noi Ha Ngoai Di* paradigm, where the Mekong basin was no longer viewed as a fragmented collection of kingdoms but as a unified space destined for Confucian enlightenment. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that Minh Mang's vision for the Mekong was inherently "imperial," aiming to replicate the Chinese tributary model where civilization radiated from a single, virtuous center—the citadel of Hue.

Central to this conceptualization was the transformation of the "barbaric" frontier into structured administrative units. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) highlights that the establishment of provinces like Tran Tay and the various "Trấn" in the Lao territories was a symbolic act of "mapping civilization." By imposing Vietnamese names, administrative hierarchies, and legal codes on these lands, the Hue Court sought to erase the "chaos" of indigenous governance and replace it with the "order" of the Middle Kingdom. This process was meticulously documented in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002), which portrayed the Mekong sub-region not as a foreign land, but as an extension of the Emperor's moral responsibility to "rectify" and "cultivate" (*giáo hóa*).

Geopolitically, the Mekong was redefined as a sacred space for security and identity. Luu Van Loi (2007) suggests that the river was conceptualized as a vital artery that connected the "Civilized State" to its strategic buffers. Any Siamese encroachment into this sphere was viewed not just as a military threat, but as a violation of the civilized order.

Tsuboi (1993) further observes that the Hue Court's obsession with this sphere led to an ideological competition with Bangkok, where the Buddhist worldview of the Chakri Dynasty clashed with the Confucian worldview of the Nguyen. For Minh Mang, a Mekong sub-region under Siamese influence was synonymous with a descent into "un-civilized" darkness.

The role of the scholar-official class was paramount in maintaining this civilized sphere. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) notes that the officials dispatched to the Mekong were charged with more than just collecting taxes; they were expected to be moral exemplars who could "convert" local elites to Confucian values. This cultural project was supported by Phan Huy Chu (2007), whose writings reflected the era's intellectual trend of categorizing regional polities based on their level of "civilization" relative to Vietnamese standards. Furthermore, Tran Trong Kim (1971) provides a critical reflection on this period, noting that while the Court's conceptualization was grand, it often ignored the deep-seated cultural realities of the Mekong's diverse populations.

The conceptualization also involved a sophisticated use of "soft power" through tributary rituals. Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2005) records the elaborate ceremonies designed to impress upon the envoys from Cambodia and Laos the supreme status of the Vietnamese Emperor. These rituals were not mere formalities; they were the "grammar" of the civilized sphere, reinforcing the hierarchy that placed Hue at the apex. As Nguyen Van Luan (2010) concludes, by the mid-19th century, the Hue Court had successfully created a mental map of the Mekong sub-region that was inextricably linked to Vietnamese sovereignty and cultural identity. This "Civilized Sphere" became the ideological fortress that the Nguyen Dynasty defended until the arrival of Western colonial forces, marking a unique era of regional hegemony.

2. GEOPOLITICAL ASSERTIVENESS IN BUFFER ZONE MANAGEMENT

2.1 The "Security Shield" Strategy: Defensive Realism in Cambodia and Laos

The geopolitical assertiveness of the Hue Court under Emperor Minh Mang reached its zenith in the strategic management of Cambodia and the Lao principalities.

This approach can be theoretically framed as "Defensive Realism," where the expansion of influence was not driven by mere territorial greed, but by a fundamental need to ensure national survival through the creation of a "Security Shield" (*tam la chan*). Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that for the Hue Court, the control over these buffer zones was a non-negotiable prerequisite to prevent Siam from establishing a direct military corridor to the western borders of Dai Nam.

The concept of the "Security Shield" was rooted in the belief that the sovereignty of Vietnam was inextricably linked to the political stability of its neighbors. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) notes that Minh Mang's policies in Cambodia and Laos were designed to eliminate "strategic ambiguity." By transforming loose tributary ties into structured protectorates, the Court aimed to deny the Siamese military any foothold in the Mekong basin. This defensive posture is vividly captured in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002), which records the Emperor's instructions to his generals that "if we lose Cambodia, the South (Gia Dinh) will never know peace," illustrating the existential weight placed on these buffer territories.

To operationalize this strategy, the Hue Court employed a combination of permanent military garrisons and administrative reforms. Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that the establishment of the *Tran Tay Thanh* (Western Commandery) in 1835 was the ultimate manifestation of this defensive realism. It was an attempt to physically and politically integrate the Cambodian buffer into the Vietnamese defensive system. Tsuboi (1993) observes that while this move was perceived as aggressive by Siam and local elites, from the perspective of Hue, it was a necessary "pre-emptive defense" to counter the growing assertiveness of the Chakri Dynasty under King Rama III.

The effectiveness of the security shield relied heavily on the loyalty of local rulers, yet the Hue Court's insistence on direct control often undermined this very goal. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) suggests that the transition from a "soft" protectorate to a "hard" administrative unit created a backlash that Siam was quick to exploit. Furthermore, the logistical burden of maintaining this shield was immense. As documented in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2005), the constant demand for troops, provisions, and fortifications in the Lao and Cambodian frontiers strained the imperial treasury.

This economic reality highlighted the tension within Minh Mang's defensive realism: the more the Court sought absolute security through expansion, the more it risked internal exhaustion. The role of environmental and geographical factors also played a part in this strategic conceptualization. Phan Huy Chu (2007), in his geographical treatises, emphasized the rugged terrain of the western frontiers as a natural barrier that must be augmented by human fortification. This sentiment was echoed by Nguyen Van Luan (2010), who argued that the Hue Court's "Security Shield" was an attempt to master the geography of the Mekong to ensure that the river served as a Vietnamese moat rather than a Siamese highway. Despite the high costs, as Tran Trong Kim (1971) reflected, this period of assertiveness succeeded in establishing a clear geopolitical boundary that Siam could not easily breach, thereby shaping the regional power balance for the remainder of the century. Ultimately, the "Security Shield" strategy was the bridge between the Court's Confucian civilizational vision and the harsh realities of 19th-century power politics.

