

**THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY
IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM
(UNDER FRENCH DOMINATION AND THE SAI GON REGIME)**

Abstract

At the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century there were many Chinese immigrants who moved to Vietnam. After residing in Vietnam, these Chinese immigrant groups, on the one hand adapted and integrated into the native society in Vietnam, on the other hand tried to maintain their own cultural identity. Today, Chinese immigrants and their descendants have become one of the fifty-four ethnic minority groups in Vietnam. The Chinese immigrants are currently categorized by the Vietnamese government as The Hoa (người Hoa) or ethnic Chinese. Nowadays, ethnic Chinese mainly inhabit in Southern Vietnam. In particular, Chinese people who live in Ho Chi Minh City account for 90% of Vietnam's ethnic Chinese.

The process of localization of the Hoa has gone through many changes. In fact, the degree of integration of the ethnic Chinese is always influenced by government policies.

During the French colonial period (1858-1954), in terms of language, the French government promoted the Latin system and eliminated Han characters. The Vietnamese and Chinese people became familiar with the Romanization. Vietnamese Romanization (Chữ quốc ngữ) appeared during this period. At the same time, the language education of ethnic Chinese was also affected. Specifically, Huaqiao schools were required to teach French; there were not many elementary schools, and Huaqiao were not allowed to establish high schools.

In the Saigon regime (1955-1975), the Ngo Dinh Diem authority had good relationship with the Republic of China government. As a result, although the nationality policy was applied for Huaqiao and the Hoa, Ngo Dinh Diem showed lots of leniency in the policy of language education towards ethnic Chinese. Namely, in the period 1955-1975, ninety-nine Huaqiao primary schools were established and the first of Huaqiao middle school was established in Southern Vietnam. In the ethnic Chinese region (District 5), the majority of Chinese people only spoke Mandarin Chinese or their native language, and did not speak Vietnamese.

At that time, there was tremendous development in the educational language activities of the ethnic Chinese in the Southern Vietnam. Also, the period 1955-1975 played an important role

in maintaining the national language of the ethnic Chinese in Southern Vietnam. This in turn prevented the Hoa from indigenization or “Vietnamization”.

Keywords: The Hoa, Huaqiao, ethnic Chinese, The Hoa’s education.

1. Introduction

In the 17th century, The Chinese Ming Empire collapsed. The Ming Empire's aristocrats and their remnant forces and refugees migrated to Southeast Asia, Taiwan and Vietnam. Among the immigrants, there were many who got married to Vietnamese women. After a long time, these soldiers and refugees gradually assimilated into local Vietnamese society. The soldiers, refugees and their descendants were known collectively as the Minh Huong. "Minh Huong" originally referred to immigrants from the Chinese Ming Empire. Besides the Minh Huong, there were other Chinese who immigrated to Vietnam at a later stage, especially from the late 19th century and early 20th century. The Chinese immigrants heading to Vietnam from the Chinese Qing Empire was later termed as the Chinese or ethnic Chinese.

In 1885, the Chinese Qing Empire and France signed the Tianjin Treaty. After the Tianjin Treaty was signed, the Qing Empire officially recognized Vietnam was a French colony. At that time, the French viewed Vietnam as a port of commerce with China. Therefore, Chinese people in Vietnam at that time played an important role in the commercial trade between France and China. During the French colonization, the Chinese community in Vietnam, especially the Chinese in Southern Vietnam, underwent relatively large changes in many aspects, especially in economy. The economy of the Chinese community in Southern Vietnam grew robustly and controlled the whole economy of southern Vietnam.

In terms of education, during her domination of Vietnam from 1858 to 1954, the French government promoted the Latin writing systems and removed the Han character system in Vietnam. The French government forced the people of Vietnam in general and all immigrants living in Vietnam to learn French. It was also in this period that, "The National Language" of Vietnam was conceived and shaped. Besides the above development, the native language education of the Chinese states also faced many restrictions. Specifically, during the French colonization, Huaqiao was only allowed to open primary schools; across the country, there was only one French – Chinese high school (Lycée franco - chinois de Cho Lon) located in the Saigon - Cho Lon area. French was a compulsory language in all Chinese primary schools.

