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## Power Struggles and Social Positioning: Culinary Appropriation and Anxiety in Colonial Vietnam

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### Introduction

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote in 1825 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” Those first two words, “tell me,” are key: what we say about what we eat reveals so much about how we see ourselves and others (Ferguson 2004, 31–33). Since food is a relatively affordable part of everyone’s daily life, food choices signify more than just economic decisions. People send many signals when they talk about what they eat and what they refuse to eat. People also reference food when signaling what they think of others. In Vietnam during the French colonial period, language about food uncovered people’s anxieties about the changing social hierarchy.

People saw themselves as having more options than their grandparents, and their choices spoke about their aspirations and anxieties for where they and their children would end up in the colonial order. That is not to say that Vietnamese people ate French food to assimilate into French

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society, that a Chinese husband ate his Vietnamese wife's local dishes to feel Vietnamese, or that French people at a Vietnamese banquet were trying to "go native." Eating unfamiliar food does not lead to assimilation; more often people try new dishes or ingredients out of necessity, curiosity, or in an effort to rise in social status.

The French incorporated Vietnam into the larger Southeast Asian colony of French Indochina, along with Cambodia and Laos. Cities flourished in the new colony and people of very different backgrounds jostled each other in the streets every day. Everyone in this colonial world—whether Vietnamese, French, Chinese, Indian, Cambodian, Hmong, Malay, Cham, or a mix of ethnicities and cultural experiences—saw other people eating different foods with different table manners. They recognized that they could borrow from each other's cuisines, whether with careful preparation and significant expense or else spontaneously, in the street, away from one's home village and the judgment of one's extended family. One was only limited by the prices charged in stores and restaurants in relation to one's purse, by anxiety over others' views, and by one's willingness to try the unfamiliar.

Textual evidence suggests French people bore the most anxiety in the colonial environment, as seen in the cultural norm they established against eating local dishes. After losing to the Prussians in 1870, French national pride tumbled. As they tried to rebuild, French nationalists relied on touchstones such as the international reputation of grand French cuisine (Ferguson 2004, 124; Laudan 2013, 280–290).

In colonial Indochina, French people wrote about their French dining practices as if they had accurately recreated familiar dishes in the colony, eliding the many culinary compromises they had to make due to the distance from France. French hotels in the colony, for instance, avoided any trace of Asian cuisine on their menus. In 1894 one French publisher stressed to readers back in France that white people in the colony only ate proper French food: "we do not live on rice, fish and bananas" (*Le Mékong*: April 2, 1894, 2).<sup>1</sup> As late as 1927, a young French soldier refused to try a bowl of *phở*, writing to a friend that although the soup looked appetizing, "I wouldn't taste it 'for an empire'" (Tardieu and Heurgon 2004, 76). The jocular idiom he chose has a bitter aftertaste, since he had come to Hanoi as an active agent of French imperial power.

Cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall, Michel Foucault, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have analyzed how power is never univocal, never

only exerted by the rulers upon the ruled. Resistance and power are two faces of the same phenomenon, as social actors struggle over control, collusion, and consent (Hall 1997, 50–51; Spivak 1981, 158–171). The overt exercise of power—in the form of tax collectors, policemen, or a French woman running a household of Asian servants—has a systemic effect on ordinary people who encounter that power and respond to it, which in turn means that everyday decisions to avoid or engage, to complain or challenge, to taste new dishes or refuse them have real consequences on social structures. French imperialism developed its harshest aspects out of anxiety over colonial populations who undermined the hierarchical division between colonizer and colonized, casting the French as illegitimate foreign usurpers rather than a powerful master race on a civilizing mission. The same “mission civilisatrice” which justified French colonialism also provided grounds for criticizing the French regime when it did not deliver on its promise to protect the local people from hardship (Conklin 1997, 145).

As a historian, I use contemporary advertisements, travel narratives, administrative reports, ethnographies, folktales, missionary correspondence, and newspaper editorials as the source material to investigate how new food practices disrupted rigid social hierarchies, whether those hierarchies had long been in place or emerged during the colonial era. This chapter does not claim that French colonial cuisine reflected a uniquely French kind of anxiety. The point is rather that people in positions of power and command are especially prone to anxiety around their food practices at those moments when their hold on power feels illegitimate and vulnerable. Food represents what we are willing to incorporate into our bodies, and those aspiring to rise in society expressed more openness toward trying new ingredients and new dishes than those fearful of losing their social position.

## Culinary Accommodations Before the French Conquest

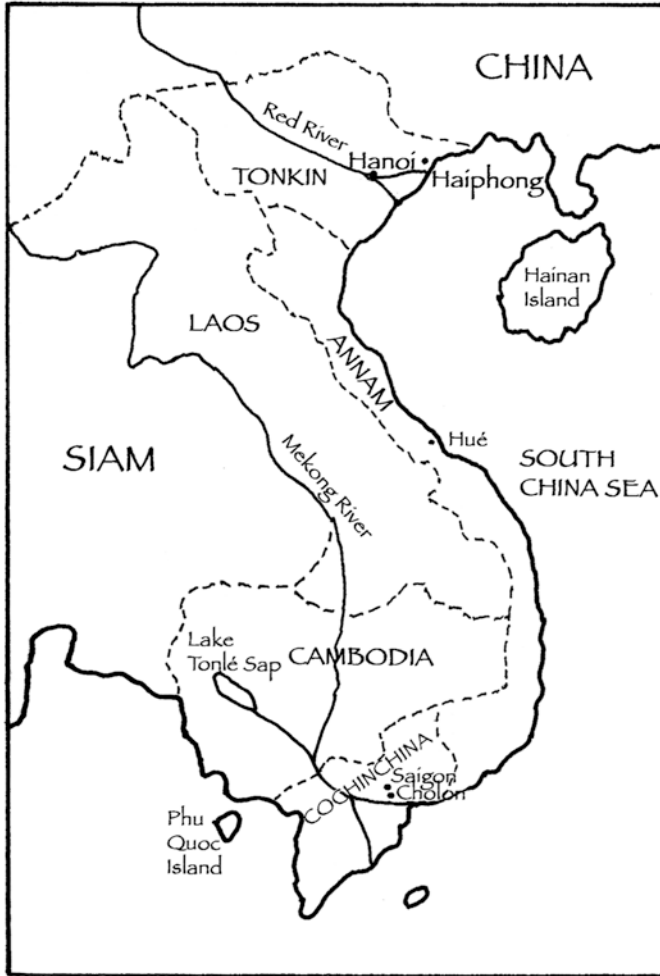
In the region we now call Vietnam, colonial forms of dominance started long before the French military arrived in the nineteenth century. The Việt people originally inhabited the Red River Delta and faced sporadic

imperial incursions from China even after formal Chinese rule in the region ended in the early tenth century. The Chinese brought a culture of wet-rice agriculture and chopsticks to a region where people had eaten sticky rice wrapped in fragrant leaves, along with molluscs, root vegetables, fruits, and meat from hunting (Lien 2016, 35). The Việt people then carried the wet rice and chopsticks culture further south as they themselves colonized regions which had been Cham, Malay, Khmer, or controlled by uplanders, part of ongoing shifts in local control in mainland Southeast Asia (Tana 1998, 145).