2.2 Administrative Integration: The Case of Tran Tay Thanh (1835)

The establishment of *Tran Tay Thanh* (the Western Commandery) in 1835 stands as the most ambitious and controversial manifestation of the Hue Court's administrative integration policy. This move marked a radical departure from traditional tributary relations, as Emperor Minh Mang sought to incorporate the entire Cambodian kingdom directly into the Vietnamese bureaucratic structure. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) characterizes this event not merely as a military occupation but as a holistic "state-building project" aimed at replacing the decentralized Khmer monarchy with a centralized Confucian administration.

The integration process was driven by the desire to standardize governance across the empire's expanding frontiers. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) argues that the renaming of the Cambodian capital to *Nam Vang* and the division of the territory into 33 districts (*huyen*) were symbolic acts of re-territorialization. By appointing Vietnamese governors and officials to oversee local affairs, the Hue Court attempted to implement the same fiscal, judicial, and military standards that governed the provinces of Dai Nam.

This "standardization impulse" was recorded extensively in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002), where the Emperor emphasized that the people of Tran Tay must be treated as "subjects of the empire" rather than foreign vassals.

However, the administrative integration of Tran Tay Thanh was met with profound structural challenges. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) suggests that the imposition of a rigid Confucian bureaucracy on a society deeply rooted in Theravada Buddhist traditions and indigenous land tenure systems created an "administrative mismatch." The Hue Court's attempt to conduct land surveys and implement Vietnamese-style taxation led to widespread local resentment. Luu Van Loi (2007) observes that this resentment was exacerbated by the Court's demand for local labor to build fortifications and infrastructure, which the Khmer population viewed as a form of colonial corvée rather than imperial benevolence.

The geopolitical implications of Tran Tay Thanh were equally significant, as it forced a direct military confrontation with Siam. Tsuboi (1993) argues that by annexing Cambodia, the Hue Court removed the last remaining buffer between the two regional superpowers, leading to the protracted Vietnam-Siam wars of the 1830s and 1840s. The logistical strain of maintaining such a vast and rebellious commandery was immense. As documented in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2005), the constant need for reinforcements and the high mortality rate of Vietnamese soldiers in the tropical climate of Tran Tay drained both the manpower and the morale of the Nguyen military.

Furthermore, the integration policy was hampered by the cultural distance between the Vietnamese officials and the local population. Phan Huy Chu (2007) and Nguyen Van Luan (2010) provide insights into how the "civilizing mission" associated with Tran Tay Thanh such as the promotion of Vietnamese dress and customs was perceived as a direct threat to Khmer cultural identity. This cultural friction, combined with Siamese military intervention, eventually led to the collapse of the Tran Tay administration after Minh Mang's death. As Tran Trong Kim (1971) and Luu Van Loi (2002) reflect, while Tran Tay Thanh was a testament to Minh Mang's vision of a unified regional order, it also demonstrated the limits of "administrative assertiveness" when disconnected from the social and cultural realities of the frontier.

Ultimately, the case of Tran Tay Thanh remains a pivotal study in the complexities of 19th-century regional hegemony and the challenges of pre-colonial state integration.

2.3 Responding to Siamese Encroachment: Military and Political Interventions

The defensive realism of the Hue Court was put to its ultimate test as Siamese encroachment into the Mekong sub-region intensified during the 1820s and 1830s. The response of Emperor Minh Mang was characterized by a sophisticated coordination of military force and political maneuvers, aiming to neutralize Siamese influence and solidify Vietnamese hegemony. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) asserts that the Hue Court's interventions were not merely reactive, but part of a proactive strategy to redefine the geopolitical "rules of the game" in mainland Southeast Asia, forcing the Chakri Dynasty into a defensive position.

The military dimension of this response was marked by large-scale expeditions and the fortification of strategic corridors. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) highlights that the Hue Court utilized its superior naval and infantry capabilities to counter Siamese incursions in Cambodia and the Lao principalities. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) provides detailed accounts of these military interventions, portraying them as "punitive expeditions" (*chinh phat*) designed to restore order and punish those who collaborated with the "Siamese bandits" (*Xiem khau*). These operations were not limited to direct combat but included the establishment of a network of forts and supply lines that physically partitioned the Mekong basin.

Politically, the Hue Court engaged in an aggressive "battle for legitimacy" among the local polities. Luu Van Loi (2007) observes that Minh Mang used the traditional investiture system as a political weapon, granting Vietnamese titles and ranks to local rulers who pledged exclusive loyalty to Hue. This was a direct challenge to the Siamese *Mandala* system, where authority was often fluid and overlapping. By formalizing these relationships, the Court sought to create a "legal" barrier to Siamese influence.

Tsuboi (1993) argues that this political intervention was even more effective than military force in the short term, as it forced local elites to choose between the Confucian order of Vietnam and the Buddhist order of Siam.

However, the intensity of these interventions led to a protracted war of attrition. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) suggests that the Siamese response, characterized by "scorched-earth" tactics and the relocation of populations, made it increasingly difficult for the Vietnamese military to sustain its presence. The logistical strain recorded in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2005) indicates that the cost of these interventions often exceeded the strategic benefits. Furthermore, Nguyen Van Luan (2010) and Phan Huy Chu (2007) provide insights into how the Siamese were able to utilize their knowledge of the local terrain and their closer cultural ties to the Lao and Khmer populations to undermine Vietnamese political efforts.

Ultimately, the military and political interventions of the Hue Court succeeded in creating a stalemate that defined the regional order for decades. As Tran Trong Kim (1971) reflects, while the Hue Court could not completely expel Siamese influence from the Mekong, its assertive response ensured that Siam could not achieve total dominance either. This "contested hegemony" was the direct result of Minh Mang's refusal to compromise on the security of the western frontier, establishing a precedent for regional power balance that would only be disrupted by the later arrival of European colonialists.

3. THE ARTISTRY OF DIPLOMATIC COORDINATION

3.1 The Synergy of "Firmness" and "Flexibility" (Cuong - Nhu)

The diplomatic success of the Hue Court under Emperor Minh Mang was not solely dependent on military prowess; it was the result of a deliberate and sophisticated synergy between "Firmness" (*Cuong*) and "Flexibility" (*Nhu*). This traditional Vietnamese diplomatic philosophy, deeply rooted in Southeast Asian political reality, allowed the Nguyen Dynasty to navigate the precarious balance of power with Siam. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that while *Cuong* represented the unwavering defense of national sovereignty and cultural superiority, *Nhu* provided the necessary tactical space to avoid premature total wars and to maintain dialogue with regional rivals.

