

Chapter VII Trường Giáo Xuyên, or the School of Teacher Xuyên: French-style Education in a Village in Northern Vietnam during the 1930s

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Preamble

Since 1994, a comprehensive area study has been under way in the small village of Bách Cốc in Nam Định Province (*tỉnh*) in northern Vietnam (which today consists of five hamlets (*xóm*), namely A, B, C, Trại Nội, and Ấp Phú, belonging to the Thành Lợi Commune (*xã*) in Vụ Bản District (*huyện*), Nam Định Province; on the concept of “village” (*làng*) in prerevolution Vietnam, see Sakurai [2006:221]). Known as the Bach Coc Project, as of 2008 fourteen surveys have been conducted by a total of more than 300 Japanese researchers and students.¹ The present article represents part of the results of this Bach Coc Project.

One of the important methods being employed in the Bach Coc Project is the attempt to reconstruct the villagers’ contemporary history through oral surveys of their personal history. In the course of this research it has become clear that schooling is the issue in which the villagers evince the greatest interest.

Academic qualifications are closely linked to the villagers’ ambitions to give up farming. It is academic qualifications alone that provide the opportunity to leave the land and seek employment in the cities. This is the driving force behind the move towards higher academic qualifications.² But this trend towards high academic qualifications is not something that has developed only since the introduction of the Đổi Mới, or “Renovation.”³ It also existed in the prerevolution period, and even when there was no educational system there was a strong desire for the education provided by private schools of Chinese learning (*thầy đồ*) in villages. This article considers on the basis of interviews with elderly people and with reference to the

¹ The results of the Bach Coc Project have been published in the bulletin *Thông tin Bách Cốc*, vols. 1–17. In addition, I have published a book [Sakurai 2006] and there have also been published many articles by other participants in the project.

² According to a questionnaire conducted in Hamlet B of Bách Cốc in 2005, in 137 families (87% of the total number of households in Hamlet B) 62 of the 116 people born in the 1980s had completed a 12-year education and 13 were attending high school. Among the 71 people born in the 1960s none had completed a 12-year education.

³ Since 1987 Vietnam has been promoting a market economy and is continuing to experience rapid economic growth. This is known as Đổi Mới, or “Renovation,” policy.

nature of education in Bách Cúc Village since the 1930s the villagers' historical experiences regarding education.

1. The Construction of a Public School (1930–1947)

1.1. Bách Cúc under Colonial Rule

Following the Treaty of Huế in 1884, northern Vietnam became a French protectorate. From the beginning of its occupation of northern Vietnam, France was plagued by rebellions, as a result of which it adopted a Policy of “Association” as the guiding principle of its colonial rule, and for the sake of preserving social order it did not interfere in the existing village order. Throughout the period of French rule the customary social order of villages and their communal character are considered to have been strengthened [Sakurai 1987:7–14]. The so-called “traditional village” was in fact formed during the period of French rule.

The social hierarchy in the village of Bách Cúc can be divided into four strata. The first stratum was the landlords, who accounted for only a few households among the village's 400-odd households. They owned 20–30 *mẫu*⁴ of paddy fields, and the landless peasants of the fourth stratum were subordinate to them, working as tenant farmers and hired farmhands. But in many cases the sons of landlords had become officials outside the village, and by the twentieth century the trend for landlords to leave the village and settle their sons in cities had become quite pronounced. The landlords were of no great importance in village politics. The second stratum was composed of the upper-middle tier of peasants, and generally each adult male was allotted 2 *sào*⁵ of communal rice fields (*công điền*)⁶ and also owned up to 1 *mẫu* of private land. Until 1930, many of their sons attended private schools of Chinese learning and became members of the Literature Club (*Hội Tư Văn*), a club for village intellectuals versed in Chinese learning, and they also became officers of the council (*hội đồng*) of village notables (*hương chức*) and guided village politics. Up until 1915, it would also have been possible for them to sit the civil service examinations and become mandarins (*quan nhân*) outside the village. The third stratum was the lower-middle tier of peasants, who were entitled to receive communal rice fields but did not own any private land. Many of their sons attended private schools of Chinese learning, and once they had mastered reading and writing

⁴ In principle, 1 *mẫu* is equivalent to 3,600 square metres, but there are regional differences. Old people in Bách Cúc remember it as having been 3,600 square metres.

⁵ A *sào* is equivalent to one-tenth of 1 *mẫu*, i.e., 360 square metres.

⁶ These were fields that up until 1954–55 were owned in common by the village, and they were apportioned equally among registered adult male villagers and reallocated every three to six years. Recipients were liable for taxes and military conscription. See Sakurai [1987].

they often went to work in the cities. They had almost no involvement in village politics. The fourth stratum consisted of lower-class peasants, who were second-class villagers with no right to any communal rice fields, and they were unable to have any involvement at all in village politics. Because the majority of them had no schooling and lacked literacy, it was difficult for them to go elsewhere in search of work, and most of them remained in the village and became tenant farmers or farm labourers [Sakurai 2006:224–54].

1.2. *The Village School*

In the 1930s modern education made its appearance in the village of Bách C c. Up until then, villagers belonging to the upper-middle tier had attended private schools of Chinese learning, where they had studied classical Chinese. Those who had sufficient ability would sit the civil service examinations on leaving private school and become low-ranking officials. Even if they were unable to become officials, they would join the Literature Club and become village leaders. This was the dream of the sons of middle-stratum villagers. But the abolition of the civil service examinations by the French colonial government⁷ destroyed this link with the outside world mediated by the traditional system of private schools. Even if one became proficient in literary Chinese, there was no longer any way of entering government service either inside or outside the village.

On entering the twentieth century, all the colonial powers began to take a more active interest in the general education of local inhabitants. Basic education in northern Vietnam in the twentieth century had the following structure.

1.2.1. *Basic Education for French Children*

This began with the four-year *premier degré*, and children were taught either in a special class established in schools for locals in the provinces or at higher primary schools (*école primaire supérieure*) or *lycées* in the cities. Those who completed the *premier degré* advanced to a higher primary school for the *deuxième degré* and then on to a *lycée* where the *baccalauréat* diploma could be obtained. The curriculum in each of these stages followed the educational system in France and was regarded as the equivalent of the corresponding curriculum in France. Depending on their examination results and their parents' assets, the children of locals could also enter higher-level schools, and more than half of the pupils at the Lycée Albert

⁷ The first- and second-level examinations of the civil service examinations were abolished in Nam Định Province in 1915 [Chapoulart 1933:39].

Sarraut, a famous public school in Hanoi, are said to have been locals in 1930s [Mantetsu Tōa Keizai Chōsakyoku 1941:443–50].

1.2.2. Basic Education for Local Children

In the educational system of 1917, the first level of education consisted of either a three-year elementary school (*trường tiểu học, école primaire élémentaire*), where subjects were taught in Vietnamese, or a five-year *école primaire de plein exercice*. For pupils who had finished elementary school there was a four-year higher primary school (*enseignement primaire supérieur*) or a two-year higher primary school (*enseignement secondaire*). Those who completed the former were able to enter high school (*enseignement supérieur*). In 1924 the curriculum of the *école primaire de plein exercice* was divided into a three-year elementary course (*cycle primaire élémentaire*), taught in Vietnamese, and a supplementary course (*cycle primaire complémentaire*) taught in French. In the educational system of 1927, the first stage was a three-year primary course (*cycle primaire élémentaire*), while the second stage was divided into a three-year supplementary course (*cycle primaire complémentaire*) and a three-year higher primary school (*cycle primaire supérieur*).