As we will see below, the French would later seize control, taking the southern region (then called Cochinchina) in the 1860s and 20 years later the central and northern regions (Annam and Tonkin). By the turn of the twentieth century, the unified colony of French Indochina, comprising what we now consider Vietnam along with Cambodia and Laos, would be overseen by a French administration in Hanoi (Goscha 2016, 87). In the days of French colonialism, however, local memories of long vanished invaders would serve to undermine French claims to be building something permanent. Food sometimes played a key role in these narratives (Fig. 2.1).

In a folktale supposedly dating back to the period when the Bạc Liêu/Sóc Trăng region of the Mekong Delta was under Khmer (Cambodian) control, for instance, the storytellers represented food practices as anxiety-producing even for the powerful. When the Siamese military invaded Angkor in the fifteenth century, the Khmer king fled further south to the Mekong Delta. He took as a wife a very talented cook, named Cấn. Her background was probably Khmer Krom, a people who lived in maritime villages along the southern coast. Their villages had long served as outposts for the otherwise land-locked Khmer empire in far-off Angkor.

As the king's consort, Cấn used her long nails to measure out seasonings, preparing all her dishes precisely to his taste. The king found her food amazing and sent spies to watch her in the kitchen. Horrified by her methods, he condemned her to death. In turn Cấn cursed any king who came to the region, then or in the future. In memory of her fiery nature and her populist curse, the people in that region supposedly gave her name to a kind of shellfish shaped like a fingernail (Son-Diếp 1903, 80–81). The local memory of resistance against external control endured



**Fig. 2.1** Map of French Indochina. (Source: Peters (2012, 24). Reprinted by permission of AltaMira Press)

for centuries, as this folktale was eventually collected by a colonial administrator of Khmer Krom ethnicity in the early twentieth century. People in the region seem to have noticed parallels between French rejection of indigenous foodways and the retelling of a folktale about an occupying oppressor who reacted violently to an unfamiliar aspect of local food expertise.

In the early nineteenth century, a strong Vietnamese state established direct rule over most of the regions which now make up the country Vietnam. One ambitious ruler, Minh Mạng, held power from 1820 to 1841 and worked to unify the nation culturally. He issued decrees forcing people in his realm to adopt Vietnamese culture, and in particular, Vietnamese food and agriculture. The emperor established firm expectations around culinary customs, based on the premise that white non-sticky rice should be at the heart of all meals. That premise relied on the wet-rice method of rice cultivation and also on a particular way of eating: a tray of shared food, with an individual bowl for each diner, full of the kind of rice one enjoys with chopsticks.

To Minh Mạng, conflicting customs revealed the “barbarian habits” of minorities within his new empire. No longer satisfied with indirect rule, Minh Mạng planned to change people’s daily life: “[Khmer] people have no knowledge of agriculture,” he announced in 1834. “Teach them to grow more rice, teach them to raise mulberry trees, pigs and ducks ... [Vietnamese] table manners must also be followed” (Chandler 2009, 152–153). Minh Mạng authorized a wholesale transformation of other ethnicities’ ways of eating—particularly targeting using one’s fingers to consume sticky rice. Vietnamese officials also told Cham people to ignore their Hindu values and eat beef and buffalo meat; Muslims were told to eat pork (Wook 2003, 50–55).<sup>2</sup> Even though Minh Mạng hoped to consolidate power through a shared culture, these impositions also seem to have galvanized opposition to his regime (Goscha 2016, 57).

In the official narrative, only the non-Việt people in the south should have needed coaching in Vietnamese culinary customs. But ethnically Việt people in the south themselves hardly acted like northern Vietnamese after decades of acclimation to a new environment. They had learned from their neighbors to enjoy new dishes and try new ingredients in familiar dishes (Wook 2004, 139). Sometimes they ate with their fingers, enjoying fruit, rice cakes, and skewered meat (Brown 1861, 252). Imperial Vietnamese sources anxiously avoided that uncomfortable topic, as chopsticks had come to symbolize civilization in their realm (Phan Thuận An 1991, 39–41). Vietnamese people eating without chopsticks disrupted the narrative: they were supposed to act civilized.

Similarly, administrators from northern or central Vietnam were surprised to find that their distinguished counterparts from other apparently civilized cultures did not know how to use chopsticks (Tana 1998, 65; Anonymous 2007, 151; Wook 2004, 145). In the late eighteenth century the governor in Huế, Phạm Ngô Cầu, gave a grand dinner to mark the occasion of a British trade mission. Servers brought out many bowls containing assorted vegetables, fish, pieces of meat (chopped pork and slices of water buffalo meat), different kinds of rice, and various sauces. The hosts watched for a long moment and commented with amusement as the British trade envoys fumbled awkwardly with the ivory chopsticks at their places. The governor then called for porcelain spoons and little bamboo sticks, split at one end, to help the envoys enjoy the meal. Governor Cầu could have instructed the servers to set out all possible implements at the same time they brought out the food. He seems, however, to have wanted to put the Europeans in the situation of having to make do with chopsticks, to test whether it was really true that they did not know how to use them. In the British report, the envoys noted their own clumsiness during the banquet (Chapman 1817, 121).

An even more discomfiting topic for Vietnamese administrators was the recurring inadequacy of the rice harvest. One reason Minh Mạng wanted to transform the foodways of the south was to increase that region's rice production by expanding southern rice fields significantly and thus provide greater food security for the whole realm. He criticized southerners (of any ethnicity) for "despising the value of rice" in comparison with northern Vietnamese (Wook 2004, 69–73, 102–103). Severe food shortages were still common in early nineteenth-century Vietnam. Terrible famines hit north-central Vietnam in 1823–1824, the Red River Delta in 1827, central Vietnam in 1835, northern Vietnam in 1840, and central Vietnam in 1841. Food scarcity exacerbated cholera epidemics in 1806, in the 1820s, and the 1840s, as well as after Minh Mạng's reign in the 1860s and 1870s (Nguyễn Thế Anh 1967, 13–14; Nguyễn Thế Anh 1992, 19–21). Vietnamese officials tried to find structural solutions. Minh Mạng's minister for land development, Nguyễn Công Trứ, organized the large-scale recuperation of flood plains through dikes and drainage, adding hundreds of square kilometers to Vietnam's agricultural resources in the north (Lê Thành Khôi 1955, 358–365). A few decades

later, the Catholic Nguyễn Trường Tộ returned from travels to Hong Kong, Canton, Italy, and France full of ideas to improve agriculture and protect the population from famine. Trứ and Tộ both spoke out against corruption that sometimes illicitly diverted state aid from those who were hungry (Peters 2016, 65). Tộ also proposed teaching hygiene and nutrition as well as shifting rice from alcohol production to food needs during hard times as “one cannot sate one’s hunger by drinking” (Chương Thâu 1993, 485). Administrators worked to address these terrible periods of famine for humanitarian reasons as well as to reduce the chance of rebellions (Goscha 2016, 61).