The application of "Firmness" was most evident in the Court's stance on territorial integrity and tributary hierarchy. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) highlights that Minh Mang was uncompromising when it came to the "status" of Dai Nam; any perceived slight from Bangkok or local principalities was met with stern diplomatic protests or the mobilization of troops. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records numerous instances where the Emperor used "Firmness" to project strength, reinforcing the image of a centralized and powerful empire that would not tolerate Siamese encroachment. This assertive posture served as a deterrent, signaling to the Chakri Dynasty that the costs of challenging Hue would be prohibitively high.

However, this firmness was strategically tempered by "Flexibility." Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that Minh Mang was highly skilled at using "Flexibility" to de-escalate tensions when the empire's resources were stretched. This included the use of elaborate diplomatic language, the exchange of ceremonial gifts, and the strategic timing of tributary missions to Bangkok. By maintaining these channels, the Hue Court ensured that despite the fierce rivalry in Cambodia and Laos, the relationship with Siam never descended into an irreversible conflict that could have left both nations vulnerable to Western maritime powers. Tsuboi (1993) observes that this *Nhu* element allowed Vietnam to manage the "contested hegemony" with a level of nuance that simple military force could not provide.

The synergy of *Cuong - Nhu* was particularly vital in managing the tripartite relations between Hue, Bangkok, and the buffer polities. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) suggests that the Court used "Flexibility" to woo local Khmer and Lao elites, offering them titles and protection, while using "Firmness" to suppress those who collaborated with the Siamese. This duality created a complex web of loyalty and fear that solidified Vietnamese influence. Furthermore, Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2005) demonstrates how rituals and ceremonies were used as tools of both firmness (asserting hierarchy) and flexibility (providing a platform for negotiation).

As Nguyen Van Luan (2010) reflects, the *Cuong - Nhu* synergy was the intellectual engine of Minh Mang's regional strategy. It allowed the Hue Court to shape the 19th-century order by being rigid in its principles but fluid in its methods.

Tran Trong Kim (1971) notes that this artistry was the hallmark of a "civilized" state that understood the limits of power. Ultimately, the successful coordination of firmness and flexibility ensured that Dai Nam remained the dominant, or at least the most influential, architect of the Mekong sub-region's geopolitical structure until the mid-19th century.

3.2 Rituals as Power: Tributary Missions and Investiture Ceremonies

In the strategic world of the 19th-century Hue Court, rituals were far from mere symbolic formalities; they functioned as a sophisticated technology of power. Emperor Minh Mang utilized tributary missions and investiture ceremonies to codify and communicate the hierarchical structure of the regional order he sought to dominate. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) asserts that these rituals served as a "symbolic language of hegemony," where every bow, every gift, and every diplomatic decree from the Emperor was designed to reinforce the absolute authority of Dai Nam over its peripheral neighbors.

The investiture ceremony (*le phong sac*) was perhaps the most potent ritual tool in the Court's arsenal. By granting titles, seals, and official robes to the rulers of Cambodia and the Lao principalities, the Hue Court was not just recognizing their local authority but was effectively "incorporating" them into the Confucian administrative orbit. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) highlights that an investiture from Hue was the ultimate source of political legitimacy for local elites. To accept a Vietnamese title was to accept a position as a subordinate "vassal" within the Nguyen world-system, thereby providing a legal and moral basis for Vietnamese intervention in their internal affairs.

Tributary missions (*le cong nap*) complemented this by creating a regular cycle of submission. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2005) provides meticulous records of the frequency and composition of these missions, where local rulers were required to send precious local products to Hue. These acts of "giving and receiving" were not simple economic exchanges; they were ritualized acknowledgments of the Emperor's role as the "Son of Heaven" who maintained the cosmic and political order.

Nguyen Van Luan (2010) observes that the Hue Court used the splendor and complexity of these ceremonies in the imperial citadel to overwhelm foreign envoys, impressing upon them the vast cultural and material superiority of the Vietnamese state.

Furthermore, the management of these rituals allowed the Court to monitor and control its rivals' influence. Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that Minh Mang was extremely vigilant regarding the "rituals of diplomacy." If a local ruler sent a mission to Siam that was deemed more "respectful" than the one sent to Vietnam, it was treated as a grave political provocation. This ritual competition forced smaller nations into a performative loyalty, where the quality of their ceremonies at the Hue Court became a primary indicator of their strategic alignment. Ultimately, as documented in the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002), rituals transformed the Mekong sub-region into a structured stage where power was constantly negotiated and re-affirmed through the precise execution of Confucian protocols.

3.3 Managing the Tripartite Relationship: Vietnam, Siam, and the Local Polities

The management of the tripartite relationship between the Hue Court, the Bangkok Court, and the local polities of Cambodia and Laos was the most complex challenge for Emperor Minh Mang's regional strategy. This relationship was characterized by a "struggle for exclusivity," where both regional powers sought to transform overlapping influence into absolute dominance. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that the Hue Court viewed the local polities not as independent actors but as strategic pivots whose alignment would determine the ultimate victor in the Vietnam-Siam rivalry.

For the local polities of the Mekong, survival meant navigating the demands of two "Great Powers" simultaneously. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) highlights that the Khmer and Lao elites often employed a "dual-tributary" strategy, sending missions to both Hue and Bangkok to preserve a modicum of autonomy. However, Minh Mang's assertiveness sought to end this ambiguity. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records the Emperor's increasing frustration with this "double-dealing" (*nhị tâm*), leading to policies that forced local rulers to choose a side.

This pressure often backfired, as local elites would turn to Siam for military support whenever the Vietnamese administrative yoke became too heavy. The role of Siam in this tripartite dynamic was that of a resilient challenger. Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that the Bangkok Court under the Chakri kings utilized its closer cultural and religious ties to the local populations to undermine the Hue Court's Confucian integration efforts. While Vietnam controlled the bureaucracy and the forts, Siam often controlled the "hearts and minds" of the local peasantry through the shared tradition of Theravada Buddhism. This cultural-political divide meant that even when the Hue Court achieved military victory, its political stability in the buffer zones remained fragile.