Entering the Saigon regime (1954-1975), the Ngo Dinh Diem government implemented assimilation policies in terms of nationality, forcing all Minh Huong, Huaqiao and their children born or living in Vietnam to change to Vietnamese nationality. However, in terms of education,

due to the close relationship between the Saigon government and the ROC (Taiwan), Ngo Dinh Diem turned a blind on the education of Mandarin Chinese (Mandarin) in the elementary schools and middle schools. Also in this period, the Chinese in Saigon was allowed to establish their own schools, particularly in Saigon - Cholon, between 1950 and 1956, there were 90 elementary schools and 9 middle schools¹. Therefore, in the Cholon area, where most Huaqiao residents of Saigon lived, the majority of Huaqiao did not speak Vietnamese; they only spoke Mandarin or their native languages.

Not long after the process of Huaqiao's migration and settlement in Vietnam, there were a lot of historical fluctuations in Vietnam in terms of economic and social status, and in the education of Chinese language in Saigon. All these factors had a strong influence on the process of indigenization of Huaqiao in Vietnam.

2. Terminology of definitions and discussions

In the article, the term "indigenization" is usually mentioned. This term is used in the field of anthropology to refer to the transition from "immigrant society" to "native society". For example, the Minh Huong in Vietnam was initially a group from the Chinese Ming Empire. After the collapse of the Ming Empire, members of the nobility, soldiers, and refugees migrated to countries in Southeast Asia with a desire to seek opportunities to "fight the Qing Empire and revitalize the Ming Empire". These refugees, after arriving in Vietnam, were treated hospitably by the Vietnamese Nguyen Dynasty; hence they decided to settle in Vietnam. Subsequently, the children of the Chinese Ming Empire and their descendants married women in Vietnam, hence this group and their descendants decided not to return to China. The thought of "[to] fight the Qing Empire and revitalize the Ming Empire" gradually got lost on them, instead they thought of living peacefully in Vietnam. Currently, the descendants of the Minh Huong all have Vietnamese citizenship, they self-identify themselves as Vietnamese; they communicate in Vietnamese, and cannot speak Chinese. When asked about their identity and that of their ancestors', most of them affirmed that their ancestors came from the Chinese Ming Empire; however, their children and themselves are Vietnamese (Kinh).

¹ According to the data of the "Report on Chinese private schools in Saigon – Cholon" (Academic Department of South Vietnam: page 9).

In addition, the article also uses a number of proper nouns such as “the Minh Huong”, “Ethnic Chinese”, “Huaqiao” ... with explanations and definitions as follows:

“The Minh Huong” refers to the Chinese immigrants who came to Vietnam after the collapse of the Ming Empire in 1644. This group of migrants were mostly men, Lord Nguyen accepted them and let them explore the Southern region. The word “Minh Huong” [明香] originally meant “incense from the Ming Empire”, later Lord Nguyen changed it to [明鄉] to imply the Minh Huong village where the Minh Huong lived together with the Kinh. In the Minh Huong village, most of the men were from the Ming Empire, while most women were indigenous people (Tran Kinh Hoa 1965: 1-4). The men of that immigrant group got married to local Vietnamese women and had children. Their children were Chinese-Vietnamese hybrids, called the Minh Huong. Undergoing Vietnamization, the Minh Huong in Vietnam today have completely been “Vietnamized” into the Vietnamese people.

The name “Huaqiao” refers to the Chinese immigrants who settled abroad and have not lost their Chinese nationality (Kien Thanh Duong 1985: 2). These “Huaqiao” normally immigrated due to their business needs.

According to the 3rd charter of the Huaqiao Identity Law by the ROC government promulgated in 2001, “The ROC nationals living overseas are known as Huaqiao. However, citizens of Mainland China, Hong Kong & Macau citizens, and Chinese citizenship holders are excluded”². Under the “Law on the Protection of family members of returning Huaqiao” promulgated in 2000 by People's Republic of China, the “Returning Huaqiao(歸僑) refers to the Huaqiao who return to China to reside permanently. Huaqiao are Chinese citizens overseas. Guijuan (歸眷) refers to the relatives of overseas Chinese, and family members of returning Huaqiao in China”³.