Vietnamese rulers collected taxes in kind and stored the collected rice in granaries for ordinary state needs as well as for bad harvests. Aware of the political dangers of running out of food, Minh Mạng and the other nineteenth-century Nguyễn emperors improved the sturdiness of their granaries (see Gorman, this volume). A brick-walled granary might be 1500 meters square and 25 meters high. Their roofs were no longer thatched as they had been in the eighteenth century. Now they were tiled to protect against fire. Not only did granaries keep the rice safe from fire and bandits, but administrators could also store troops and arms in the granaries when necessary (Aurillac 1870, 22–23; Brown 1861, 206–207, 267).<sup>3</sup>

Nguyễn officials faced difficult choices about how to use their stores of rice. Their first choice when the harvest failed was to reduce the taxes people owed in that region. That left more rice in the village to feed locals, without offering handouts which might attract people from a neighboring region. Hunger alone usually did not convince officials to give out food, unless it was accompanied by the possibility of rebellion. Threatening rebellion was, however, a dangerous tactic for a region. In one incident, the Nguyễn army destroyed crops in order to starve rebels in the south after Minh Mạng’s death (Nguyễn Thế Anh 1967, 11, 17, 20–22).<sup>4</sup> Control of the harvest was key to state power. But local rebellions created administrative anxiety about whether the state could control the harvest. Poor harvests provided opportunities for the government to demonstrate its effectiveness in responding to crises; the Vietnamese government established its legitimacy along these lines more than the French colonial government ever would. The French should have been more



concerned about stories ordinary people told each other about government overreach, incompetence, and illegitimacy, as in the Khmer Krom folktale of a king who killed a woman for cooking too well.

## The French Conquest and Chopstick Challenges

By the early 1860s, the French gained military control of the southern part of the Vietnamese realm, the Mekong Delta and the greater Saigon region. By the 1880s, they had extended their control through the Red River Delta in the north as well. French anxiety about their own legitimacy permeated the colonial period, and how French people wrote about colonial dining practices revealed these concerns. As mentioned, before the French conquest, Vietnamese officials like Huế governor Phạm Ngô Cầu were intrigued to learn that Europeans did not know how to use chopsticks. After defeat at French hands, one might think Vietnamese people would be circumspect in pointing out French ineptitude. Yet Vietnamese elites who were scorned by many of their countrymen for eating and working with the French occupiers still hosted events where they pushed chopsticks on their French guests. This gesture may have acted to challenge the French claim to a civilizing mission by reminding those present—and those who heard about it later—that civilization was a relative term: these French military victors did not even know how to use chopsticks.

In 1888 when the Vietnamese governor of the northern city of Nam Định gave an official luncheon, the mixed crowd of French and Vietnamese elites faced a meal served “half French-style and half Vietnamese-style” (*L’Avenir du Tonkin*, Sept. 15, 1888, 4).<sup>5</sup> The host mixed elements from each culture’s formal banqueting style, cleverly relying on the premise that the meal was early in the day and thus could bend the formal rules. A French reporter who wrote up the event noted his compatriots “struggling” to eat the Vietnamese dishes with chopsticks, caught off-guard and embarrassed by the Vietnamese governor (*L’Avenir du Tonkin*, Sept. 15, 1888, 4).

In the 1890s, the well-traveled southern administrator Đỗ Hữu Phương gained a reputation for inviting influential French officials and businessmen to lavish banquets at his home. When the guests arrived, the very Western-style table was set “Vietnamese-style,” at least to French eyes, with “an infinity of little bowls” containing different delicacies. Each setting featured a small plate, a bowl of rice, a porcelain spoon, and chopsticks.

One guest, the French administrator Pierre Nicolas, was so dismayed by the chopsticks that the utensils began to overwhelm his narrative of the occasion, recurring in his description again and again: “armed with two ivory sticks,” he wrote, the French guests tried to dip into the bowls with their “little sticks,” to pull out at random “a bit of still-born pig” or “palm-tree worms, grilled to perfection” (Barreton 1893, 244). Then, “still using the chopsticks, you put the morsel on your rice, and with the little spoon, you add some *nước mắm* [Vietnamese fish sauce].” Then picking up the rice bowl, “you use the two sticks to place the tidbit in your mouth, then shovel the rice in with the help of your ivory chopsticks.” He admitted they were let off easy in the end, fed European food to make sure no one went home hungry:

After everyone has struggled their best [literally: *escrimé* (“fenced”)] with these little sticks, less dangerous than our fork and our knife, but also less convenient ... the table is reset in European style, and servers bring out huge steaks for those not satisfied with the previous offerings. (Barreton 1893, 244–246)<sup>6</sup>

The martial imagery Nicolas used, describing the guests as “armed,” and “fencing” with their chopsticks, led to his comparison that at least chopsticks were “less dangerous than our fork and our knife.” He left the impression that the French might turn to force—even in the middle of a dinner party—to resolve internal anxiety about their role in the colony. The overall defensiveness of the story suggests French people worried that they looked foolish muddling through awkwardly with chopsticks and that they feared their Vietnamese hosts enjoyed watching the French display their incompetence. Đỗ Hữu Phương clearly owned forks, after all,

and could have placed them on the table from the start, rather than just bringing them out with the steaks toward the end of the meal. Like Governor Cầu a century earlier or the governor of Nam Định in 1888, maybe the Vietnamese administrator simply wanted to see how these Europeans would handle the uncomfortable situation. Food may seem apolitical and innocent, but negative stories about someone's food choices or cutlery skills can affect a person's public image. The French may have found it hard to challenge these micro humiliations without looking petty.

## French Resistance to Cross-Cultural Cuisine

Unlike these powerful Vietnamese, ordinary villagers were less prone to challenging a French guest's skill with chopsticks. A French text from 1862 notes that women in the southern region prepared food for village banquets: "all the talented old women, whatever their rank or wealth, would set to the task" (Cortambert and de Rosny 1862, 61). They boiled pork, chicken, and geese with a few vegetables and they mixed cane sugar with eggs, rice flour, or corn to make treats for the whole village. The women put bowls of this food out on trays five or six hours before the feast; they do not seem to have eaten with the men. In front of each guest sat a bowl of boiled rice, two chopsticks, and a little cup for rice liquor—except that visiting Frenchmen received a spoon alongside the chopsticks, without having to ask for it or wait at all.

