

**The Introduction of the "New Books" (Tân Thư) in Vietnamese Society: the Analysis of
"Ty Đào Nguyên Phổ Túc Bẩm" (Your Humble Servant Đào Nguyên Phổ Makes a
Petition to the Emperor)**

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The colonial wars forced China and Vietnam to open their ports to foreign commerce. Their sovereignty was either questioned or denied by a series of humiliating treaties. Colonization attempts facilitated the exchanges between the Asian countries. Policies that arose from the colonial powers' needs for economic expansion enlarged Asia's ground for activity, making communication between diverse parts of the Asian world faster and easier. Hence, events occurring in China were able to have a more direct repercussion over the East Asian society on a large scale.

The defeat of 1895 was also an occasion for the Chinese reformists to assert themselves. It is then that the echos of the reformist movement of Kang Youwei and of his pupil Liang Qichao began to spread. Their ideas were conveyed by means of learned societies and of the modern press whose development became increasingly considerable. The publication of newspapers and books played an essential role in the distribution of the progressive "New Learning," which denounced the retrograde character of the "Ancient Learning." It is especially from the late XIXth century that the reformist ideas were introduced from China to Vietnam, through the "New Books," the vehicle of this "New Learning."

There has been a considerable amount of research conducted on the Vietnamese "New Books" by Vietnamese and Western historians. However, the first obstacle we face is the difficulty of knowing the exact titles, authors, translators, publishers and publication years of the "New Books." Which "New Books" were then effectively introduced into Vietnamese society? It is unfortunate that not only is there almost no indication of precise titles, in regard to the authors of the "New Books", most previous research is restricted to mentioning the names of the authors - Spencer, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Yan Fu, Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao etc.-, passing over in complete silence the essential role of the translators in the publication process. What was the relation between the original texts and the translations? What effects did the reading of *tân thư* have on the Vietnamese intellectuals?

To answer these three questions, it is necessary to examine an address to the throne delivered in approximately 1906 by a retired civil servant Đào Nguyên Phổ. Twelve pages of this manuscript deserve special mention as they provide precise information about the titles. In this manuscript, Đào Nguyên Phổ made an eight page list of "New Books" available in bookstores in Hà Nội at the time, hoping that the Court would purchase them.