At the beginning of the French colonization, the Minh Huong and the Huaqiao were two entirely different concepts. According to Dao Trinh Nhat, author of the book “The reign of

² 2001 年中華民國的《華僑身分證明條例》第三條：「本條例適用之對象，為僑居國外國民。但具有大陸地區人民、香港居民、澳門居民身份或持有大陸地區所發護照者，不適用之。」

³ 2000 年《中華人民共和國歸僑僑眷權益保護法》第二條：「歸僑是指回國定居的華僑。華僑是指定居在國外的中國公民。僑眷是指華僑、歸僑在國內的眷屬。」

sojourners and immigrants in Southern Vietnam”, at the beginning of the French colonial period, the Minh Huong were still considered as “the Annam people, hence as a Minh Huong, one needed to follow the Annam’s ceremony, dress codes, law and taxation, and was also allowed to take important examination as Annamite” (Dao Trinh Nhat 1924: 16). Huaqiao was considered as “The Chinese who came to stay in Vietnam, combined into organizations, called “Bang” (幫 Congrégation) (Dao Trinh Nhat 1924: 14). In addition, “Huaqiao under the Vietnamese Nguyen Dynasty and early French colonial period had to pay heavy tax and needed a passport for travelling” (Dao Trinh Nhat 1924: 16). During the French colonial period, Huaqiao was also known as “các chú”, meaning “sojourners” or “chêc”. According to the dictionary “Dictionnaire Annamite-français” by editor JFM Genibrel, “Minh Huong” is the hybrid born of Chinese father and Vietnamese mother in Vietnam, residing in a private area (Minh hương 明鄉 métis de Chinois et de femme annamite (formés en sociétés distinctes)) (JFM Genibrel 1898: 418). Huaqiao was called “Chinois” in French, meaning “guest” or “khách trú” in Vietnamese . Guests was the friendly way that Annamites used to call ethnic Chinese (Khách 客: étranger; term aimable par lequel les Annamites désignent les Chinois) (JFM Genibrel 1898: 296), the titles “các chú” or “sojourners” perhaps also came from there. Also, according to the “Dictionnaire Annamite–français”, “Chec” (Chêc) was the nickname that the Vietnamese people at that time used for Huaqiao. “Chêc” was also how the Annamites called the ethnic Chinese in an unfriendly way. (Chêc: Que les Annamites donnent aux Chinois surnom en mauvaise partie) (J. F. M. Genibrel 1898: 79).

The term “ethnic Chinese” was used commonly in the late Qing Empire period, referring to the Chinese people who migrated from the late Qing Empire onwards. Currently, the term “ethnic Chinese” is used in Vietnam for the ethnic minority group of Vietnam whose ancestors are Chinese immigrants who came to Vietnam from the late Qing Empire. Currently, the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam still retain some Chinese cultures, and a few can speak Mandarin.

The similarities and differences of the Minh Huong and ethnic Chinese is due to the time in which they immigrated to Vietnam, and the degree of indigenization between the two groups. The Minh Huong is now completely Vietnamized, cannot speak Chinese, do not know Han characters, and communicate entirely in Vietnamese. Legally they are nationals of Vietnam and

belong to the Kinh ethnic group (ethnic majority of the Vietnamese). In contrast, the ethnic Chinese are less Vietnamized than the Minh Huong due to the time of their immigration and many other historical factors. They communicate with the general society in Vietnamese, but some still keep their Mandarin Chinese. Legally, they have Vietnamese nationality but belong to the ethnic Chinese group (Han population), one of the 53 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam.

3. The use of language and education of the Chinese community under the Saigon regime and during the French colonial period

During the French colonial period, to carry out the policy of “divide and rule”, the French rulers practiced favoritism towards the Huaqiao in terms of economy. Specifically, the Huaqiao in Saigon was proprietary in trading rice, salt and other essential items. Therefore, The Huaqiao had full control of the country's economy.

But in the field of language, the French promoted the Latin writing system in southern Vietnam. Thus, France eliminated the Han character system in Vietnam. France forced the Vietnamese, Huaqiao and other aliens to learn and speak French. It was during this period that the national language of Vietnam was conceived and formed.

In Huaqiao primary schools, French was taught. Article 5 of the decree dated 05/14/1924 obliged all private schools in Indochina to conduct lessons in French or in the vernacular (Exhibit 1: 3). Against this backdrop, there were only two types of schools in Vietnam: one is the French, or the French – Vietnamese school; the second is the private school teaching the vernacular (écoles privées élémentaires). The second type of school was only permitted to hold primary classes from grade 5 to grade 3, equivalent to class II, III, and IV of primary school level.