Within rural villages, these public banquets held a great deal of weight socially and were fraught with anxiety for those who hosted the feasts as well as for Frenchmen who sometimes attended. In 1861 the colonial administrator Lucien de Grammont attended a feast in the market town of Thủ Dầu Một, in Cochinchina (southern Vietnam). He praised the mayor's wife, who had organized the feast, saying "she had undertaken the task with understanding and perfect taste" (Grammont 1863, 246). Trays were spread out along the porch of the communal hall; each tray held a substantial dish, accompanied by an array of sauces of different colors and tastes. The dishes included:

Roasted peacocks, displayed in their feathers, flattened ducks, deboned chickens, minced pork, minced buffalo, bits of meat boiled with vegetables or cooked in gelatinous fat; fish stews, eggs streaked with fat or beaten with sugar; aromatic green herbs; pale noodles, some firm, some quivering; potatoes coated with corn flour; yams roasted in their skins; dried mushrooms; acacia pods cooked with tomatoes; beans from My-tho; rice cakes of many colors and textures; grilled pistachios, green bananas, slices of papaya and star fruit, purple mangosteens, yellow mangos, coconut creams, boiling hot tea, scented rice alcohol, and immense bouquets of pineapples. (Grammont 1863, 247)

Grammont's praise might lead one to think that he ate and enjoyed the meal. In fact, he and the few other French guests did not touch the food: "We tried to put a good face on it, by sipping our tea from time to time. As dubious and intense smells began drifting up to us, we began to find the atmosphere a bit oppressive" (Grammont 1863, 248). By refusing to join in the feasting, Grammont knew he was offending his hosts; their displeasure probably added to his sense that the festive mood was clouding over.

French missionaries had long noted that eating village food was one of the best ways to build relationships with the Vietnamese community. "These nice people are so happy when we eat the food they have brought," noted one missionary. "I hear them repeating to each other: 'The Father tasted everything'" (Monteuuis 1894, 264).<sup>7</sup> Grammont probably worried more that the other Frenchmen might view him as soft toward the natives if he admitted to eating any of the food there. As we will see, that would be a reasonable concern for someone in his situation, since French people in the colony tried hard to avoid eating like the local population and wrote about their efforts.

French texts reverberate with refusals to eat rice, or try the fish sauce, *nước mắm*, or try any kind of street food. In practice, colonials could not get the same fresh ingredients they had in France, so they made do with canned and preserved imports. The French colonial diet was a shaky simulacrum of French cuisine, rather than an accurate reproduction. As argued elsewhere, as a small minority dominating this foreign space and uncertain how long the status quo would last, the French let fear and anxiety drive their determination to "eat French," rather than being motivated by pride, taste, or health concerns (D'Enjoy 1897, 145; Peters 2012, 150).

One might think French people worried about getting sick from local food. Colonial newspapers were full of advertisements for medical treatments and nostrums—but so were newspapers back in France (Stewart 2001, 60). In the colonies, French people ignored contemporary Western nutritional recommendations to avoid alcohol, canned goods, and meat consumption in the tropics (Neill 2009, 9–11). When the French turned to canned asparagus over local vegetables, ate expensive steaks regularly, and drank to excess—it was not for health reasons. It was to represent themselves as fundamentally different from those they had colonized.

For similar reasons, French texts repeatedly returned to the fear that Vietnamese people might eat French food—particularly household servants: “They claim in a whine to ‘eat only rice,’ but treat themselves to the scraps from our tables, when they do not filch the best bits beforehand” (*La France d’Asie*, Nov. 7, 1901, 2.) A prominent French newspaper in Hanoi asserted that Asian cooks routinely prepared too much food for their French employers in order to have leftovers to bring home to their own families (*L’Avenir du Tonkin*, Aug. 15, 1900, 1). The impressive feat of putting many different dishes on the table every night was reconceptualized in that story as theft. The next day, the same newspaper issued another iteration of this imagery: “If you go on a trip [...] and then return without warning, you will find your servants, their families and their friends [...] as drunk as Poles.” And if you confronted them, they would blatantly lie about drinking their employer’s liquor: “Us no can drink same thing French; no eat same thing” (*L’Avenir du Tonkin*, Aug. 16, 1900, 1). This deception, attributed to an imagined Vietnamese servant, reveals some of the anxiety of the French at the idea of Vietnamese people consuming the same food and drink as the French. Many French colonizers wanted to feel they were completely different from (and superior to) the people whose country the French seized by force.

## Culinary Tensions in the Colonial Countryside

Anxieties about food also emerged among the colonial Vietnamese population, but the root causes were different. People worried about getting enough to eat or strategized how to build social networks with food.

Journalist and social critic Phan Kế Bính reported on village feasts in the early twentieth century, noting that all men hosted in turn, unless they were destitute (Peters 2016, 67–68). Sometimes the expectation was that the host paid the banquet costs out of savings; other villages lent the money up front and then the host reimbursed the costs over time; another possibility was for village men to make regular payments into a fund covering the expense of the animal sacrifice, the pigs, chicken, or buffalo slaughtered in honor of local spirits. In those cases, the particular host would pay for vegetables, rice, and firewood (Phan Kế Bính 1975, 146–148).<sup>8</sup>

At the feast, one's seat was assigned based on one's rank in the village. The food was portioned out onto many different trays. There were trays for those who officiated at the ceremony, trays for elders, trays for village notables. If one belonged to more than one category, one might be entitled to three or four shares. Some received so much that they could not eat it all at once, and brought home meat and cakes. Others received only a small portion and the honor of joining in the village feast: "a bite sitting on a mat in the middle of the village is worth a meal in one's own kitchen" (Phan Kế Bính 1975, 148). As Phan Kế Bính interpreted that saying, villagers appreciated the opportunity to display their portion of rice and meat in public. Even the lowest-ranked feaster could hold up his head before village boys not yet old enough for a seat at the banquet, not to mention the girls and women who generally were not invited to the formal feasts. Yet the visibility of everyone's rank at the feast probably also increased anxiety about one's position and prospects.

There were other opportunities for villagers to share food besides the formal village-wide feasts and those excluded from the latter found other ways to get noticed. Village women prepared regular offerings of rice cakes, bananas, betel nuts, and rice liquor for village spirits. In the rainy season, a Buddhist monk might lead a more elaborate ceremony offering food to local spirits in exchange for their help with the weather (Phan Kế Bính 1975, 85). Villagers anxious about the contrasting dangers of floods or drought would pile offerings on an altar: rice in many shapes and consistencies, prepared in many ways, as well as fruit, sweet potatoes, and assorted candies. After the ceremony, the poor came and made off with the food, a custom known as "cướp cháo thí," which literally meant "looting the charity porridge" (Phan Kế Bính 1975, 118).

The food from some ceremonies was divided according to established village hierarchies; other ceremonies led to more anarchic distributions. Ethnographer Lê Văn Phát described villages in the south holding banquets for “cô hồn” (wandering souls). These unsettled spirits would be invited to a grandiose spread, with butchered whole pigs or huge hunks of roasted meat lying next to enormous cones made of rice cakes in many colors, with baskets of other foods nearby. Each basket had an elegant scroll indicating the name of its donor. Village authorities then turned a blind eye while the baskets and food offerings were systematically pilaged by hungry younger villagers, who were called the “cô hồn sống” (the living wandering souls):

Crowds of them fight each other for the food, and serious accidents sometimes arise from these fights. The next day, a smaller feast is offered up ... This one was reserved for those who were late the day before, or who had been too weak to take part in the first meal. (Lê Văn Phát 1907, 43–45)

The first day’s festivities were apparently a free-for-all among the boys of the village, those who were not old enough to sit at the formal banquets. The following day, the boys shoved aside at the first feast were invited back to gather up the scraps for themselves.