In Vietnam, the local population, including villagers, was keen on a French-style education. This was the public school, which served as a French colonial version of the former private schools of Chinese learning, allowing people to leave the villages and seek employment in government service. But though in Bắc C c during the 1920s a few of the landlords sent their sons to French-style schools in Ninh Bính and other large cities nearby [Sakurai 2006:235], the majority of peasants could not afford to do so. With peasants of the upper-middle tier taking the lead, villagers demanded the establishment of public schools to replace the existing private schools. In 1926, the French granted permission for the establishment of public primary schools at the expense of the villages themselves. Villages in the Red River Delta faced with the same problem as Bắc C c vied with each other in building schools.⁸

Around 1930, moves were made to establish a public elementary school in Bắc C c too.⁹ The administrative council (*hội đồng*) made up of village notables [Sakurai 2006:225–26] decided to use the village hall (*đình*) [Sakurai 2006:219] for

⁸ The number of village schools in Vietnam was 2,870 in 1922–23, 4,341 in 1929–30, 4,902 in 1936–37, and 8,575 in 1941–42, by which time schools had been built in most of the main villages throughout Vietnam [Shimao 2001:22].

⁹ In the early 1930s, 6,626 pupils were studying at 133 primary schools and 8 combined primary and junior high schools. In 1932, 2,099 pupils in Nam Định Province requested diplomas certifying their completion of primary school, and 810 were granted them [Chapoulart 1933:41].

the school. A teacher by the name of Bùi Văn Xuyên, hailing from Đan Phượng District in Hà Đông Province (present-day Greater Hà Nội), was invited at the village's expense to take up the position of teacher. This school is today remembered by the name of "School of Teacher Xuyên" (Trường Giáo Xuyên).

1.3. Teacher Xuyên

1.3.1. Personal History

Mr. 39¹⁰ (Hamlet A, born 1929), who was a favourite of Xuyên, says that Xuyên was born in about 1890 or 1891. According to Mr. 87 (Hamlet A, born 1929), when he himself was eight years old, Xuyên seemed to be about fifty years old. Xuyên's daughter, from when he was still in Hà Đông Province, was born in 1924. It may thus be assumed that he was born around 1890, which makes him a contemporary of H Chí Minh and Phạm Quỳnh.¹¹

Neither Xuyên's former pupils nor his daughter or son-in-law recall details of his career. Since he had a primary school teacher's certificate (probably as a relieving teacher), he may have finished a *lycée* in Hanoi or a Qu c Học junior high school in Huế. Before being invited to Bách C c, he is said to have been teaching in Lào Cai and Lạng Sơn provinces in the mountainous north. He married his first wife while in Hà Đông Province (Mr. 125, Hamlet C, born 1919), but later took a woman in Bách C c as his second wife. He remained in Bách C c until the school was burnt down by French forces in 1947. His eldest daughter is married to Mr. 125.

1.3.2. Village Teacher

Former pupils (Mr. 39, Hamlet A, born 1929; Mr. 87, Hamlet A, born 1929; Mr. 80, Hamlet Áp Phú, born 1922) all remember Xuyên as having been a large, stout man with an imposing appearance. As for his personality, they stress his kindness.

He was a good teacher who treated the pupils as if they were his own children.

Although he never beat them, he would strike them lightly on the palm of the

¹⁰ The names of the informants whom I interviewed are being kept confidential, and instead they are referred to by random numbers.

¹¹ Phạm Quỳnh (1892–1945) was an enlightenment thinker who modernized the Vietnamese language. From 1932 onwards he served in the government of the emperor Bảo Đại as minister of education and minister of personnel administration, and in 1945 he was captured by the Việt Minh and killed.

hand. But this happened very seldom. (Mr. 80)

But many pupils recall that he would strap their hands if they did not do their homework.

We also practised reading and spelling. We were also given homework, and if we did not do it, we were struck on the palm of the hand. Mr. 39 was never struck because he did what he was told. The teacher sometimes gave tests, and the pupils answered his questions with their arms folded (Many of the questions were about vocabulary). The test was for ten marks, and if we were unable to answer, we got poor marks and were also struck on the hand. (Mr. 39)

Xuyên was respected by the pupils.

The villagers respected Teacher Xuyên, and he had prestige (*uy tín*). (Mr. 39)
He had prestige. The pupils adored (*quí*) him. (Mr. 87)

In the early 1930s, earnest country teachers like him went from one village to another and taught a new generation of villagers.

1.3.3. School Environment

The school stood on the site of present-day Trần Lam Primary School (the site of the former village hall) and consisted of a single room which could hold about fifty people (Mr. 87). There were six long wooden desks which seated five pupils each [Shimao 2001:6] or eight desks seating four pupils each [Shimao 2001:13].

The School of Teacher Xuyên was a three-year school which pupils began attending at the age of six or seven,¹² and for the most part it was attended by children between the ages of seven and twelve by the traditional reckoning (Mr. 39). Xuyên was the only teacher, and the pupils, numbering about thirty,¹³ formed a multiple-grade class in which three grades were taught together.

¹² There were two classes, in the morning and in the afternoon, and the pupils were divided into three grades in accordance with school regulations issued in 1924. Pupils between the ages of seven and nine were known in French as *enfantin*, those aged ten to twelve as *préparatoire*, and those aged eleven to fifteen as *élémentaire* [Shimao 2001:6]. However, each grade included children of different ages.

¹³ Recollections of the number of pupils vary. In 1930 Mr. NTV (now living in Lyon) recalls that there were ten pupils, Mr. 39 that there were about sixty pupils, and Mr. 80 that there were about forty pupils.

Pupils from the three grades studied in a single classroom, and Teacher Xuyên taught by himself. For instance, when the first-grade pupils were practising writing (*bài viết*), the second-grade pupils did mathematics and the third-grade pupils did history. Though it was a combined class, there were no problems. When the teacher was using the blackboard to teach the first-grade pupils, the second-grade pupils worked at exercises by themselves, and they were able to study together. (Mr. 39)

There were all together about forty pupils. They all studied in a single classroom. The first-grade pupils sat near the blackboard, and the third-grade pupils sat at the back of the classroom. The teacher went around the classroom, and when he was teaching one grade, the other grades did exercises. (Mr. 80)

Classes were held every day except Sundays for three hours each in the morning and the afternoon (Mr. 39), and there were fifteen-minute breaks (Mr. 80).

1.3.4. Curriculum

The curriculum followed the Outline of Elementary Education (*sơ học yếu lược*)¹⁴ [Shimao 2001:9, 13, 19]. The subjects taught were French, *Quốc Ngữ* (Romanized Vietnamese), mathematics, geography, history, ethics, and spelling [Shimao 2001:21]. First-grade pupils learnt the alphabet, second-grade pupils addition and subtraction, and third-grade pupils multiplication and division.

1.3.5. French

Among the subjects taught, learning French held the greatest attraction for pupils at the time.

Knowing French had the advantage of making it easy to find employment. French was necessary in order to be able to work together with French people,

¹⁴ The Vietnamese translation of *cours élémentaires*. The textbooks of the *cours élémentaires* were the top bestsellers in French Indochina. They included textbooks on reading, ethics, arithmetic, science, hygiene, geography, gymnastics, and spelling, and the Vietnamese versions were published by the Department of Education of the Government-General. A total of four million copies are said to have been published, and many pirate editions are also said to have been published by Vietnamese [Mantetsu Tōa Keizai Chōsakyoku 1941:448]. Many of the private schools described below also used textbooks of the *cours élémentaires*. The *cours élémentaires* were the source of the basic education of the revolutionary youths who became active after the August Revolution.

and the French employed people who had gone to school and knew some French. (Mr. 39)

At the time, I studied French and Chinese characters at the School of Teacher Xuyên and at a private school, but French was more useful. This was because one could join the French army and become an interpreter. (Mr. 87)

If one knew French, one could get a high salary. One could work as an interpreter, and if one was able to read and write French, one could do work dealing with documents. (Mr. 87)

For young boys in colonial society seeking to get on in the world by being employed by French organizations, the study of French represented the first step on this path.