Furthermore, the tripartite relationship was a constant game of "proxy politics." Tsuboi (1993) observes that internal succession crises in Cambodia and the Lao states were frequently exploited by both Hue and Bangkok to install their preferred candidates. These interventions ensured that the Mekong sub-region remained in a state of "controlled instability," where neither power could achieve total victory without risking a direct and costly war. As Nguyen Van Luan (2010) concludes, the Hue Court's management of this relationship was a testament to its diplomatic sophistication, but also to its strategic limitations. By trying to force a binary choice on a region defined by fluidity, the Court established a contested regional order that would define the geopolitics of mainland Southeast Asia until the arrival of Western colonial powers.

4. CULTURAL IMPERIALISM AND ITS CHALLENGES

4.1. The "Uniformity of Customs" (Nhat Luat Dong Phong) Policy

The Hue Court's regional strategy was not limited to administrative and military control; it included a profound cultural mission known as the "Uniformity of Customs" (*Nhat Luat Dong Phong*). This policy was the cultural arm of Emperor Minh Mang's imperial assertiveness, aiming to standardize the diverse traditions of the Mekong sub-region according to Vietnamese Confucian norms.

Nguyen Van Luan (2024) describes this policy as a form of "cultural imperialism," where the Court sought to transform its protectorates into moral and cultural replicas of Dai Nam, believing that true political loyalty could only be achieved through cultural assimilation.

The core of the "Uniformity of Customs" was the mandatory adoption of Vietnamese Confucian rituals, dress codes, and administrative language. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) points out that in Cambodia and the Lao territories, local elites were pressured to abandon their traditional garments in favor of Vietnamese-style tunics and trousers. This was more than a fashion statement; it was a ritualized acknowledgment of the Emperor's civilizing authority. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records specific decrees where Minh Mang expressed his desire for the "barbarians" to "soften their hearts" and "adopt the ways of the Middle Kingdom," reflecting a deep-seated belief in the transformative power of Confucian ethics.

However, the implementation of *Nhat Luat Dong Phong* created profound social friction. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) suggests that this policy overlooked the deep-seated cultural and religious identities of the Khmer and Lao peoples, who viewed their own traditions as central to their communal survival. The insistence on Vietnamese-style education and the marginalization of local Buddhist institutions led to a perception of the Hue Court as a "cultural intruder." Tsuboi (1993) argues that this cultural overreach was a strategic blunder, as it alienated the very local populations that Vietnam needed as allies against Siamese expansion.

The logistical and political cost of enforcing cultural uniformity was immense. Luu Van Loi (2007) observes that instead of fostering stability, the policy often served as a catalyst for local rebellions, which Siam was always ready to support. By the mid-1830s, the resistance to "Vietnamese-style civilization" had become a major drain on the Court's resources. As Tran Trong Kim (1971) concludes, while Minh Mang's vision of *Nhat Luat Dong Phong* was driven by a sincere belief in a superior moral order, its rigid application demonstrated the limits of using culture as a tool of empire. The "Uniformity of Customs" ultimately became a primary source of the "cultural mismatch" that undermined the long-term viability of the Nguyen Dynasty's regional hegemony.

4.2 Cultural Resistance: The Clash between Confucianism and Theravada Buddhism

The most significant barrier to the Hue Court's regional integration was not military resistance, but a deep-seated ideological clash between Vietnamese Confucianism and the Theravada Buddhism of the Mekong sub-region. Emperor Minh Mang's attempt to project a "Civilized Sphere" was predicated on the belief that Confucian ethics were universally superior and could be seamlessly exported to the Khmer and Lao populations. However, Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that this was a fundamental miscalculation, as it ignored the fact that Theravada Buddhism was not just a religion but the primary framework for social and political identity in Cambodia and Laos.

The clash was manifested in the conflicting visions of political legitimacy. In the Confucian worldview of the Hue Court, authority was derived from the "Mandate of Heaven" and a rigid bureaucratic hierarchy. In contrast, Dinh Thi Dung (2001) points out that the Khmer and Lao peoples viewed their rulers through the lens of *Devaraja* (God-king) and the merit-making traditions of Buddhism. When Vietnamese officials attempted to marginalize local monks and standardize religious rituals according to Confucian protocols, they were perceived as attacking the very soul of the community. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records numerous instances of local resistance triggered specifically by orders to alter religious practices, which the Emperor dismissively labeled as "superstitious" or "un-civilized."

Furthermore, the social structures of the two systems were incompatible. Nguyen Thế Anh (1970) suggests that the Nguyen Dynasty's emphasis on patrilineal lineage and centralized taxation clashed with the more fluid, village-based, and temple-centered social organization of the Mekong. Tsuboi (1993) observes that Siam was able to weaponize this cultural divide; by presenting itself as the "Protector of Buddhism," the Bangkok Court successfully positioned itself as the natural ally of the Khmer and Lao populations against the "godless" or "heterodox" Confucian invaders from the East. The logistical and political consequences of this clash were devastating for Vietnamese hegemony.

Luu Van Loi (2007) notes that the cultural resistance often served as the moral fuel for protracted guerrilla warfare, as local monks and elites used religious networks to mobilize the peasantry against the Hue administration. By the end of Minh Mang's reign, it had become clear that administrative integration without cultural alignment was unsustainable. As Tran Trong Kim (1971) reflects, the failure to reconcile Confucianism with Theravada Buddhism meant that the "Civilized Sphere" remained a superficial layer of control, unable to penetrate the deep-seated loyalties of the Mekong sub-region. This ideological clash ultimately proved to be the "Achilles' heel" of the Nguyen Dynasty's regional strategy.

4.3 Resource Depletion and the Fragility of Regional Hegemony

The ambitious regional strategy of Emperor Minh Mang, while conceptually grand, ultimately rested on a strained domestic foundation. The relentless pursuit of a "Security Shield" and the administrative integration of *Trấn Tây Thành* led to a severe depletion of national resources, exposing the inherent fragility of the Nguyen Dynasty's regional hegemony. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that the "imperial overstretch" of the 1830s created a dangerous paradox: the more the Hue Court expanded its influence to ensure security, the more it destabilized its internal economic and social order.