A precolonial tradition had involved gangs of young men maintaining village norms by confiscating the livestock of those accused of theft, assault, or seduction: “They bring the animals to the communal hall [đình], where there are always knives ready for the slaughter” (La Bissachère 1920, 145). The meat was then divided among villagers according to rank. Other times the young bands avoided that hierarchical division by not returning to the communal hall. Instead, they tied up the alleged wrongdoer, beat him with sticks, and roasted his pig with his own fuel, in his own courtyard, and enjoyed a feast right there. A spontaneous feast like that carried a distinct claim about power in the village (La Bissachère 1920, 139–145, 158–161; Peters 2016, 67). By the colonial period, village offenders were more likely to face monetary fines than to lose their pigs in the dark of night. Village elites presumably forbade informal pig confiscations at least in part in order to limit the power of village youth, who were no longer able to reintegrate a wrongdoer into

the community by seizing and eating his pig (Papin 1997, 15, 19).<sup>9</sup> Instead village boys fought among themselves to get the food that was set out for “wandering souls.” Lê Văn Phát’s colonial-era text made intergenerational conflict in the village sound neatly contained by such ceremonial food distribution.

Food could also be a proxy for other kinds of disputes, some of which had histories stretching back to the earlier moment of Vietnamese colonialism in the south. Ethnographer Lê Văn Phát also described stories of feasts in the rural countryside with anxious overtones about dispossession and defiance. Vietnamese settlers with Vietnamese military support had taken southern lands from Cham and Khmer residents, often turning the former landowners into farmhands or sharecroppers. Local resentment ran high, and certain feasts seem to have been designed to soothe hard feelings.

A large part of Annam and Lower-Cochinchina [central and southern Vietnam] used to belong to aborigines: the Cham and Khmers whom we pushed into the bush and whose land we took. But the dead are still here. The vanquished use their last resources to reclaim their property ... and to avenge their brutally dominated brothers. They engage in a guerrilla war without truce or respite, and create all sorts of hardships and troubles. When members of a [Vietnamese] family fall victim to wasting illnesses, or when the livestock die in large numbers, one does not hesitate to attribute these misfortunes to the vengeance of the “chúa-ngu ma-nướng” [Cham spirits], the name given to the original owners of the land [now deceased]....

To appease the expropriated spirits, one serves them a feast, prepared to their taste, with large fish skewered from mouth to tail with a bamboo stick and roasted over a high flame. During the meal, with gentle, reasonable words, one tries to calm the spirits’ anger and ask them to renounce their claims....

If all that does not work ... then one turns to magicians or sorcerers. In all legal matters, the law requires both parties to be present.... Two people who are unknown to the sorcerers (so they cannot collude with each other) represent the husband and wife, the former owners of the land in dispute.... The sorcerers use incantations, gestures, and cabalistic phrases to enchant [the stand-ins] ... [until] they are completely brutish, dishevelled, in rags, with dirt smeared all over their bodies and faces.... Then one gives them baskets, utensils and wooden bowls such as the aborigines used. They receive them with signs of satisfaction....



Then the sorcerers pressure the *chúa-ngu ma-nưong* [Cham spirits] to sell the disputed land for some money and livestock. The savages try to refuse, with many tears. But in the end, they usually accept. . . . [The buyers] give them food, and pay them in paper-money and pictures of animals which are then burnt. . . . When the spirits do refuse, a long-term lease is signed instead.

In our time, sales and leases of this kind are rare. Most of the lands were acquired by more or less arbitrary and underhanded methods . . . One still sees these ceremonies sometimes in the remote countryside, either when a well-off property owner wants to protect his farmers and animals, or when someone has been clearing new crop land, gets a fever from the virgin soil, and thinks that demons have attacked him. (Lê Văn Phát 1907, 32–36)<sup>10</sup>

Superficially, the ethnographer acted as if these spirits were real, engaging in “guerrilla war” and expressing their dissatisfaction with what they were offered. He explicitly wrote that these feasts and ceremonies happened in the “remote countryside,” revealing his discomfort with the practice of eating with so-called ghosts. His rhetoric asserts that people living in towns or cities would not participate in these customs or feel a need to appease the expropriated spirits.

Lê Văn Phát’s story provides a perspective on culinary practices in a disputed territory. Some of the farmers mentioned in the last section of the quote may have been grandchildren or other descendants of the original inhabitants of the land (Baurac 1899, 246; Hardy 2009, 118–119; Wheeler 2006, 186–187). In that case, providing the symbolic feast would have allowed the rich Vietnamese property owner to cater to his fieldhands’ culinary heritage and pride by hosting a somewhat appropriate feast.<sup>11</sup> It also reveals the upper-class ethnographer’s anxiety at the idea that his rural compatriots did talk about sitting down to eat with ghosts.

## Chinese Compradores Coping in a Vietnamese Setting

As discussed below, the same Vietnamese ethnographer also addressed a local legend which related to marriages between male Chinese immigrants (or their male children) and Vietnamese women. These relationships

could look like a business relationship, but they could also be more intimate. Cultural differences might strain these marriages, but one can also see traces of significant cultural accommodations—particularly in family meals.

The regions south of Huế had a significant Chinese community since at least the seventeenth century, when many Chinese men fled Guangdong and Fujian after the fall of the Ming dynasty. They brought tea, cloth, farming implements, and porcelain from China and exported pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, sugar, sugar-candy, dried shrimp, and a great deal of rice to China, Singapore, and Bangkok. By the early nineteenth century, more than 30,000 Chinese lived in the southern regions of Vietnam, and there were well over a 100,000 by the early twentieth century, not counting untold populations of mixed Sino-Vietnamese ethnicity (Tana 2004, 3–9).

For the most part, Chinese immigrants married local women, and relied heavily on their wives' networks, language skills, and business acumen in establishing and running their commercial ventures. A Chinese trader might set up a different wife in different trading posts, seeking each one's help in dealing with her local community and trusting her with his accounts (Hocquard 1999, 71, 340). He might also have a legal wife back in China, with whom he intended to retire in old age (Ha 2009, 199). The sights, sounds, and smells of Chinese cuisine proliferated in and around Vietnam's port cities. Vendors from different regions in China spoke in different dialects—Cantonese, Hainanese, Teochiu, Hakka, and Hokkien—but the majority of the Chinese restaurateurs and soup vendors were Cantonese (Garros 1905, 290; Nguyễn Tùng and Krowolski 1997, 168).