1.3.6. Teacher Xuyên's Proficiency in French

At the School of Teacher Xuyên, pupils learnt French vocabulary in the second grade and sentences in the third grade [Shimao 2001:9]. But the classes do not seem to have lived up to the pupils' expectations. To begin with, the classes themselves were few in number.

We studied French on Tuesdays and Fridays, and the study time for a single day was short. (Mr. 39)

According to Mr. 87, there was only one French class a week.

We studied French only once a week for about thirty minutes. (Mr. 87)

In content too the classes were quite rudimentary.

When we first started school, we learnt how to read the French alphabet, and then we learnt numbers and the names of the days of the week and the months. The method of studying French was that the teacher wrote on the blackboard and the pupils copied it into their notebooks, and there was no conversation practice. (Mr. 39)

In the French classes we would sometimes read sentences too, but we read only short sentences such as "Bon jour." We did no conversation practice, and it was mainly copying what the teacher wrote. (Mr. 87)

In the French classes we only studied one or two hundred words, and we did not study it in a specialized way. (Mr. 80)

In other words, the classes were short and fairly rudimentary, and there were no conversation classes at all. Ultimately, the three-year course had to end at a quite basic level. There also seem to have been some problems with Xuyên's French.

Teacher Xuyên could hardly speak French at all. (Mr. 39)

Although (Teacher Xuyên) was able to speak French, he was not very good at it. (Mr. 80)

The pupils thus shared doubts about their teacher's proficiency in French. In other words, it was not possible to learn sufficient French at the School of Teacher Xuyên to be of any use later on.

In the end, when going on to a higher-level school as Mr. 39 did, it was necessary to do supplementary study by oneself.

Even after the French lessons ended, I studied with a supplementary textbook that I had bought myself. Everyone bought supplementary textbooks and studied them. (Mr. 39)

1.4. The Pupils

1.4.1. Alumni

Even if one assumes that about twenty pupils entered the School of Teacher Xuyên each year, this would mean that more than three hundred children attended the school during the seventeen years that it operated. But in our investigations we found that only twelve elderly people had attended the school at Bách C c, and a mere three of them had completed the three-year curriculum of the *cours élémentaires*.

The first reason for this was that pupils did not move up to the next grade automatically, and the examination for doing so was quite difficult.

There was no entrance examination. There were no school fees, and about all we did was give a present on teacher's day. There were no restrictions on entry for well-off families or poor families, but many of the children came from well-off families. Even though children from poor families might start school, they were unable to keep up with the lessons. When moving up [to the third grade] the teacher set an examination, and the names of the pupils who would be able to advance to the next grade were posted up. The teacher had discretion over who was able to move up to the next grade, and if you were deemed unsuitable, you had to repeat the grade. (Mr. 39)

In this fashion the majority of pupils dropped out of school without completing the *cours élémentaires*.

I attended the School of Teacher Xuyên for only one year, and soon afterwards I did apprentice training in Nam Định and Hanoi as a hat maker, tailor, and carpenter. (Mr. 41, Hamlet A, born 1927)

Secondly, the youths who were born in the second half of the 1930s and sustained Bách C c after the arrival of peace had been unable to complete the curriculum by the time the School of Teacher Xuyên disappeared in 1947.

I attended the School of Teacher Xuyên in 1946, but I was unable to continue because of the invasion by French forces in 1947. I continued my subsequent studies under Teacher 125, a *thầy đồ*, and had become able to read the alphabet by 1954. (Mr. 2, Hamlet C, born 1936)

1.4.2. Further Education

Graduates of the School of Teacher Xuyên were able to obtain a certificate (*certificat*) and enter a junior high school in Nam Định and elsewhere.¹⁵ In this respect the school was completely different from a private school. Though it was small, the School of Teacher Xuyên was a public school positioned at the lowest level of the French educational system and was the gateway to becoming a member of the élite outside the village. Being a gateway to future success, it had meaning only if one could advance to higher-level schools. But in actual practice very few of those who completed its curriculum were able to enter a higher-level school, and most of them had no choice but to either become factory workers in Nam Định or else remain in the village.

After leaving the School of Teacher Xuyên I farmed or went to work as a hired labourer. I wanted to continue studying, but because my family were only

¹⁵ On completing the first stage of primary school, one was given a *certificat d'étude élémentaire*, followed by a *certificat d'étude primaire franco-indigène* on completing the entire primary school curriculum, whereupon one was able to receive higher primary education (*enseignement primaire supérieur*). At the completion of three years' secondary education, one was given a *brevet de capacité d'enseignement secondaire franco-indigène*, which not only qualified the holder for admission to university, but, following a decree issued by the Government-General in 1927, was deemed to be the equivalent of the *baccalauréat* in France [Mantetsu Tōa Keizai Chōsakyoku 1941:450]. An elementary education was the first step towards becoming one of the colonial élite.

peasants, I was unable to go on to a higher-level school. (Mr. 80)
 After leaving the school [of Teacher Xuyên], only a few of my classmates went to work elsewhere, and the rest became workers (*công nhân*) or farmers. The large majority became farmers. (Mr. 39)

It was impossible for ordinary peasants to advance to a higher-level school.

An exception was Mr. 39 (see below), who was eventually able to enter the Church School of Saint Thomas Cathedral (Trường Nhà Thờ Cơ S Xanh Ta Ma)¹⁶ because his father and an elder brother worked at Nam Định Textile Factory (Nhà Máy Dệt Nam Định).

That I was able to enter junior high school was because I had an elder brother in Nam Định to whom I could turn for assistance, and others were unable to attend because of financial problems such as living expenses. (Without help from an elder brother, Mr. 39 would not have been able to enter junior high school.) (Mr. 39)

1.4.3. *Leading Members of Local Society*

The School of Teacher Xuyên, which started in 1930, had an enormous impact on the children of peasants of the middle stratum and above. Mr. 80, who came from a poor peasant family and became acquainted with writing for the first time by attending the School of Teacher Xuyên, sets high value on the school's significance for those belonging to the generation of the revolution and economic growth.

My foremost memento from the School of Teacher Xuyên is that I learnt how to write. Without the School of Teacher Xuyên, I would have been unable to read and write, and without knowing how to read and write, I would have been unable to become an executive of an agricultural cooperative. Reading and writing are necessary for the growth of society. If one can't read or write, one can't do anything; the revolution would not have been accomplished, and there would be no economic growth.

In point of fact, many of the executives who joined the low-level agricultural cooperatives (*hợp tác xã bậc thấp*) and remained active in the high-level agricultural cooperatives (*hợp tác xã bậc cao*) until the mid-1980s were graduates of the

¹⁶ Today the former buildings of Saint Thomas Cathedral, on Nguyễn Du Road in Nam Định, house the Nam Định Bureau of Moral Education (S Giáo Dục Đào Tạo Nam Định) and Nam Định Nguyễn Quyền General High School (Trường Phổ Thông Trung Học Nam Định Nguyễn Quyền).

School of Teacher Xuyên.