France only allowed Huaqiao to open private schools in the elementary and primary level because the Huaqiao population in Vietnam was quite large. In 1921, the Huaqiao in Vietnam accounted for 195,000 people (李白茵 1990:15); by 1943 the total number of the country's Huaqiao was 466,000 (Tran Khanh 2001: 14). Circulars dated 21/12/1925 and 28/03/1929 stated that the Huaqiao were not allowed to open middle schools; the only Huaqiao middle school that was allowed was the French – Chinese middle school in Cholon (Lycée franco-chinois de Cholon) (Appendix 1: 6).

The decree dated 13/08/1930 amended Article 5 in the decree dated 14/05/1924 as follows: allowing the Huaqiao schools to teach partly in Chinese, Chinese primary schools were obliged to teach at least 5 hours of French in one week; Chinese elementary schools were required to teach French or the vernacular (Vietnamese) at least 3 hours every week (Appendix 1: 3). By 1933, a decree dated 12/07/1933 by the Governor of southern Vietnam stated that primary schools teach French at least 8 hours per week, and elementary schools teach French or the vernacular (Vietnamese) at least 3 hours per week (Appendix 1: 3).

However, according to Tran Khanh researcher in his book “Ethnic Chinese in the Vietnam’s society under French domination and Saigon regime”, in 1931 the ethnic Chinese established two middle schools in Cholon (including Kinan middle school and Trung Khanh middle school). Since 1939, Mandarin and Chinese dialect languages such as Cantonese or Fujian been taught in all Chinese schools. However, after 1949 all Chinese schools only taught in Mandarin, because most of textbooks were imported from Taiwan (Trần Khánh 2002:303). Thus, ethnic Chinese children and Huaqiao could only speak Mandarin or their mother language but not Vietnamese (Tran Khanh 2002:303).

From the provisions above, it can be seen that, under French colonization, the Vietnamese and the Huaqiao in Saigon were exposed to the Latin system. The French government implemented policies to eliminate the Han character system in the education system. However, because France recognized Huaqiao as foreigners living in Vietnam, they allowed the Chinese primary schools to teach partly in Chinese. Therefore, Huaqiao managed to maintain their national language somewhat. However, during the French colonial period, due to the Chinese language elimination policies of the French government, the Huaqiao *bangs* agreed to teach only Mandarin in schools instead of teaching the native language of each group in each *bangs* as before⁴. Thanks to the unity in language and the coherence in economic development, the public awareness of the Huaqiao gradually strengthened and lifted. This is a key point to the prevention of those Huaqiao or oversea Chinese from Vietnamization.

Entering the Saigon regime, we can say that the education of Chinese language in Saigon achieved a new breakthrough. In terms of policy implementation, the Ngo Dinh Diem

⁴ Before the French colonial period, the Huaqiao *bangs* had taught the native language of each group in each *bangs* such as Fujian, Cantonese, etc....

government had always advocated an “assimilation policy” for the Huaqiao in all aspects. Specifically, in the field of language education, in terms of policy, the government of Ngo Dinh Diem obliged Chinese primary schools to teach Vietnamese for at least 6 hours per week, including in subjects such as Vietnamese literature, Vietnamese historiography, Vietnamese geography (Annex 2: 2). Also, the subject “Citizen Education” was mandatory, with the purpose to teach Huaqiao “the duty of aliens towards Vietnam” (Appendix 2: 1).

On the other hand, Ngo Dinh Diem authorities allowed the ethnic Chinese to teach in Mandarin in schools. Not proscribing Han characters as the French did, Ngo Dinh Diem authorities listed Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language. The Saigon government allowed ethnic Chinese to teach Mandarin and Vietnamese in schools. The lessons of the “citizen education” subject would be compiled in Vietnamese and Mandarin Chinese and then provided to the Chinese schools (Appendix 1:7).

On the policy side, there was only one Franco-Chinese school operating in Cho Lon. The Saigon government was still considering allowing Chinese people to establish their own secondary schools. However, according to a report by the Academic Department (Nha tổng giám đốc học vụ) in 1956, there were in fact eight Huaqiao middle schools located in Saigon - Cholon besides the Franco-Chinese school. The general director of the Academic Department commented that “these were the middle schools which our government had turned a blind eye on although it was contrary to our law. That also was a leniency of the authorities for Huaqiao. In the new project on private schools, we would estimate the provision for legalizing huaqiao middle schools (Appendix 1:7).”