Meanwhile, Hokkien-speaking traders were most likely to marry Vietnamese women in the countryside and engage directly with the farmers bringing in the rice harvest (Tsai Maw Kuey 1968, 87–104). They established warehouses and small shops along Vietnam's rivers and coasts, selling goods such as pans, cutlery, and farm tools, alongside seed for farmers, ordinary needs such as *nước mắm*, salt, sugar, rice wine, and new treats such as durians, mangosteens, pineapples, and Siamese bananas (Tana 2004, 9; Barton 1977, 72–74).

In describing the Vietnamese culinary preparation of crocodile meat—“we make it a treat with spicy sauces” (Lê Văn Phát 1908, 13)—ethnographer Lê Văn Phát described a local legend saying that the Chinese had driven all crocodiles out of China to prevent them from eating Chinese people. The legend insisted that Chinese people living in southern Vietnam (Cochinchina) were culturally forbidden from eating crocodile meat, lest the reptile return to China and start eating Chinese people again:

Some of [the Chinese] are completely assimilated to the locals from their long stay in Cochinchina, where they have married Annamese women, and they eat everything – except crocodile meat. They even manage to accustom their wives to regard this meat with disgust. (Lê Văn Phát 1908, 14–15)<sup>12</sup>

Between the fantastical lines of this story about different cultural views on eating crocodiles, Lê Văn Phát provides a rare glimpse of men whom he identified as ethnically Chinese, who apparently ate Vietnamese meals at home. At the same time, he pointed out that their wives also compromised in some ways, adapting to their Chinese husband’s anxiety about eating crocodile meat. A Vietnamese wife would also sometimes hire a Chinese chef to cook an important meal for her husband’s Chinese business associates (Lefèvre 1989, 170). Sino-Vietnamese families perceived a broad range of food options, and husbands and wives were capable of negotiating family meals keeping in mind each person’s social relations, memories, cultural anxieties, and taste.

Despite these internal negotiations, Chinese who lived with or married Vietnamese women raised anxiety in outside observers. Writers portrayed Chinese compradores cohabitating with multiple Vietnamese women while in the colony, then abandoning them and returning to their original wives and children in China with a sizable fortune (Bineteau 1864, 58; Bouinain and Paulus 1885b, 508; Chivas-Baron 1927, 54). In 1898, a Vietnamese bureaucrat told the following story of an apparently happy Sino-Vietnamese arrangement:

In Hải Dương province, a poor widow sold her daughter – a ravishing creature, thirteen or fourteen years old – to a rich Chinese merchant. The

child was dressed and adorned with uncommon luxury, and her new master treated her with great solicitude and a surprising degree of respect, for a Celestial.

A Vietnamese student suspected that the Chinese man wanted to transform the young virgin into a guardian spirit to watch over his wealth. Acting on his advice, the widow secretly told her daughter to leave a trail of rice behind if her master escorted her out of the house. One morning ... the widow learned that her daughter had been gone for quite some time.

Frightened, she told the student, who summoned the police; they found the trail of rice the girl had thrown behind her, and followed it to an isolated mountainside with freshly turned dirt. Digging, they found her still alive, walled up with her master's treasure. The Chinese man was sentenced to death, while his victim was awarded his property; naturally, she married the Vietnamese student. (Basset 1898, 214–215)

The folktale revealed a tension in Vietnamese villages, torn between the pragmatic benefits of a match with a successful Chinese entrepreneur and the competing fear of losing their daughters and future grandchildren to a foreign culture. Vietnamese mothers might feel a sense of foreboding even though a daughter seemed to be well fed and treated with respect by her Chinese husband, as in the beginning of the story. Rice serves as the link, connecting the daughter back to her family of origin.

The mother secretly told her daughter to leave a trail of rice for the mother to follow, creating a bond between mother and daughter through food. The instruction also acknowledged, however, that the younger married woman now had the resources to throw rice on the ground, to use rice for communication, rather than just for food. Many Vietnamese mothers had to endure years of quiet submission to their own Vietnamese mother-in-law before gaining more control of the household. The story expressed their anxiety about their daughters in these different marriages, free of abusive mothers-in-law, but also lacking maternal guidance. Their daughters might never be able to stand up to their Chinese husbands and gain some control over family resources, since they were metaphorically “walled up”—shut away from their Vietnamese families and culture.

Anxiety about Chinese economic power also led to rhetoric describing Chinese men getting fat off the backs of the poor Vietnamese. French

authors sometimes took the stereotype seriously, as when a well-considered text explained to Parisian readers that the Vietnamese were “generally less obese than the Chinese” (Bouinai and Paulus 1885a, 228). The French colonial administrator Pierre Nicolas noted a folktale about a stout Chinese man who turned into a round teapot from overindulging in that hot beverage (Nicolas 1900, 144).<sup>13</sup> The implications were that the Chinese were gluttonous and that they were overindulging while the local population went hungry. Contemporary rhetoric portrayed Chinese as obese parasites, feeding directly on the region’s resources. One French editorial complained in 1910 that the Chinese were “a parasitical organism, established between us and the Annamese” (*L’Avenir du Tonkin*, Feb. 5, 1910, 5). In 1907, the anticolonial activist Phan Bội Châu had made a similar analogy, but lumping in the French as well:

We are so stupid to spend all our money on these foreign imports. We feed to the foreigners the resources Heaven and Earth have given us. Today we buy French merchandise; tomorrow we purchase Chinese goods. (Phan Bội Châu 2000, 116)

That parallel raised problems. The French were anxiously aware that many of the Vietnamese viewed French colonial interests much the same as the Chinese, two different kinds of parasites feeding off Vietnam’s human and material resources. French colonizers did not like that comparison, especially since the Chinese often seemed to be more successful at exploiting the Vietnamese economically (Lanessan 1889, 455).

## Ambition and Anxiety About New Urban Foods

Despite exhortations such as the ones by Phan Bội Châu, many Vietnamese were eager to explore new culinary opportunities, especially in the growing colonial cities. The French colonial government neither mandated nor banned the use of European products, so even the lower classes could try new tastes, eating bread instead of soup or *xôi* [cooked sticky rice] in the morning, or an occasional beer, lemonade, or banana-flavored drink

(*L'Opinion*, May 26, 1908, 3). Arriving in Saigon in 1909, a French travel writer noticed “natives in every street taking for breakfast half a roll [petit pain] with black coffee or café au lait” (Jafe 1910, 21). By the 1910s, French writers reported widespread Vietnamese appreciation for French bread, butter, and Gruyère cheese, in addition to Western drinks from milk to coffee to beer, wine, and champagne (Brébion 1913, 295).