(1) Mr. 14 (Hamlet B, born 1936) attended the School of Teacher Xuyên for a total of four years. He was born into a family of the upper-middle tier who owned 4 *sào* of paddy fields, 2 *sào* of dry fields, and 1 *sào* of residential land. According to the assessment at the time of the land reforms, the family were “well-off middle farmers” (*trung nông khá*). Mr. 14 began attending the School of Teacher Xuyên in 1943 and continued doing so until 1947, but was then no longer able to do so because of incursions by the French army. The family took refuge in Hiền Khánh Commune in the same Vụ Bản District. They returned around 1948, but Mr. 14 missed out on any further opportunity to go to school and continued helping his father farming. After the restoration of peace, he was active in the middle echelon of the youth group (*đoàn thanh niên*), and he was certified as an “upper middle farmer” (*trung nông trên*) in the land reforms. He also participated in the labour exchange team (*tổ đổi công*) movement, but shortly before the establishment of the agricultural commune he joined the People’s Army in 1959. He was attached to an artillery unit. He left the army in 1972 with the rank of sergeant major. He was mainly in charge of training soldiers (*rèn quân*). After leaving the army, he became first the vice-chairman of Thành Lợi Commune and then served as chairman from 1984 to 1989 and as party secretary from 1989 to 1996, becoming one of the most powerful figures in the village. Among former pupils of the School of Teacher Xuyên still in the village, he is an example of someone who rose to the highest position in the local community. But his career until his enlistment in the army was fairly ordinary, and his advancement began after his discharge from the army in 1972. He is an expert in army education, and this has determined his rise since having left the army. The School of Teacher Xuyên had no direct bearings on this advancement.

(2) Mr. 39 attended the School of Teacher Xuyên for five years, starting in 1935. He was the youngest of five siblings in a family of middle-stratum peasants in Hamlet A who owned about 2,000 square metres of private paddy fields. According to the class divisions as defined at the time of the land reforms, they were “lower-level middle farmers” (*trung nông cấp dưới*). At the wishes of his parents, he attended the School of Teacher Xuyên from the age of seven to twelve by the traditional reckoning (1935–40) and completed the *cours élémentaires*.

As for French, I studied only a very little under Teacher Xuyên. My most lasting impression of Teacher Xuyên is having been praised by him for being a well-behaved pupil (*học sinh ngoan*) and a pupil with good handwriting (*học sinh chữ đẹp*), although he certainly did not say that I was a clever pupil (*học sinh giỏi*). (Because he was well-behaved and had good handwriting, Mr. 39 was a favourite with the teacher.) (Mr. 39)

At the time, his eldest brother (born in 1910) was working in a textile factory in Nam Định, and so in 1941 or 1942 he began attending the Church School of Saint Thomas Cathedral, a higher primary school. He entered the three-year course for elementary primary education (*sơ đẳng tiểu học*) and studied for three years. He was class president. At the time, his dream was to become a junior high school teacher.

I liked studying French and languages. I wanted to study French more. My dream was to become a junior high school teacher. (Mr. 39)

But his dream came to naught on account of the war. In 1945, as the war intensified (with the occupation of Nam Định by Japanese forces), the school was closed just before Mr. 39 was due to complete his course, and he returned home to Bách Cốc, where the wild excitement that followed the August Revolution and the attacks and burning by French forces awaited him. He joined a guerilla unit,¹⁷ and after the arrival of peace in 1954 became the head of the hamlet. His proficiency in French was recognized, and he acted as interpreter for Canadians in Nam Định belonging to International Control Commission to oversee the Implementation of the Geneva Accord. He was still twenty-five years old at the time. At this point he gave up all hopes of working outside the village and switched to the path of a member of the village élite. In 1960 he became the vice-director of the agricultural commune in Hamlet A, and thereafter up until 1986 he served as vice-director in charge of financial affairs and planning, including a period with Bách Cốc Thành High-Level Agricultural Cooperative.

(3) Mr. 80 (Áp Phú, born 1922) was born into a family that owned no private land and had only communal fields. But because his father owned water buffalo and did ploughing for other farmers, the family belonged to the upper-middle tier.

At the age of nine or ten I first learnt some Chinese characters. I then entered the School of Teacher Xuyên, where I studied French and Quốc Ngữ to the level of *élémentaire*. I attended school while working in the fields. There were no school fees. This was the only education I received, and I then worked full-time as a farmer. Around 1938 I went to Hải Phòng to learn sewing techniques. I was invited there by the owner of a sewing factory in Hải Phòng who came from Hamlet Áp Phú. In 1945 I returned home, and thereafter I continued working with my father's water buffalo. (Mr. 80)

¹⁷ Guerilla units formed part of an anti-French armed organization established in villages during the war of resistance against France. In Bách Cốc a self-defence team (*đội tự vệ*) was organized in 1945, and during the resistance it was incorporated into the Tấn Thành guerilla platoon (*trung đội du kích*) [Sakurai 2006:298–99].

After experiences in a guerilla unit and as a prisoner of the French army, from 1954 onwards he taught writing for the mass education (*bình dân học vụ*) movement.¹⁸ He joined Ấp Phú Agricultural Cooperative from the very outset and served as vice-director for agriculture and for cultivation (*thời vụ*).

(4) Mr. 87 (Hamlet A, born 1929) is the same age as Mr. 39. According to the assessment at the time of the land reforms, his family were upper-middle farmers, like Mr. 39. He went as far as the level of an *élémentaire* at the School of Teacher Xuyên. His actual ability was about that of the fourth grade (or someone who had completed primary school under the old system). After participating in a guerilla unit and a labour exchange team, in 1960, when an agricultural cooperative was established in Hamlet A, he became the secretary of the production team, and he subsequently served as head of the production team of Hamlet A until his retirement in 1985.

(5) Mr. NTH (Hamlet Ấp Phú, date of birth unknown, died 1985) was the first treasurer of the Ấp Phú Agricultural Collective mentioned by Mr. 80. After finishing the School of Teacher Xuyên, he attended a higher primary school in Nam Định.

The careers of the four men (2) to (5) are very similar. They came from comparatively well-to-do middle-stratum peasant families, have an attachment for the School of Teacher Xuyên, and dreamed of entering a higher-level school, but they abandoned these dreams for economic reasons and because of war. Since the high-ranking officials of the early agricultural cooperatives had had almost no education, these men held rather specialized positions in charge of accounts, financial affairs, cultivation, and so on, but they did not become members of the central executives of the cooperatives.

Mr. 87 failed to become head of a production team. The reason for this can be sought first in the fact that he came from a family of middle farmers (*trung nông*). Those who had formerly been landowners (*địa chủ*), well-off farmers (*phú nông*), or middle farmers were unable to become cooperative executives, and only poor farmers are said to have been able to assume leadership of cooperatives. Secondly, the qualifications for head of the production team did not require much in the way of academic credentials, and instead it was necessary to be good at farming, be sociable, and receive an endorsement from a higher organization. Therefore, anyone with certain qualifications could become head of a production team, and in point of fact during the time when Mr. 87 was secretary, the head of the production unit changed four times while the secretary remained unchanged. The third reason was that people who had mathematical competence, could keep accounts, and had many years of experience, like Mr. 87, could not be easily replaced.

¹⁸ A youth class movement launched twice, in 1945 and 1954, to eradicate illiteracy [Sakurai 2006:317–19].

The sons of families in a position to allow them to finish the School of Teacher Xuyên were valued in cooperatives for their technical expertise and constituted the middle echelon.

1.4.4. School Leavers

Those who dropped out of the School of Teacher Xuyên, forming the majority of former pupils, are active as the working executives of cooperatives.

(6) Mr. 41 became a land registrar under the new government established after the August Revolution and directed the distribution of former communal field. In 1947 he joined the resistance and did work related to public security in the commune. Under the cooperative movement he became chairman of the management committee of the agricultural cooperative in Hamlet A. After having studied for one year in 1960 at the veterinary school of Vụ Bản District, he became the cooperative veterinarian in 1961 and worked until 1998. Since then he has been active as the central figure in the revival of religious ceremonies in Bách C c.

(7) Mr. 2 served from 1961 to 1983 as head of the cooperative's production team in Hamlet C.