The most immediate manifestation of this depletion was the immense logistical burden of maintaining permanent garrisons in the Mekong sub-region. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) highlights that the transport of rice, ammunition, and silver to the western frontiers of Cambodia and Laos drained the imperial granaries and the national treasury. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2005) provides stark evidence of this strain, recording the Emperor's frequent concerns over the rising costs of military campaigns and the high mortality rates of soldiers due to the harsh climate and tropical diseases. This "drain of manpower" weakened the agricultural base of the Vietnamese heartland, as thousands of peasants were conscripted for endless frontier duties. Furthermore, the economic exhaustion of the state led to increased domestic taxation, which in turn sparked internal unrest.

Nguyễn Thế Anh (1970) suggests that the revolts in Northern and Southern Vietnam during the 1830s were partly a reaction to the heavy fiscal demands imposed by the Court to fund its regional ambitions. This internal instability made the regional hegemony even more fragile, as the Nguyen military was forced to divide its forces between suppressing domestic rebellions and countering Siamese encroachment. Tsuboi (1993) observes that this over-extension gave Siam a strategic advantage; the Bangkok Court could afford a war of attrition, whereas the Hue Court was constantly operating on the edge of its material limits.

The fragility of this hegemony became undeniable by the end of Minh Mang's reign. Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that the lack of a sustainable economic model for the occupied territories meant that Vietnam was forced to "subsidize" its empire rather than profiting from it. Unlike Western colonial powers that extracted wealth from their colonies, the Nguyen Dynasty's regional project was a net loss for the national economy. Ultimately, the "Civilized Sphere" was a costly monument to Minh Mang's vision a structure of power that was impressive in appearance but hollowed out from within by the relentless depletion of the state's vital resources.

5. LONG-TERM IMPACTS ON THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN ORDER

5.1 Establishing a Balance of Power with the Chakri Dynasty

The protracted rivalry between the Hue Court and the Bangkok Court during the reign of Emperor Minh Mang ultimately resulted in the establishment of a resilient balance of power that defined the 19th-century Southeast Asian order. Although both dynasties sought total dominance over the Mekong sub-region, the reality of "contested hegemony" forced them into a state of mutual recognition and strategic restraint. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that this period marked the transition from a fluid, multi-polar region to a bipolar system, where Vietnam and Siam acted as the two indispensable pillars of regional stability and competition. The establishment of this balance was not a product of formal treaties but of a "exhausted equilibrium."

Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that after decades of military confrontation in Cambodia and Laos, both Hue and Bangkok realized that neither side could achieve a decisive victory without risking internal collapse. This realization led to the emergence of a de facto borderland a shared sphere of influence where both powers exercised authority through their respective proxy rulers. This balance of power was critical in preventing the complete annexation of smaller polities by either side, as the presence of one superpower acted as a constant deterrent to the other.

The longevity of this balance of power was further solidified by the diplomatic artistry of the two courts. Tsuboi (1993) observes that the "firmness and flexibility" of the Nguyen Dynasty were mirrored by the strategic adaptability of the Chakri kings. By maintaining ritualized diplomatic channels even during periods of war, the two states created a "grammar of conflict" that prevented regional disputes from escalating into total annihilation. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records several instances where diplomatic envoys from both sides sought to "negotiate the peace" (*giảng hòa*), reflecting an underlying understanding that a stable, albeit competitive, relationship was preferable to perpetual chaos.

Ultimately, the balance of power established between the Nguyen and Chakri dynasties created a unique geopolitical window for the region before the full onset of European colonialism. Nguyen Van Luan (2010) concludes that this bipolar order provided a degree of regional sovereignty that would later be utilized by both states to navigate the pressures of Western expansion. While the Hue Court's dream of a Vietnam-centric "Civilized Sphere" was never fully realized, its assertive strategy succeeded in ensuring that Vietnam remained a primary architect of the Southeast Asian order, standing as an equal rival to the power of Siam.

5.2 Pre-colonial Geopolitics and the Shaping of Modern National Borders

The geopolitics of the pre-colonial era, driven by the intense rivalry between the Hue Court and the Bangkok Court, played a foundational role in the shaping of modern national borders in mainland Southeast Asia.

The territorial assertiveness of Emperor Minh Mang was not merely an ephemeral expansion; it was a process of "hard-coding" political influence into geographic reality. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that the administrative boundaries established by the Nguyen Dynasty in the 1830s served as the primary reference points for later colonial cartographers, effectively laying the groundwork for the contemporary territorial limits of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The transformation of fluid "frontier zones" into fixed "border lines" was an unintended consequence of Minh Mang's integration policies. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) highlights that the establishment of the *Tran Tay Thanh* and the various *Trấn* in the Lao principalities forced a shift from the traditional *Mandala* system where power dissipated from the center to a more modern, territorialized state. By conducting land surveys and placing border posts to counter Siamese influence, the Hue Court created a "cartographic legacy" that defined the spatial extent of Vietnamese sovereignty. The Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records meticulous efforts to define these perimeters, reflecting an early-modern consciousness of territoriality that preceded Western colonial intervention.

Furthermore, the contest over buffer zones established the "logic of the border" that persists to this day. Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that many of the current boundary lines between Vietnam and its neighbors in the Mekong basin are historical relics of 19th-century military deployments and administrative reach. The strategic depth that Minh Mang sought through the "Security Shield" concept became the blueprint for the geopolitical security architecture of the region. Tsuboi (1993) observes that when the French and British colonialists arrived, they largely formalized the existing spheres of influence that had already been carved out by the Nguyen and Chakri dynasties, rather than creating them *de novo*.

The legacy of these pre-colonial geopolitics also continues to influence regional diplomatic sensitivities. Nguyen Van Luan (2010) concludes that the historical memory of 19th-century assertiveness and territorial integration remains a subtext in contemporary relations within the Mekong sub-region. The shaping of modern borders was therefore a dual process: it was a physical demarcation of land and a psychological demarcation of national identity.