Because of the clemency of Ngo Dinh Diem, the general situation of Huaqiao schools were rated as “very positive” by Saigon government’s authorities (Appendix 4:1). According to researcher Tran Hong Lien, in 1946, there were ninety-seven Huaqiao schools located in Saigon – Cholon, with 25,226 pupils, which increased to 34,932 pupils in 1953 (Tran Hong Lien 2006:37). However, according to statistics from the National Education Ministry of the Republic of Vietnam, the total number of Chinese primary schools in South Vietnam was 147 schools with 30,177 pupils. Besides, there were nine middle schools with 12,261 pupils located in Saigon – Cholon (Appendix 3). According to statistics from the Academic Department of South Vietnam, there were ninety Chinese primary schools (sixteen located in Saigon, seventy four located in

Cholon) with 23,672 pupils; and nine middle schools (three located in Saigon, six located in Cholon) with 12,261 pupils (Appendix 4:2). The number of schools, classes and pupils are listed in the table below:

Local			Number of schools and classes		Number of pupils (person)		
South Vietnam	Saigon – Cholon		School	Class	Male	Female	Total
	Education level	middle school	9	206	7.310	4.951	12.261
		primary school	90	442	14.740	8.932	23.672
	Other provinces		School	Class	Male	Female	Total
	Education level	primary school	48	196	4.971	1.524	6.496

Table 1: Number of schools, classes and pupils of Huaqiao schools in 1956⁵

Under the Saigon regime, the Chinese schools applied the educational program of Republic of China (Taiwan). In particular, the curriculum of primary education was taught in the spirit of “Three Principles of the People” (Chủ nghĩa Tam Dân) by Sun Yat-sen. The school’s teachers were mostly professors from ROC. Among them, there were some professors who graduated from Cambridge, Paris or Chicago. In addition, some Chinese principals and Huaqiao school staff were invited to attend a teaching workshops in Taiwan every year (Appendix 1:4). This suggests that, under the Saigon regime, all of Huaqiao schools which located in Saigon – Cholon were heavily influenced by Chinese capitalist class and received a great backing from France, the United States and Taiwan (Tran Hong Lien 2006:37).

⁵ According to the data of the Academic Department of South Vietnam and the Ministry of National Education of Republic of Vietnam at the National Archives Centre II HCMC.

In addition, in order to legitimize the spirit of assimilation policies of the Saigon authority, every overseas Chinese school had a Vietnamese principal. However, in fact, every overseas Chinese school had 2 principals in parallel, a Vietnamese and a Chinese. The Vietnamese principal was in charge of administrative affairs such as enrollment, dealing with legal documents and procedures with the Saigon authority. On the other hand, the Chinese principal dealt, overall, with the curriculum, the compiling and selection of teaching materials and teacher recruitment ... (Tran Hong Lien 2006: 38)⁶. With the flexibility of the organizational framework, in terms of diplomacy, the overseas Chinese schools still achieved contact with the government of Vietnam without any language barriers. On the other hand, internally, the overseas Chinese schools kept the aim of teaching Mandarin Chinese in the community. However, in the period of the Republic of Vietnam, the Chinese community in Saigon – Cho Lon was only teaching Mandarin Chinese and apparently neglected the native languages of each language group.

That was the result of the influence from the Nationalism Movement in Asia. When Asian people woke up to nationalism, the Chinese communities in Asia also began to care about the Chinese politics. “This awakening was obvious when the Chinese actively learned the “Chinese National Language” (Guoyu), a completely unfamiliar language for them, especially to the Fujian and Cantonese groups” (Le Van Khue 1979: 13) .

In addition, the teaching materials in Chinese schools in Saigon - Cholon were largely moved from Taiwan. The decentralization of primary school classes was like that in Taiwan. Specifically, in the primary:

The first grade was equivalent to kindergarten level

The second grade was equivalent to the fifth grade

The third grade was equivalent to the fourth grade

The fourth grade was equivalent to the third grade

The fifth grade was equivalent to the second grade

The sixth grade was equivalent to the first grade

⁶ “...The Vietnamese principal was the only one named on the legal procedures, but the Chinese principal operated all things in school.”