(8) Mr. 43 (Hamlet A, born 1938) was born into a family with 5 *sào* of private land and 2 *sào* of communal rice fields. He attended the School of Teacher Xuyên in 1945 prior to liberation, but after only one year he moved to a school in the neighbouring village of Tấn Thành. In 1952 he went to Nam Định, where he attended a private school, but left in 1953 and returned to his home village. From 1954 to 1958 he attended Trần Lam School, the successor to the School of Teacher Xuyên. In 1960 he joined the People's Army and remained in the army until 1984, when he retired with the rank of captain (*thượng úy*), and thereafter he served as party secretary of Hamlet A.

(9) Mr. 45 (Hamlet A, born 1935) was born into a family who had no private land and were allotted 3 *sào* of communal rice fields. He attended the School of Teacher Xuyên for three years from 1942. From 1954 onwards he served as secretary of the commune's youth group, was active as an organizer of the land reform movement, and became a leader of the labour exchange team and early cooperative movements. He joined the army in 1960 and was discharged in 1967, after which he supervised air defence in his capacity as company commander in the commune's militia. But he has not been involved in any work for the commune or agricultural cooperative since 1973.¹⁹

At least within the village,²⁰ the School of Teacher Xuyên had meaning as a source of cooperative and party acting executives.

1.4.5. *The End of the School of Teacher Xuyên*

Since the expenses for the School of Teacher Xuyên were borne by the village, it continued to operate regardless of World War II and the August Revolution. But in 1947, when the entire village of Bách Cúc was reduced to ashes by French forces, the school too was burnt to the ground. Xuyên evacuated to Vụ Bản District together with his family and remained there for a time, but he later returned to his home district in Hà Tây Province, where he died without ever returning to Bách Cúc.

2. Private Schools

2.1. *People Unable to Attend Public School*

2.1.1. *The Cultural Élite*

The name “School of Teacher Xuyên” is known to all villagers above a certain age. But for many peasants it was in actual fact a school with which they could have no relationship.

Actual entry to the school had its democratic aspect, being restricted to the children of the canton chief (*chánh tổng*), village chief (*lý trưởng*), village policeman (*xã tuần*), the families of their siblings and friends, and well-to-do families, but in actual fact it represented a “perfunctory training” and was not an education available to the entire population. [Shimao 2001:17]

For those excluded from the world of village notables, even if they belonged in economic terms to the upper-middle tier, the school at Bách Cúc was a remote entity. Mr. 55 (Trại Nội, born 1917) of the upper-middle tier, whose family had 10 *sào* of private land and 2 *sào* of communal land, explicitly states that the School of Teacher Xuyên was a school where the children of village officials went and he

¹⁹ The reason that Mr. 45, who finished the School of Teacher Xuyên and was a leader of the party’s youth organization, as well as serving as a noncommissioned artillery officer in the army, was not treated as a village leader after his discharge from the army would seem to be that in 1967, immediately after his discharge, when he was secretary of the production team of Hamlet A, he submitted a letter to the district authorities critical of the cooperative’s work. Although details are unclear, this action would have been regarded as hostile to the village.

²⁰ Since it has not been possible to conduct follow-up surveys of former pupils of the School of Teacher Xuyên now living outside the village, the school’s significance in activities outside the village is unclear at the present stage.

himself did not go there. He went to a private school and took over the family occupation of ploughing with water buffalo. A particular home culture was necessary in order to attend the School of Teacher Xuyên.

2.1.2. Birth Certificates

Because all expenses for the School of Teacher Xuyên were borne by the village, there was no monthly tuition fee, and there were virtually no other school fees either.

Pupils had no textbooks, and instead they copied into their notebooks what the teacher wrote on the blackboard. We copied all the subjects into a single notebook. (Mr. 87)

Nonetheless, one of the conditions for attending the School of Teacher Xuyên was affluence.

Only the children of well-to-do families could go to school. (Mr. 24, B Hamlet, born 1927)

The School of Teacher Xuyên was a place where the children of village officials went, and commoners did not usually go. (Mr. 55, Trại Nội, born 1917) Mr. 73 (Áp Phú, born 1933) was born into a family allocated 2 *sào* of communal land, and although he tried to attend the School of Teacher Xuyên, he was rejected by the school on grounds of poverty.

The children of poor peasants and still lower-class families generally attest that they were unable to attend the School of Teacher Xuyên. But this is not a very accurate perception, for even the children of poor peasants, such as Mr. 80, were able to attend. The problem was that because their parents had not obtained a birth certificate (*giấy khai sinh*) on account of their poverty, the School of Teacher Xuyên, a public school, was unable to accept them [Shimao 2001:10, 14].

Consequently poor people generally thought of the School of Teacher Xuyên as a school that was not for them.

2.2. Thầy Đồ

For about two-thirds of those allocated communal land, corresponding to about two hundred households, communal land was the only land they had. Hardly any of those from families allocated communal rice fields attended the School of Teacher

Xuyên either. When asked about their first experience of schooling, almost all old people say with evident pride that they attended a *thầy đồ* school (*trường thầy đồ*). The *thầy đồ* was a teacher who taught Chinese learning in villages. In the 1930s such teachers were running private schools throughout Bách Cốc Village. Elderly people fondly cite the names of more than twenty *thầy đồ*.

Hamlet A: (1) Mr. Kim (Ông Kim) (Mr. 42, Mr. 94, Mr. BA [Shimao 2001:5]);

Hamlet B: (2) Mr. Cầu (Ông Cầu) (Mr. 8);

Hamlet C: (3) Luong Uy (Mr. 82), (4) Mr. Thiều (Ông Thiều) (Mr. 82), (5) Nguyễn Thị Qui Liễu²¹ (Mr. 80), (6) Đỗ²² Mĩ (Mr. 75), (7) Mr. 125 (Mr. 75), (8) Cự Nhất Thước, (9) Nguyễn Tài Cảnh (Mr. 75, Mr. 82);

Hamlet Áp Phú: (10) Nguyễn Tha Sinh (Mr. 75, Mr. 76), (11) Đỗ Đồi (Mr. 72), (12) Đỗ Tuệ (Mr. 73);

Hamlet Trại Nội: (13) Đỗ Xan (Mr. 55), (14) Nguyễn Ích Trang (Mr. 75, Mr. 82).

In addition, Mr 56 (Hamlet Trại Nội, born 1927) says there were other teachers in Trại Nội called Đê²³ Trang, Hương²⁴ Huy, Nhất²⁵ Long, and Cái²⁶ Đại.²⁷ In Shimao's investigations [2000:17], mention is made of teachers named Đỗ Lan, Đỗ Thục, and Đỗ Môn. While they do not all belong to the same period, it is to be inferred that there were always two or three private schools operating in each hamlet.

²¹ Information about her was obtained from Mr. 80 on August 1, 2001, but on the occasion of a follow-up investigation by Ōizumi and Ariyoshi on August 10, 2005, her existence was negated.

²² “Đô” is an abbreviation of *đô lý*, a low-ranking district official. “Đô Mối” therefore signifies a Mr. Mối who was a district official.

²³ “Đê” is an abbreviation of *đê lý*, a low-ranking district official.

²⁴ “Hương” is probably an abbreviation of “Ông Hương,” a popular reference to the hamlet representative *tộc biểu*, or an abbreviation of *hương trưởng*, or “village chief.”

²⁵ “Nhất” refers to *đội nhất trường*, a noncommissioned section commander (Mr. 56).

²⁶ “Cái” is an abbreviation of *cái đội*, a noncommissioned officer.

²⁷ According to inquiries conducted by Shimao and others, the last-mentioned was Mr. 125's father. He served as an interpreter for the French army, but was expelled from the army for gambling. His title from his time in the army presumably continued to be used [Shimao 2001:19].