Middle- and upper-class Vietnamese parents introduced their children to dairy products in particular, which had not been part of the local cuisine. This was part of a larger project to support their children learning culinary practices that might help them advance in the colonial administration, from using a knife and fork to chewing silently (Peters 2012, 196–197). At first fresh milk was sold door to door in wealthy neighborhoods by Tamil milkmen, but by 1914 advertisements in the Vietnamese-language newspaper *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* (News of the Six Provinces) promoted imported *La Petite Fermière* brand milk in place of fresh milk. One rendition of the ad had a Vietnamese servant standing at the gate of a grand house, scolding a dark-skinned person holding milk in glass bottles: “Go away! Your milk smells like hairy goat, and this house drinks only *La Petite Fermière* milk.” The ad glossed over the employers’ ethnicity; the point of the ad was the Vietnamese servant’s scorn for the Tamil milkman and his milk (*Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, Jan. 7, 1915, 8).<sup>14</sup> Another version showed two Vietnamese women on the street: one has baskets and a bamboo pole, while the other has a chubby child. The first praises the baby’s weight, and the other replies that she only gives him *La Petite Fermière* milk. The ad promises that drinking this particular condensed milk will promote the child’s health and good fortune (*Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn*, Feb. 25, 1915, 3). Even without knowing sales numbers, the text and imagery of this widely read advertising campaign illustrates Vietnamese anxiety about how to get one’s children established in colonial society.

On the one hand, cost prevented most working-class Vietnamese from giving their children imported milk or eating imported foods very often. Food took up three-quarters of the average unskilled laborer’s income in the 1920s (Leurence 1924, 1, 5). On the other hand, workers and even villagers did get occasional urban treats. They came to the cities to sell in the market or for temporary work and city residents made regular trips back to their original village for celebrations, bringing gifts of food. In

January 1895, a French observer in Cholon, the Chinese business district near Saigon, commented on the “interminable lines of villagers, coming to make their purchases for Tết,” the lunar new year (Monnier 1899, 36). In the north, the journey from Haiphong to Hanoi became a quick day-trip once the railroad line was finished for the 1902 Hanoi Exposition. Many classes of travelers used the colonial train service. The train was “a wandering market on wheels, full of rice, millet, vegetables, fruit, fish, and all kinds of other merchandise ... [J]ust as in one of the market halls of the Tonkin towns, ... people are bargaining, selling and buying” (Baelz 1902, 11–12). Whether the trip to the city was for commerce or employment, the Vietnamese appreciated the new sights, sounds, and tastes.

Not all new urban tastes were imported from outside Vietnam. There were many new drinks available in the city: nước hột é (cold water with sugar and basil seeds, which swelled up like tapioca pearls), herbal teas, or drinks made from oleaginous plants in many colors, red, yellow, green, or purple (Brébion 1913, 297; D’Enjoy 1897, 142). Each village probably had its own local herbal tea, but only in the cities could people taste so many different beverages. Vietnamese workers may not have been able to afford French cafés or Chinese restaurants, but they could enjoy a wider variety of foods than they were used to in the countryside: fresh and dried seafood; new fruits and vegetables; sweet and savory bean jellies; and a diversity of sticky rice cakes, from smooth rectangles of sweetened rice flour (*bánh khảo*), to firm round silver-dollar-sized cakes (perhaps like *bánh bèo*, but with a jujube filling), to marzipan-like cakes colored pink, blue, yellow, or green, to breast-shaped soft rice dumplings (*bánh vú*), to many more. There were numerous candies as well, white and yellow rock candies, candied fruit, peanut nougat, sugared water lily seeds, caramel taffy, and more (Hocquard 1999, 93; Bourde 1885, 250).

In 1909, a French newspaper reported workers panicking when two northern Vietnamese died after eating pineapple; one of them collapsing after having only two little pieces of the fruit: “We are now hearing Vietnamese and Chinese insisting French authorities ban the sale of pineapples in the city’s markets ... [The locals] deem pineapple a dangerous fruit, containing a powerful poison” (*L’Indépendance Tonkinoise*, July 22, 1909, 2). The French journalist mocked their anxiety, but the anecdote reveals how new pineapple was to northern Vietnam. People feared the

fruit, when perhaps the tragedy came from eating an unripe pineapple or contaminated piece of fruit, or from an undiagnosed allergy. Parisians had enjoyed pineapple since the middle of the nineteenth century, whether imported fresh from Brazil and Havana; canned from Martinique; or grown in greenhouses in Parisian suburbs like Versailles and Meudon (Husson 1856, 364–377). For the Vietnamese and Chinese living in northern Vietnam, however, this fruit was exotic and disconcerting. They asked in vain for the colonial government to respond to their concerns. More Vietnamese fell ill after eating pineapple, experiencing itching, acid reflux, stomach pains, sometimes followed by sweating, sensory problems, and finally coma (Mouzels 1912, 618–619). It is not clear if this rash of medical issues was due to allergies to the pineapple itself or to reactions to some kind of fungus on the pineapples, as French administrators did not explore how to address the problem. To this day the Vietnamese are especially particular about peeling their pineapples, carefully removing all the skin and the eyes before eating the flesh (Avieli 2012, 50).

While pineapple moved from south to north, *phở*, the aromatic beef-based noodle soup, moved in the opposite direction. It originated in the north at the beginning of the twentieth century and only gradually made its way south to Huế and Saigon (Greeley 2002, 80). *Phở* was marked as a particularly Vietnamese dish from very early on. By 1919, Jean Marquet reported hearing “Yoc Pheu!” called out on the streets of Hanoi by Vietnamese selling beef soup with flat rice noodles, competing with Chinese vendors of chicken soup or duck soup with wheat noodles. This may be the earliest representation in print of *phở* as an essentially Vietnamese dish (Marquet 1922, 76).<sup>15</sup> For decades, *phở* was a northern dish. By 1950, however, *phở* was also available in Saigon (Arnold 1950, 10). Then the 1954 Geneva Accords brought a flood of northern refugees to southern Vietnam, and with them a sharp increase in *phở* consumption (Peters 2010, 161).<sup>16</sup>

## Wartime Anxieties About Food and Power

*Phở* became a complicated symbol of the then-divided nation. In 1957 a prominent northern Vietnamese essayist named Nguyễn Tuân wrote a notorious essay on *phở* (Nguyễn Tuân 2000 [1957]). Communist Party officials had just admitted some serious missteps regarding the controversial land



reform program, and they looked vulnerable (Goscha 2016, 292–296).<sup>17</sup> The very first issue of the northern literary journal *Văn*, on May 10, 1957, included the first part of Nguyễn Tuân’s playful but provocative essay, which went much further in poking the Communist Party than one might expect from a piece on *phở*.

He spent much of the piece praising the soup in all its many delightful variations, but the essayist went on to mention that some people could not afford meat in their *phở*. The criticism was not subtle, as Nguyễn Tuân portrayed the government of North Vietnam failing to care for the population. In a similar vein, he wondered what *phở* would be like, if people had to start making it with a broth made from rat meat. He then bitterly brought up the innovative ways that rich people—even under Communism—were enjoying *phở*, made with duck, with pork, with five spice or sesame seeds. Nguyễn Tuân even affected to worry that the country was relying so heavily on industrial foods imported from the Soviet Union (mostly potato flour and wheat flour) that soon people might find themselves eating canned *phở*. Soon after the Party shut down the journal and made Nguyễn Tuân apologize for his supposedly “frivolous” essay. Yet the political thrust of the essay became even clearer over time, as *phở* lost its flavor under continued Communist rule.