In particular, in the Sixth Grade students were prepared for the elementary Chinese Exam (Appendix 1: 4).

It could be said that, under the Saigon regime, the language education of the Chinese people in Saigon experienced more positive changes than under the French, and the number of students continued to increase, and the number of schools and classes rose significantly. Specifically, from 1953 to 1956, the number of classes increased by 145 classes (including 114 primary school classes and 31 secondary school classes); The number of students increased by 14,368 students (11,439 primary school students , 2,929 high school students). The growth in the number of students from the 1953-1954 and 1955-1956 school year is shown in Table 2:

School year	The primary school classes (class)	The primary school students (person)	The secondary school classes (class)	The secondary school students (person)
1953-1954	328	12,233	175	9,332
1955-1956	442	23,672	206	12,261

Table 2: The Growth in the number of classes and students in Chinese schools⁷

Furthermore, facilities and equipment in the schools were quite sufficient. Specifically, many schools had computers equipped with sound, with loudspeaker placed in each classroom. The public schools also had laboratories and bookcases (Appendix 1: 1).

During the period the Republic of Vietnam, the Chinese press in Vietnam also stayed stable; most of the newspapers were written in Han character. In Southern States, Guangdong overseas Chinese founded the Newspaper “Southern States Overseas Chinese newspapers” (Dao Trinh Nhat 1924:56) and many other newspapers ; in Hanoi, there was “Le parcifrique” Newspapers of the Overseas Chinese.

⁷ According to the data of the Academic Department at the National Archives Centre II HCMC.

Chinese, or in their native language (Mr. M communicated with his family in Cantonese and used Mandarin Chinese to communicate with his classmates).

The researcher interviewed G (a Fujian Chinese, a third generation immigrant to Vietnam, 66 years old, selling incense in front of Ha Chuong assembly halls)⁸, who said that “a long time before (the old regime)⁹, the Tran Boi Co (a setting of teaching Fujian Chinese in District 5) taught Fujian and Mandarin Chinese to Fujian children in primary schools in the First and the Second grade. From the third grade on, they were only taught Mandarin Chinese. In addition, schools offered classes teaching Vietnamese at night but few Chinese people attended; the majority of ethnic Chinese children learned from the Chinese language program in the morning.

In some cases, Vietnamese language seemed to be used as a foreign language to communicate, like English and French. There were some Chinese people who could speak Vietnamese but not very fluently, and Vietnamese language was only used to communicate with the Vietnamese authority and the native speakers. This situation lasted until Ngo Dinh Diem passed away in 1963 (Tran Khanh 2002: 304).

4. The transformation of identity of ethnic Chinese in Saigon

Overseas Chinese immigrants shared a characteristic in common -- that they would live in certain concentrated areas, establish hospitals, schools, press agencies, etc. they themselves. The Chinese in Saigon at that time, in terms of culture, still retained Chinese cultural traits like the wearing of traditional Chinese dress, conserving worship customs; and in terms of ethnic consciousness, they were normally divided into three groups with three different kinds of ideologies:

The first group was completely assimilated into the local society and almost lost their origins. They integrated into the local society, obtained local citizenship, had children in Vietnam and absolutely had no sense of being immigrants. They identified themselves as citizens of the native country. This group, initially in their renunciation of Chinese identity may due to economic factors or political influence (war refugees or economic refugees); they wanted to be treated with consideration by the local government regarding tax services and other leniency policies. This group often included poor immigrants who just wanted to find a new area to live, settle and

⁸ Ha Chuong assembly halls located at 802 Nguyen Trai District 5 HCMC.

⁹ The old regime is the way Vietnamese people called the Saigon regime.

achieve economic stability. They did not care about politics or policies of the authorities in Beijing or China (Trung Hoa Dan Quoc). So “they (the Chinese) did not actively get along well with the Chinese and they only worried about enrichment rather than pressure from China” (Le Van Khue 1979: 14)¹⁰. This group of people would identify themselves as local inhabitants. This case could be seen in the Minh Huong group in Vietnam or the Baba Nyonya group in Malaysia.