2.3. Teaching Methods

2.3.1. Size

The private schools varied in size, but usually they had from five or six to ten pupils.²⁸ But even so the total number of pupils would have easily exceeded one hundred, and in scale they surpassed that of the School of Teacher Xuyên.

2.3.2. Classrooms

The classroom was in the teacher's home. Classes were held daily from 6:30 to 10:00 in the morning and from about 3:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon. The teacher wore a black jacket and white trousers, characteristic of a *thầy đồ*, and sat on a bed in the main room at the center of the house while the pupils sat on rush mats spread over the earthen floor [Shimao 2001:9].

2.3.3. Method of Instruction

Pupils were first taught how to hold a brush [Shimao 2001:9] and were then made to memorize a text (*quả văn*), after which they were taught its meaning. They placed a piece of paper over a copy of the text written by the teacher and traced the characters. They read the text out aloud and memorized it, and the following day the teacher would check whether or not they had remembered it. When called by the teacher, the pupils would fold their arms in front of them and recite the text aloud. If they made a mistake, the teacher would draw a circle in black ink around their mouth [Shimao 2001:5]. Every day they practised writing four lines in the morning and reading them in the afternoon [Shimao 2001:9].²⁹ The teacher had a rod, and if an answer to one of his questions was incorrect, he lashed the pupil. If one did badly, one was made to stand facing the wall or to assist the teacher in his chores [Shimao 2001:17]. Mr. BD had his uncle help him with his lessons, but if he could not remember the text, a torn towel was placed over his head, and whenever he met someone in the street he had to say, "Today I didn't remember the text" [Shimao

²⁸ The largest private school was that run by Mr. 125 in Hamlet C, which for a time was attended by more than twenty pupils from each hamlet, making a total roll of more than ninety pupils (Mr. 75). This school was, however, started after the destruction of the School of Teacher Xuyên.

²⁹ There appear to have been various methods of instruction, and Mr. 97 of Dương Lai (born in 1934), who attended the private school of a *thầy đồ* named Trần Xuân Hồng, says that he was taught one Chinese character each day.

2001:19].

2.4. Curriculum

2.4.1. Chinese texts

The basis of the classes taught by the *thầy đồ* was the traditional education in classical Chinese. Mr. BA remembers the texts used by his father NK, who was a teacher.

Tam Tự Kinh 三字經 (Three-character classic) (year one, completed in three months), *Tứ Tự Kinh* 四字經 (Four-character classic) (year one), *Ngũ Tự Kinh* 五字經 (Five-character classic) (year two, completed in five months), *Đại Học* 大學 (Great learning) (year one), *Luận Ngữ* 論語 (Analects) (year two). (Mr. BA [Shimao 2001:6])

According to Mr. 101,

They completed the *Thiên Nam Tứ Tự Kinh* 天南四字經 and *Áu Học Ngũ Ngôn Thi* 幼學五言詩 (Five-syllable poems for children) in two years and then went on to the *Minh đạo* 明道, *Sử Thượng* 史上 and *Sử Hạ* 史下. [Shimao 2001:9]

According to Mr. NB,

They progressed through the *Tam Tự Kinh*, *Áu Học Hán Tự Tân Thư* 幼學漢字新書, *Sử Địa* 史地. [Shimao 2001:17]

At the school run by Cụ Nhất in Hamlet C the following texts were used:

Tam Tự Kinh, *Luận Ngữ*, *Trung Dung* 中庸 (The mean), *Đại Học*, *Thi Kinh* 詩經 (Book of songs), *Thư Kinh* 書經 (Classic of history), etc. (Mr. 25, Hamlet Phú Cốc, born 1924)

It would seem that the textbooks used in the curriculum for classical Chinese were more or less fixed. The teachers probably followed traditional teaching methods that had been passed down over the generations.

2.4.2. *Quốc Ngữ Education*

Worthy of note is the fact that from the 1930s onwards the *thầy đồ* in Bách C c actively taught Qu c Ngữ alongside Chinese. According to Mr. 56, ĐỀ Trang, Nhất Long, and Cái Đại all taught Qu c Ngữ. Mr. 82 (Hamlet B, born 1927) learnt classical Chinese and Qu c Ngữ at the schools run by Lương Uy and Đô Thiều among the teachers mentioned by Mr. 56. Mr. 72 (Áp Phú, born 1920), who attended Đô Đôi's school in Hamlet Áp Phú, studied classical Chinese for six years and then studied Qu c Ngữ for two years. Mr. 58 (Hamlet³⁰ Phú C c, born 1930) and Mr. 68 (Hamlet Phú C c, born 1929) learnt classical Chinese and Qu c Ngữ at the school of Cụ Chánh Trọng. Mr. 25 (Hamlet Phú C c, born 1924) had the same experience at probably the same school. Mr. 80 learnt Qu c Ngữ from Nguyễn Thị Qui Liễu, a woman teacher, in the early 1930s and then studied it at the school of Mr. 125. In particular, Cái Đại of Hamlet C opened a school for Qu c Ngữ in 1941, and Mr. 125 and Mr. 72 also studied Qu c Ngữ there [Shimao 2001:17]. There also appear to have been teachers like Hàng of Dương Lai village who stubbornly taught only Chinese characters (Mr. 97; Mr. 124, Hamlet Dương Lai Trong, born 1935), but by the 1940s most teachers were teaching Qu c Ngữ.

2.4.3. *Level of Education*

According to Mr. 42, the private school of Teacher Kinh in Hamlet A offered the equivalent of three full years at a public school, while Mr. 75, who finished Mr. 125's school, says that its level was that of the fourth grade. Mr. 61 (Hamlet Phú C c, born 1924) initially studied Chinese characters at a private school in Phú C c village, but because the teacher died, he went to a private school in the neighbouring village of Xa Trung, where he continued studying Chinese characters for seven or eight years. At this school, Qu c Ngữ was taught in accordance with the *cours élémentaires*.³¹

³⁰ Phú C c Village became a hamlet of C c Thành Village then Thành Lợi Commune after 1945.

³¹ Mr. 64 (born 1937) of Hamlet Phú Cốc, where there was no public school, even refers to the private school of the *thầy đồ* (probably Cụ Chánh Trọng) of Hamlet Phú Cốc as the "village school" (*trường làng*). Those who wished to attend a public school in Hamlet Phú Cốc had no choice but to go to the school attached to the church in the village of Xa Trung. The School of Teacher Xuyên was the village school of Bách Cốc, and virtually no children from Hamlet Phú Cốc, which had no landowners, went to schools in Nam Định or Ninh Bình.

2.5. School Fees

The *thầy đồ* did not take any monthly tuition fees.³² As well as giving them seasonal gifts, the pupils would, for example, help repair the roof of the *thầy đồ*'s house. In the case of Đô Xan of Trại Nội, the pupils clubbed together to help repair his house (Mr. 55, Hamlet Trại Nội, born 1917). Mr. 101, who came from a poor family, would give the *thầy đồ* rice cakes (*bánh chưng*),³³ a five-fruit tray (*mâm ngũ quả*),³⁴ and 3 *hào*³⁵ in cash at the New Year (Tết) and 5 *hào* or one kilogramme of yellow sugar and red honey on the Double Five Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month (Đoan Ngọ) [Shimao 2001:10].

Villagers respected the *thầy đồ*, and when they met him in the street, they would greet him politely. They also gave him sugar, tea, cakes, bananas, and so on at the New Year. There was also an alumni fund (*quý đồng môn*) to which present and past pupils of the same school contributed [Shimao 2001:17]. Each person gave one basket of unhulled rice (*một thúng thóc*), which was managed by a representative (*trưởng tráng*) of the alumni, and it was loaned to raise funds for the alumni [Shimao 2001:10].