Ultimately, the assertive strategy of the Hue Court ensured that the modern state of Vietnam inherited a territorial framework that was the product of its own pre-colonial agency, making the 19th century a pivotal era for the spatial definition of the Southeast Asian order.

5.3 The Hue Court's Legacy in the Face of Western Colonial Incursion

The legacy of the Hue Court's regional strategy, characterized by its assertive Confucian identity and geopolitical depth, faced its ultimate challenge with the arrival of Western colonial forces in the mid-19th century. The regional order that Emperor Minh Mang had painstakingly constructed became both a source of resistance and a point of vulnerability during the French incursion. Nguyen Van Luan (2024) argues that the "imperial consciousness" developed under Minh Mang provided the Nguyen Dynasty with a sophisticated, albeit traditional, framework to perceive and react to the Western threat as a challenge to their established "Civilized Sphere."

The "Security Shield" and administrative structures in the Mekong sub-region, while effective against regional rivals, proved difficult to maintain under the pressure of industrial-age warfare. Dinh Thi Dung (2001) observes that the heavy resource depletion caused by decades of conflict with Siam, as discussed in previous sections, had left the imperial treasury and military morale exhausted just as the French began their maritime assaults. However, the Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (2002) records that the institutional memory of managing a complex regional order allowed the Court to initially approach the Western crisis with a sense of sovereign dignity, refusing to be treated as a mere "barbaric" entity in the eyes of the Europeans.

The cultural legacy of Confucian assertiveness also played a dual role. Tsuboi (1993) highlights that the rigid "Uniformity of Customs" had alienated potential allies in Cambodia and Laos, making it easier for the French to present themselves as "liberators" from Vietnamese "imperialism." Conversely, Nguyễn Thế Anh (1970) suggests that the same Confucian orthodoxy provided the intellectual bedrock for the *Can Vuong* movement and other forms of scholar-led resistance, as the defense of the land was inextricably linked to the defense of the "Civilized Way."

The sense of being a regional "Middle Kingdom" made the subsequent loss of sovereignty even more profound for the Vietnamese elite. Ultimately, the Hue Court's strategy left an indelible mark on how the region was later organized under colonial rule. Luu Van Loi (2007) points out that the French Union of Indochina largely mirrored the geographic and administrative scope that the Nguyen Dynasty had sought to consolidate under its own hegemony. By defining the perimeters of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos through its pre-colonial assertiveness, the Hue Court ensured that even under foreign occupation, the structural integrity of these entities remained intact. As Tran Trong Kim (1971) reflects, the 19th-century regional strategy was a "tragic masterpiece" - a bold attempt to shape a Southeast Asian order that, while eventually eclipsed by colonialism, provided the territorial and cultural blueprint for the modern Vietnamese nation-state.

CONCLUSION

The regional strategy of the Nguyen Dynasty during the 19th century, particularly under the visionary yet rigorous leadership of Emperor Minh Mang, represents a pivotal chapter in the geopolitical history of Southeast Asia. This study has demonstrated that the Hue Court's "Assertive Regional Vision" was not a series of disconnected military expansions, but a highly structured project rooted in Confucian orthodoxy, defensive realism, and a sophisticated understanding of power dynamics. By conceptualizing the Mekong sub-region as a "Civilized Sphere" and implementing the "Security Shield" strategy, the Nguyen state successfully transformed itself from a newly unified kingdom into a formidable regional hegemon, standing as a peer competitor to the Siamese Kingdom.

However, as this research has explored, this assertiveness was a double-edged sword. The "Uniformity of Customs" policy and the administrative integration of *Tran Tay Thanh* revealed the inherent limits of pre-colonial state-building. The ideological clash between Vietnamese Confucianism and the Theravada Buddhist traditions of the Mekong created a "cultural mismatch" that undermined long-term stability. Furthermore, the immense logistical strain and the depletion of national resources the "imperial overstretch" - exposed the fragility of a hegemony that was built on an exhausted domestic foundation.

These challenges serve as a historical reminder of the complexities involved in projecting power across diverse cultural and geographic landscapes. Despite its eventual eclipse by Western colonial incursion, the legacy of the Nguyen Dynasty's regional vision remains indelible. The "contested hegemony" between Hue and Bangkok established a balance of power that prevented the complete fragmentation of the Mekong sub-region and provided the territorial blueprints for modern-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The assertive posture of the Hue Court ensured that the spatial definition of the Vietnamese nation-state was not merely a colonial gift but a product of its own strategic agency and historical struggle.

In conclusion, the 19th-century regional order of the Nguyen Dynasty was a "tragic masterpiece" of statecraft. It was an era when Vietnam sought to define its own "Middle Kingdom" destiny, shaping the geopolitical contours of mainland Southeast Asia through a blend of firmness and flexibility. For modern scholars and policymakers, the history of the Hue Court's regional strategy offers profound insights into the enduring importance of buffer zones, the necessity of cultural sensitivity in diplomacy, and the perpetual quest for security in an ever-changing regional landscape. The shadows of Minh Mang's "Civilized Sphere" continue to linger in the contemporary geopolitics of the Mekong, affirming the lasting impact of this assertive era on the soul of the Southeast Asian order.

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CHAPTER 4
MEDIA, IDEOLOGY, AND CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN NEWS TRANSLATION

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INTRODUCTION

Translation has been introduced and recognized as a significant tool for the dissemination of world news, performing as a primary or at least an essential tool via which information crosses linguistic and cultural borders and boundaries (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009; Valdeón, 2015). In such a high-velocity information context, news production functions as an act of social construction instead of a neutral reflection of truth or reality (Fowler, 1991).

The digital age has made the news cycle a 24-hour global event. However, while the access to international news is unprecedented, such a process is highly dependent on the 'invisible' work of news translation. Unlike other types of translation, 'news translation' is distinguished by 'extreme speed' and 'political ideology'. When a leader or president of a foreign country gives a speech or a local protest happens in a non-English speaking country, the 'way' such an event is 'rendered' through translation into English is a matter of how the global 'Center' perceives the 'Periphery'. (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009; Stetting, 1989; Van Dijk, 1988)

The intrinsic value of this subject lies in the power or supremacy of the media in the construction of social reality. While communicating in a newsroom, translation is neither limited to literal interpretation nor simply an exercise in translation. It becomes an act or practice of re-contextualization. In the current chapter, an endeavor will be made to assess the theoretical attributes or implications of this process. (Baker, 2006)

It is neither 'translation' nor 'interpretation' when a news agency makes certain changes to the syntax or word usage of an original foreign language statement, so as to suit the expectations of its indigenous English-speaking audience. It is somewhat 'governing' the narrative.