The frame of Nguyễn Tuân’s essay was the author reminiscing about *phở* while he was overseas and missing his country. So Nguyễn Tuân used *phở* as a symbol of Vietnam as a whole, but without homogenizing it or pretending there was one authentic, timeless *phở*. He mentioned a variety of different ways to prepare *phở*, including how it was still evolving on the streets of Saigon. He also stated how he himself preferred the soup. In the process he highlighted the idea that getting into arguments over the best kind of *phở* was part of what made *phở* so Vietnamese.

Vũ Bằng was another northern writer who avoided the mode of timeless nostalgia about *phở*, even as he, like Nguyễn Tuân, reminisced about the dish at a distance. In the late 1950s he was living in Saigon, spying for the north, and writing an essay remembering Hanoi’s *phở*. He said:

To some people, *phở* is no longer just a dish – they are addicted to it, the way others are addicted to tobacco ... These fans do not easily step into any *phở* shop on their path. To them, enjoying *phở* is a process of inquiry and experiments ... They each have a favorite *phở* shop. (Vũ Bằng 1990, 19)

The rhetoric of addiction offered a way of talking about the craving for *phở* without being sentimental.

There was very little to be sentimental about during the American war. After 1964 people in the north used the phrase “*phở không có người lái,*” joking about having to eat *phở* “without a pilot” (i.e., without the meat), as they mocked the official version of *phở*. The phrase riffed on current events—at the time the United States was using unmanned planes, flying at very low altitudes, to take photos of North Vietnam for intelligence purposes (Vietnam Studies Group online listserv, February 2000). People in North Vietnam may not have enjoyed their cheap *phở* very much in those days, but they connected it with the modern world around them. *Phở* was not an age-old, traditional dish, but a creation of living Vietnamese, making something delicious from a new source of scraps. It was invented to be cheap, nourishing street food, but now the government had taken even that away. People resented having to pay a high price on the black market if they hoped to find a rich, tasty *phở* (Xuan Phuong and Mazingarbe 2004, 170).

## Conclusion

Over centuries, Vietnamese taste preferences evolved as new ingredients and new dishes became available. People in power made evolving claims about what foods Vietnamese people ought to eat, or ought to avoid. The disjunction between what a person ate (or wanted to eat) and what society said they should eat—based on their class, gender, or ethnicity—was definitely a source of anxiety. Had a youth outgrown the right to pillage the “wandering souls” offerings? Was it nurturing for a wife to adjust meals to her Chinese husband’s tastes or a sign she was losing her culinary culture? Was feeding milk to one’s children just maternal love, or a sign of collaboration with the French? Despite such concerns, for many Vietnamese in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the larger problem was simply getting enough food to eat.

When the French controlled the region, individual French people felt little concern about where their next meal was coming from. Instead, the blatant illegitimacy of their rule led to protracted anxiety about losing

control and being forced to leave. Erecting a rhetorical bright line between the foods of the colonizer and those of the various local colonized people made the French feel different from (and superior to) those they ruled. The frequency of stories about the wrong people eating French food reveals how much anxiety went into pretending that bright line was real—until the line was gone, and with it the colonial moment.

## Notes

1. For hotel menus, see advertisements in, for instance, *Petites Affiches Saigonnaises*: 4 Oct. 1888, 2; *La France d'Asie*: 3 Jan. 1905, 3; *L'Opinion* (Saigon): 3 Jan. 1911, 3.
2. For more discussion of the foodways of non-Việt ethnicities living under Minh Mạng, see Alexander Woodside (1971, 96, 134, 254–255); Po Dharma (1987, 121–130); Jean Moura (1883, 383); Trịnh Hoài Đức (1863, 129); Charles Wheeler (2006, 163–193, 184–186).
3. On poor quality eighteenth-century granaries, see Lê Quý Đôn (1977 [1776], 239); on granaries in the nineteenth century, see also Van Nguyen-Marshall (2008, 23–26).
4. On problems of famine migration, see David Arnold (2008, 117–139, 125).
5. Another banquet with mixed French and Vietnamese food and diners is described in Charles Édouard Hocquard (1999 [1892], 300–2).
6. The author did not include diacritical marks on the word *nước mắm*. On the engagement party of Đỗ Hữu Phương's daughter, catered by the French *Hôtel de l'Univers* with a largely European guest list, see *La Semaine Coloniale* (Saigon), 19 September 1896, 2.
7. For the experiences of other missionaries, see Jean-Charles Cornay (1989 [1809–1837], 143) and a letter from Mgr. Retord published in *Annales de la propagation de la foi* (1847, 325).
8. On current public feasts and animal sacrifices in Vietnam, see Nir Avieli (2012, Chap. 6).
9. This shift also emphasized that the offender had not nourished the village in the same way that an ambitious villager might ceremonially feed everyone at a feast. This transition happened much later in some villages than in others.
10. On spirits and materiality in Vietnam, see Léopold Cadière (1944, 17–19); Heonik Kwon (2008, 104–107); Nir Avieli (2008, 129–130).

11. See discussion of transferring oxen, buffalo, and pigs to settle disputes with *chúa-ngu ma-nương* spirits in Philip Taylor (2016, 354–355).
12. The term “Annamese” referred to the local Vietnamese women. Vietnamese people did eat crocodile meat when they could get it. See, for instance, Albert Bouinai and A. Paulus (1885a, 239) and Gaston Darboux et al. (1906, 296).
13. See also the image of fat Chinese men in Saigon, in Aloïs d’Huncks (1908, 522). Throughout Southeast Asia the Chinese were described in similar terms.
14. Immigrants from French commercial cities in India such as Pondicherry ran most of the dairies in Cochinchina; see Natasha Pairaudeau (2016, 215).
15. Jean Marquet’s novel, *Du village à la cité: moeurs annamites*, was serialized in *La Revue indochinoise* in 1919 before being published in Paris in 1922.
16. In 1954, representatives of Cambodia, China, France, Laos, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union, the Communist Vietnamese government and the rival anti-Communist Vietnamese government all met in Geneva, Switzerland, to settle the crisis in Vietnam. They divided the country temporarily at the 17th parallel until a projected election and reunification in 1956. During the cease-fire of 1954–1955, about 800,000 people moved south to escape Communist rule, and about 120,000 people moved north. The country was not in fact reunified until the US withdrawal in 1975 (Goscha 2016, 267–270, 280).
17. Starting in 1953 the Communist-run Democratic Republic of Vietnam initiated a land reform campaign in the zones it controlled, with the goal of redistributing land from the rich to the poor. Ad hoc courts encouraged villagers to denounce their neighbors, which led to violent attacks based more on intravillage rivalries than strict measures of wealth. By 1957, the atrocities were public knowledge and embarrassing to the Communist regime.

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