2.6. The Pupils

2.6.1. Private Schools as Schools for Children of Lower-Middle Families

Among twenty-nine people who attended private schools run by *thầy đồ* (eighteen in Bách C c Village, eight in Phú C c Village, and three in Dương Lai Trong Village), nineteen came from families allotted communal land, five from families with no allocation of communal land, four from families whose circumstances regarding communal land are not known, and one from a family from outside the village. Those who attended the private schools of *thầy đồ* were in the main the children of full-fledged villagers entitled to communal land. There were seven families owning private land and nineteen families who had no private land. The majority thus did not own any private land. On the other hand, there were only three families who had neither communal land nor private land. The private schools of *thầy*

³² Almost all the old people say there were no tuition fees, but Mr. BA alone states that pupils handed the teacher a voluntary sum of money at the New Year [Shimao 2001:5].

³³ Steamed rice cakes made of glutinous rice and stuffed with pork; they are prepared for the New Year.

³⁴ A tray with five kinds of fruit offered to ancestors at the New Year and at other festivals. The fruits vary depending on the locality and season, but they usually include bananas and mangoes.

³⁵ One-tenth of a piastre (*đồng*), the key currency.

đồ were above all schools for the children of lower-middle families, and in the 1930s they were places where the children of families excluded from the School of Teacher Xuyên studied a replica of modern education centred on Qu c Ngữ.³⁶

Mr. NB disliked going to a private school. This was because he was always hungry, the teacher often beat him, and he did not do very well at school, but his parents made him go [Shimao 2001:17]. The schools of *thầy đồ* grew out of the strong desire of poor parents to have their children learn how to read and write.

But these schools were not public schools, and naturally there was no certificate of completion. The path to advancement to a higher-level school was therefore closed to their pupils. A large gulf came to separate the lives of middle-stratum villagers, namely, a gulf between those who attended Bách C c School and had a diploma which entitled them to go on to a higher-level school and those who studied at private schools and had no qualifications that opened up opportunities in the outside world. The only options available to pupils of private schools were either to remain in the village and continue as petty farmers or to rely on personal contacts to leave the village. Many of them chose the latter course [Sakurai 2006:279–87], and after the revolution they went on to assume leadership of the village.

For instance, Mr. 56 (Hamlet Trại Nội, born 1927), who in 1959 started an early agricultural cooperative in the hamlet of Trại Nội, had been unable to attend the School of Teacher Xuyên and had learnt classical Chinese and Qu c Ngữ from his father and at a private school. Later, when higher-level cooperatives developed, he became vice-director of C c Thành Agricultural Cooperative [Sakurai 2006:365]. Mr. 8 (Hamlet B, born 1920), who at the time of the land reforms assumed local leadership as a member of the peasants' association (*nông hội*) and in 1959 started an agricultural cooperative in Hamlet B, had also attended a private school, as had two of the vice-directors [Sakurai 2006:366]. Many other leading members of the early cooperatives had received their education only at private schools. Former pupils of private schools became a source of directors, vice-directors, and other high-ranking officials at the time when the early agricultural cooperatives were being established.

³⁶ There was naturally antagonism between pupils of the School of Teacher Xuyên and pupils of private schools run by *thầy đồ*. Pupils of the School of Teacher Xuyên made fun of the pupils of private schools by singing the following song: “Pupils of the writing of the south (i.e., traditional learning) are headstrong and braggarts” (*Học trò chữ Nam ăn tham nói phét*). In response, pupils of private schools taunted the pupils of public schools, saying, “Pupils of the writing of the north wet their pants” (*Học trò Tây ỉa đày ra quần*) [Shimao 2001:20–21].

3. The Private School of Mr. 125

3.1. Mr. 125

The School of Teacher Xuyên came to an end in 1947 with the invasion by French forces. The Việt Minh régime subsequently made repeated efforts to rebuild the school, but the teachers who were sent to the village were taken captive by the French.³⁷ During this time Mr. 125, Xuyên's son-in-law and a leader of mass education, opened a private school for adults and for children to replace the School of Teacher Xuyên. During the day he taught children and at night adults.

Mr. 125 was born in 1919 in Hamlet Ấp Phú. He came from a lower-middle family who had only 2 *sào* of communal land and no private land. His father Cái Đại was a teacher in the neighbouring district of Mỹ Lộc and later started a private school in Hamlet C. Between the ages of nine and fifteen Mr. 125 studied Qu c Ngữ under his father, and he then went to Hanoi, where he worked as a shoemaker and a tailor. In 1944, following discussions between his father and Xuyên, he married Xuyên's daughter by his first wife, and in 1945 he returned to Bách C c, where he engaged in farming.

Although Mr. 125, having been educated at home, had not attended the School of Teacher Xuyên, he had great respect for his father-in-law Xuyên. When the School of Teacher Xuyên disappeared, he thus followed in the footsteps of Xuyên and opened a private school.

My classes were for commoners (*bình dân*). It was a home school (*trường gia đình*). I began teaching after Teacher Xuyên returned to Hà Tây. The reason that I started classes was that at the time there were not enough teachers, and well-informed people needed to become teachers and teach. I taught while farming. The main subjects were reading and writing the alphabet, Vietnamese and arithmetic, and I taught them at primary-school level. During the war, there was no place for studying, and so I used a temple to teach. I didn't charge any tuition fees. (Mr. 125)

3.2. Size

The number of pupils varied from year to year, ranging from five to ten or twenty. Any pupils who wished to attend the classes could do so (Mr. 125). Mr. 2 began to

³⁷ Textbooks were supplied by the Việt Minh régime, and they were brought to the village by a Mr. Co (Ông Co) and a Mr. Đô (Ông Đô), who were later arrested by French forces [Shimao 2001:19].

attend Mr. 125's private school in Hamlet C in 1949. He says that at the time there were already thirty to forty pupils. According to Mr. 96 (Hamlet B, born 1938), who attended Mr. 125's school from 1954 to 1956, at the time between forty and fifty pupils were gathering at Mr. 125's school, and they included girls.

Even after the school system was established, Mr. 125 continued teaching at home until about 1990. Pupils who wanted to study or pupils who were poor at schoolwork came for supplementary lessons. Among the pupils who attended his classes there were even some who went on to university. Mr. 125 held classes during the day at times when there were no regular school classes. There were three to four hours of classes daily from Monday to Friday. Even now he claims to be able to teach pupils from grade one to about grade seven. (Mr. 125)

3.3. Middle-Rank Officials of the Next Generation

Insofar that Mr. 125's school was a volunteer activity by a village intellectual and was a school with no fees run in a private home, it followed in the traditions of the earlier private schools run by *thầy đồ*. But it was not a school for teaching classical Chinese, nor was it a place for teaching morals. It was a place for providing a minimum education for village youth who had lost a place for learning at a time of war.

But after the establishment of the Hamlet Ấp Phú Agricultural Cooperative in 1959 Mr. 125 himself served as treasurer of the cooperative, and he later served as treasurer of the agricultural cooperative in Hamlet C. He was a central figure in the early cooperative movement in Hamlet C. This means that the next generation of leaders of Hamlet C and Ấp Phú emerged from his school.

For example, Mr. 73 (Hamlet Ấp Phú, born 1933), who was able to attend the School of Teacher Xuyên for only one year on account of the war, received additional education (*học thêm*) from 1956 at Mr. 125's school. Mr. 73 started the Ấp Phú Agricultural Cooperative together with Mr. 125, and subsequently served as secretary of its production team. Mr. 96 (Hamlet B, born 1938) had also attended the School of Teacher Xuyên for only two years, but from 1954 he attended Mr. 125's school for two years and was later in charge of accounts at the agricultural cooperatives of Hamlets A and B and C c Thành Agricultural Cooperative.