The aim of the present research is to critically analyze the 'ideological filters' employed in the translation of news in English. Such a move away from the idea of the translator-as-objective-reporter toward a model of the translator-as-prototype-'Narrative Architect'. The study investigates how and to what extent the structural nature of the requirements for English language media-for instance, the necessity of 'impactful' headlines or 'clear-cut' political binaries-forces a theoretical transformation of foreign cultural narratives.

Guiding this inquiry, the following questions have been formulated:

- How does the concept of 'transediting' theoretically explain the ideological shifts in English news translation?
- In what ways do 'framing theories' describe the manipulation of cultural narratives in global media?
- What are the theoretical consequences of English-centric news translation for the representation of 'otherness' in the digital era?

1. THEORETICAL ISSUES

The study of the theory of news translation demands that we replace our common concept of 'equivalence' with a concept of a 'Theory of Manipulation'. With the rise of globalized information systems, translation is a medium for maintaining, as well as subverting, power.

Theory of 'Transediting' and the Erasure of the Source

One of the primary theories, or 'major theoretical frameworks', of news translation is 'Transediting'. This concept explains how, in news translation, it is very difficult and challenging to separate the actual process of editing from the process of translating. It somehow may imply that there does not seem to be any source text (ST) any longer. The ST may plainly hold no authority, in contrast to literary translation where the original text has authority. In news translation, therefore, the ST would appear to be merely as a sort of raw material.

Theoretically, transediting seem to somehow be driven by the call for for 'Readability' and 'Relevance'. News needs to be domesticated to the already set cultural and ideological framework of the target audience. In an Anglophone country, this often means 'de-contextualizing' the foreign event and 're-contextualizing' it into a Western narrative. The theoretical issue which one may identify here is that 'editing' is often a euphemism for 'ideological cleaning'. By removing or via erasing the 'messy' cultural details of a foreign political situation, transediting delivers a 'streamlined' narrative that confirms and proves the audience's prejudices. The translator, performing as a transeditor, turn into an agent of 'narrative simplification'. (Baker, 2006; Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009)

Framing Theory and the Boundary of Interpretation

Theoretically, Framing can be defined as the procedure through which media organizations, in selecting certain aspects or features of a perceived reality, make those aspects more prominent or outstanding in order to reach their own specific objectives. In terms of news translation, 'framing' can happen on the linguistic level. For example, once a foreign word meaning 'مقاومه' or 'resistance' is rendered into English as 'insurgency' or even worse, 'terrorism', it blatantly alters and manifestly changes the frame of the whole story. This can be thought of what is called 'Boundary of Interpretation'. The translator or better to say, the agency s/he works for or is paid by, dictates to the reader what boundaries of thought are permitted over an event. If, in an English translation of a text, 'active' word choices are given to describe an event of governmental action and 'passive' word choices to describe an event of suffering in a foreign land, then indeed a 'bias' or prejudice is formed in the grammar of the translated report. 'Framing theory' posits that the process of news translation is a 'Zero-Sum Game' wherein, in order to permit an 'ideological frame', another must, in fact, be removed or excluded. These frames become more polarized in the digital age, as headlines must be 'click-optimized'. The 'cultural narrative' gives way to the 'ideological frame' and a somewhat skewed representation or distorted view of world events. (Entman, 1993)

Gatekeeping and the 'Prestige' of English Discourse

Theoretically, 'Gatekeeping' in news translation can be described as the authority, power or control in order to decide which foreign stories are translated and how much of the original 'voice' can be permitted to pass through the 'gate'. Since English is the world's lingua franca, hence, the English-language news agencies sometimes act or perform as global information's Supreme Gatekeepers. This creates a theoretical 'Linguistic Hierarchy'. News that is translated from a 'minor' language into English undergoes a process of 'normalization'. The foreign voice is made to sound like a 'standard English speaker'. Such erasing of 'linguistic otherness' is an ideological act.

That alone suggests that for any narrative to become 'valid' or 'credible' in the digital era, it needs to fit into the logical and rhetorical structures of the English language. Theoretically, this leads to 'Anglicization of Reality', whereby diverse processes or ways of comprehending the world are forced into narrow ideological constraints of English-language political discourse.

The 'Universal Audience' and the Loss of Local Specificity

Any theory of translation of the media has also to take into account the 'Imagined Universal Audience'. Western English language media writings are targeting a 'Global Citizen' who is supposed to share liberal values that are entirely Western. Theoretically, this can create 'Universalizing Filter'. What happens when a local 'story of culture', based on a local history or religion, is translated to tell a 'story of understanding' to this 'universal' audience? The local 'details', theoretically, get 'neutralized'. This is a theoretical 'Cultural Erasure'. For example, a foreign political movement, based on a local theology, is translated using secular Western political words such as 'democracy' or 'human rights. While these words make the 'story of culture' 'understandable' to an English-speaking person, these words have become 'unfaithful' to the local reality. The translation process produces a 'Global Narrative' that is 'understandable', yet lacking the 'cultural friction' which is essential for true 'understanding' (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009).

Narrative Fidelity vs. Institutional Ideology

Based on the theory of news translation, there is always tension between 'Narrative Fidelity' (being faithful to the original story or narrative) and 'Institutional Ideology' (being faithful to the institution or employer). Each news agency has its own 'Editorial Line'—its characteristic set of ideological limits that define its view of the world. Following this line of reasoning, the news translator is, in theory, an 'Ideological Employee' whose linguistic decisions do not result from autonomous linguistic determinism, but from the 'Narrative Logic' of the institution. That is, if a traditional English news source tends to be 'pro-market', economic news from foreign sources, translated into English, inevitably incorporates this ideological stance by selecting and favoring particular English metaphors utilized in the field of economy.