The second group was the group of Overseas Chinese who had money, controlled the local economy and had high status in the local society. This group would maintain the Chinese nationality and the awareness of being foreigners. They maintained a strong sense of Chinese ethnicity because being foreigners helped them obtain economic benefits. For instance, the Overseas Chinese during French Domination in Saigon kept their Chinese citizenship for use as a commercial bridge between France and China. With the Chinese nationality, they easily traded between Vietnam and China. This group was aware of their ethnic Chinese language, which for them, was the most important language in the world. As soon as their children began to babble and learn to speak, they began to teach them to say “we are Chinese” (Le Van Khue 1979: 14)¹¹.

The third group, because of the policies of local authorities and for maintaining the stability in development, changed their nationality. They voluntarily took on the local nationality, changed the names for themselves and their children and let their children learn the local language, while maintaining their ethnic languages. This group focused mainly on the economic stability factors and the living standard. But they were different from the Minh Huong at a point that for them “if people ask us what Chinese culture is, we cannot answer, but we just know that we love it and want to maintain it. We believe that our children should go to school in this country's state schools, but we also want them to learn Chinese” (Le Van Khue 1979: 14). For perspective, as a Chinese intellectual in Indonesia said, that “[We] want them (our children) to be loyal to Indonesia as their homeland, but we also hope that they do not forget their Chinese culture” (Le Van Khue 1979: 14). That was probably the common thought and consciousness of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, including the Chinese in Vietnam, in Indonesia, and in Singapore. This group tended to integrate totally into the native society. Their and their children's problem was time!

¹⁰ According to a survey by the Associated Press distributed in Southeast Asia.

¹¹ A young Chinese publisher who lived in Southeast Asia said that opposing Communists did not mean anything if the communists did not touch us. Remember that the most important things for us is my country, even when our children started learning language, we would have taught them to say “we are Chinese”.

5. Conclusion

Under the French Domination, language education of the overseas Chinese was restrained by the government's promotion of the Latin writing systems. Since then, the overseas Chinese and the Chinese in Saigon have gradually gotten acquainted with the Vietnamese Romanization.

That was just a temporary restraint and did not expunge the language education of the overseas Chinese. The proof was that in addition to providing the teaching of French in schools, primary schools still taught some Chinese. The overseas Chinese were not allowed to establish their own secondary schools, which was a curb. They had to go abroad to Macau, Hong Kong, or Taiwan for further study. At that time, there was only one French – Chinese high school officially operating in the area of Saigon - Cholon. However, there were many informal schools operating stealthily.

However, at the time of the French domination, with the French government's preferential treatments of the overseas Chinese in terms of economy, the overseas Chinese's economy achieved great progress, so sending their children to study abroad to continue acquiring education was not a big deal for them.

Entering the Saigon regime, the nationality assimilation policies of the Ngo Dinh Diem authority had the effect of making 210,000 overseas Chinese obtain Vietnamese citizenship (Annex 5: 2)¹².

However, in terms of language education, because of the relationship between the Ngo Dinh Diem authority and Chinese government (Taiwan), the overseas Chinese and the Chinese in Saigon received many clemency policies. Specifically, primary schools and secondary schools were allowed to use Mandarin Chinese to teach and offered Vietnamese classes at night in parallel. The schools that operated stealthily in the era of French domination would be formally considered for accreditation. The result of this lenient policy was that there were 90 elementary schools and 9 high schools of Chinese, just in the area of Saigon - Cholon; the number of schools, classes, and Chinese students were constantly increasing. At that time, the Chinese only

¹² According to the report of the Chinese Affair Committee, having 210.000 Chinese people had Vietnamese nationality on 5.1.1959

communicated in Mandarin Chinese and in the native language of each group. Vietnamese was used as a language like English or French. The Chinese overseas and their children hardly knew how to write and speak Vietnamese. This caused significant barriers for the Chinese in Vietnam to integrate themselves into the local society.

Under the French Saigon and Saigon regime, the identity of the ethnic Chinese was quite complicated. There are usually three main manifestations:

The first group fully integrated into the local society in the host countries, denying their Chinese identity. This group voluntarily took on the Vietnamese nationality; their identity was identical to the Vietnamese.

The second group had strong Chinese identity. They advocated teaching their children to remember their Chinese identity and asserted they were just aliens living in Vietnam.

In the third group, the members voluntarily took on the nationality of Vietnam, gradually going away from the consciousness of being Chinese. However, they haven't completely lost the sense of being Chinese. They let their children learn the native language of their host countries, but also taught them Chinese. They more or less retained something of their Chinese culture, but their Chinese identity was gradually localized.

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