Mr. 125's school served a transitional role which combined the modern education of the School of Teacher Xuyên, a public school for children from families of the middle stratum and above, with the traditional education of the *thầy đồ*, whose private schools were open to children from families of the middle stratum and below, and linked them to the present educational system.

4. Children Unable to Attend Public or Private Schools

4.1. The Illiterate

Among the informants, there were twenty people who said they had been unable to attend any kind of school, including schools of the mass education movement after the revolution, because they were poor or conditions did not allow them to do so. In addition, nine old people said that they had studied only through the mass education movement. Most of them are today still virtually unable to read. Fifteen of these are women. Prior to the revolution, all women in Bách Cúc were excluded from education.

4.2. Males

Table 1 divides by age the fourteen males among the twenty-nine illiterate informants and compares them with those of the same age group who attended some form of school.

Table 1. Ratio of Illiterate Males

Birth Decade	No Schooling	Some Schooling	Total
1910s		5	5
1920s	4	17	21
1930s	10	22	32
	14	44	58

It is true that because we were interviewing informants recommended by the cooperatives, the informants included many intellectual elderly people, and the ratio of those who had some form of schooling is on the high side. The figures are also influenced by the fact that the oldest people, born in the 1910s, all attended private schools. In addition, the great famine of 1945 had the greatest impact on the illiterate, and therefore the ratio of illiterate males with no schooling who are alive today tends to be low. Even so, the number of males from Bách Cúc born in the 1920s and later who attended school is quite large, and the ratio of males with no schooling may be considered to be 25–30 percent of the total number of males of the same age group.

The ratio of those with no schooling more or less coincides with the ratio of the number of low-stratum peasant households. In point of fact, none of the four-

teen illiterate males (excluding one whose circumstances are not known) came from a family owning private land. Six of those with no schooling came from families who were allotted communal land. Thus, many of those whose illiteracy was due to a lack of schooling came from low-stratum families with neither private nor communal rice fields, and some of them came from lower-middle families who farmed only communal rice fields. Whether or not a family possessed land had a decisive influence on the literacy of the children.

4.3. *Females*

Almost all women were excluded from the various forms of education,³⁸ and even the families of landowners intent on giving their children a good education, such as the Vũ Thiện family,³⁹ were no exception. According to Mr. Vũ Thiện Vinh, the head of the family, his four sisters were all illiterate. Both Ms. 29 (born 1929), who was born into a family with 5 *mẫu* of paddy fields and 2 *mẫu* of dry fields in Hamlet Trại Nội, and Ms. 32 (born 1942), born into a family with 3 *mẫu* of paddy fields in Hamlet A, had no schooling at all and were illiterate until the advent of mass education movement. According to Mr. NB, about two-thirds of the children did not attend any school at all [Shimao 2001:16]. This is roughly equivalent to the total number of females, who accounted for about 50 percent of the children, plus the illiterate males.

4.4. *Literate Females*

Seven of the women informants had had some form of schooling, and the two who were born in Bách C c were both born after 1949, were of school age in 1954, and finished primary school at Trần Lam School. Ms. 89 (Hamlet C, born 1940), who today lives in Hamlet C, finished third grade at the village school in the village of Kim Thái, where her parental home was, in the same district. Ms. 99 (Hamlet C, born 1937) completed third grade at Trịnh Xuyên Village across the road from Đường Lai where her parental home was. The cooperative movement in Hamlet C was sustained by outside women with an education such as these, who married men from the hamlet.⁴⁰

³⁸ However, during the 1940s there were some, though not many, girls attending the School of Teacher Xuyên called Lan, Ngọc, Hiền, and Hoa. Ms. Lan family in Hamlet C has died, and the others too have all passed away. At the time, parents were of the view that girls did not go to school, and so there were few girls at school (Mr. 39).

³⁹ A representative landowning family of Hamlet C whose members became government officials. Mr. Vinh, the head of the family, lives in Lyon.

The majority of elderly women in Bách Cúc have no experience of having worked outside the village, and a major reason for this is that they were illiterate. Further, the tribulations at the time of the war of resistance against France weighed most heavily on these illiterate women. Schooling for almost all women born in Bách Cúc began with the adults' school of the mass education movement from 1955 onwards. The revolution for women started with learning the letters of the alphabet [Sakurai 2006:317–19].

Concluding Remarks

In the above, I have considered the circumstances surrounding education in the former village of Bách Cúc from the 1930s through to the time around the start of the war of resistance against France. In the villages of northern Vietnam there had developed private schools run by teachers traditionally called *thầy đồ*, and the objective of this village education was to grant qualifications to the children of the village élite or to provide the first step to the outside world of officialdom through the civil service examinations. But with the abolition of these examinations and the creation of a colonial élite, the meaning of the education provided by private village schools was confined to the preservation of traditional culture. In their place, the School of Teacher Xuyên, a public village school, was built around 1930, and it instructed children of the upper-middle tier in the regular basic curriculum (*cours élémentaires*) of French and Quốc Ngữ. This took the place of the former private schools in guaranteeing the creation of a village élite and advancement to higher-level schools. But because of the level of education provided and economic limitations, very few pupils managed to go on to higher-level schools, and the political situation from 1941 onwards destroyed this possibility. Many of the former pupils of the School of Teacher Xuyên who remained in the village became middle-ranking technocrats in the subsequent development of cooperatives in the village. Meanwhile, for the children of lower-middle families unable to attend the School of Teacher Xuyên because of economic or cultural factors there existed many pri-

⁴⁰ Of great interest is the fact that there was a woman teacher among the *thầy đồ* in Hamlet Ấp Phú. As was noted above, it was impossible for women, including those from landowning families, to receive an education in Bách Cúc society. Thus, there could not have been a woman teacher of classical Chinese. But a woman teacher by the name of Nguyễn Thị Qui Liêu settled in Hamlet Ấp Phú at the start of the 1930s. She taught young children mainly French and Quốc Ngữ, and Mr. 80, who later became a vice-director of Thành Lợi Agricultural Cooperative, was one of her pupils. A woman shrouded in mystery, she died of starvation during the great famine of 1945. What sort of woman would she have been? This tragedy of a female intellectual leading a secluded life in a village during the 1930s piques one's interest in hidden aspects of modern Vietnamese history.

private schools. While imparting a traditional education in classical Chinese, the private schools also provided a modern education centred on *Quốc Ngữ*, and there even emerged some private schools that used textbooks of the *cours élémentaires* as their texts. But private schools granted no graduation diploma, and one could not go on from a private school to a higher-level school. Many of the pupils of private schools elected the path of finding employment outside the village, and after 1945 they returned to the village and became leading figures in the socialization of the village and the building of the earlier cooperatives.

Meanwhile, after the collapse of the School of Teacher Xuyên, a private school providing a basic modern education was established from 1947 to 1954 by Xuyên's son-in-law, and it was attended by many young people with no school to go to. The pupils of this school formed the actual working teams of the next generation in the cooperatives, such as the production teams. The cooperatives of the period of collective farming, until 1981, were headed by pupils of the former private schools and had former pupils of the School of Teacher Xuyên in their middle management, while former pupils of this private school were in charge of production teams and so on. The realities of the construction of socialist villages in Vietnam were sustained by a skilful division of roles among people who had grown up in a formerly hierarchically differentiated educational system.

Since the 1980s, people who had completed the basic formal curriculum and experienced a long period of enlistment in the army have taken charge of the new cooperatives. I hope to discuss the education that has underpinned leadership in the new system of cooperatives on another occasion.

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