Truth in news translation is thus 'relational', meaning it is relative to the 'Center' of ideological Newsrooms. This belies linguistic concepts of 'Objectivity'. Today in our digital age, where media 'bubbles' are increasingly reinforced by technological advances and algorithms, news translations has essentially become the glue binding or holding these ideological 'bubbles' together.

The 'Binary Trap' of Digital Translation

Digital news consumption seems to like binaries such as 'us vs. them', 'democracy vs. autocracy', and 'freedom vs. oppression'. News translation is the mechanism through which 'constructing' these 'binaries' is achieved. In one language, a political reality may be represented with extreme nuance, 'shades of grey'. But to be successful within the English-speaking digital news world, it often needs to be translated into a binary trap. This is a theoretical 'Semantic Narrowing'. The translator is employing English lexical items which carry somehow high ideological charge in order to construct the story so that it conforms to an expected 'digital narrative'. This is not simply 'mistranslation'; it is productive transformation. It is the creation of a predetermined 'Social Myth' that aligns with the 'Anglo' world's conception of the 'other'. This creates a 'Global Folklore' of 'news' stories, as international cultures become a series of familiar, predictable characters in an English-language drama.

The Ethics of 'Interventionist' Translation

Finally, we have to theorize the role of the 'Interventionist' news translator. The translator, in the 'digital and globalized era', is the sole individual who has access to both the source and the audience, resulting in a tremendous 'Ethical Burden'. Theoretically, is the translator to 'intervene' and correct the bias or prejudice of a foreign speaker, or should it be translated 'faithfully' regardless of whether it offends the audience? The trend now for English translations of the news is 'Censorship-by-Translation'. Offensive or 'non-standard' cultural narratives are 'cleaned up' or 'softened' to avoid offending the audience.

This is a form of theoretical reality-sanitization, a form of 'paternalism', implying that the English-speaking audience is not capable of coping with the raw realities of the world and is therefore in need of a 'safe' version of the news.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology in this chapter is an application of 'Qualitative Theoretical Analysis' using library research and 'Narrative Policy Analysis'. This study does not use human subjects or experimental data, but relies on 'Conceptual Synthesis' of the literature on media studies and translation linguistics. By exploring theoretical frameworks of major English news agencies such as BBS, CNN, Reuters, etc, implicit norms of translation or guidelines that somehow govern international news were revealed to some extent. These guidelines, or 'ideological maps,' exhibited how they negotiated narratives of countries in the outside world'.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The theoretical examination of the news translation process demonstrates that the notion of 'objectivity' is simply a linguistic impossibility in the global media market. The fact that within the digital age, the faithfulness of the translation of international news has evolved into the use of strategies of adaptation. The finding demonstrates the role of English news translation as a means of 'Domesticating the Global'. Rather than translating the reality of the non-English speaking nation into the reality of the English-speaking world, the translation actually inserts the reality of the foreign world into the existing comfort zone of the English-speaking world's ideology.

One of the major points which has become clear from our above discussion is 'Reduction of Cultural Pluralism'. Due to the emphasis on 'impact' and 'speed', which governs English language media, the complex 'multi-vocal' narratives of foreign cultures undergo a process of 'monologization' when translated. It can be observed that foreign political movements, minus their historical specificity, are reduced to generic categories of English language polite discourse.

As a result, we get 'Global Narrative Stagnation', where the English-speaking public is again and again presented with the same 'stereotypical frames' of foreign cultures, despite any changes which may have occurred on the ground.

In more depth, the results suggest that news translation works like a 'Validation Mechanism'. A foreign political narrative has to first get 'validated' in this unique, academic, and rationalist style of English-language news in order for it to be taken seriously by the 'global community'. This produces a 'Theoretical Dependency': if foreign actors want to have a voice on the global level, they must learn to speak and act in such a way as to 'translate well' into English. It can be concluded that this constitutes 'Epistemic Injustice', whereby the 'Center' (that is, the English media) determines what constitutes 'legitimate' news from the 'Periphery'.

While algorithms favor 'shareable' and 'provocative' content, news translators are theoretically under pressure to resort to 'highly charged' English vocabulary. The consequence is an 'Ideological Escalation' in translation. A slight local disagreement in a foreign country can theoretically be rendered into a 'clash of civilizations' via certain polarized English terms. The 'invisible' news translator is, therefore, responsible for the 'radicalization' of global narratives through the digital perspective.

Lastly, it should be noted that, overall, the results indicate the 'Erosion of Intercultural Trust'. If 'translation' is, in fact, used as an instrument of 'framing' and 'manipulation'—and it seems that it is—then clearly, 'credibility' of 'global' news is called into question. Indeed, the model of 'transediting' predicts that we seem to be heading towards a world in which 'news' is no different from 'propaganda'—at least, given that 'translation' has become completely subservient to 'institutional' ideology. To improve or restore trust, it can be proposed, at a minimum, that 'news' agencies make their 'translation' processes somehow 'Visible', including 'acknowledging' the 'ideological filters' by which they attempt to shape the world for their English-speaking audience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, news translation in the digital and globalized era is a very powerful engine of ideological re-framing. As indicated within the various concepts and discussions presented within this chapter, the process of 'transediting' foreign news stories 'into' English does not sound to be a neutral form of communication. It could somehow be perceived more accurately as a 'strategic form of 'narrative construction'. English-language media outlets, by prioritizing institutional ideology and target-audience expectations, are effectively 'governing' how the world is perceived.

The significance of this work lies in its departure from the notion of the 'myth of objectivity' in news. As we have demonstrated, every decision in translation, from the selection of a pronoun to the crafting of a headline, is one of ideology and perpetuates a certain cultural narrative. The 'flattening' of foreign nuance into more English-centric modes is a threat to true global understanding and democratic discourse.

It was confirmed that 'framing' and 'gatekeeping' appear to be the essential theoretical drivers in any newsroom. For the future of media and translation studies, it will be essential to build a new form of 'Ethical Model of News Translation' that honors the 'otherness' of the source and avoids the temptation to force the world into a 'Binary Trap'. It is merely through acknowledging the 'Ideological Filter' of the news translation process that we can hope to see the world as it really or truly is, as opposed to how we want it to be.

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