PREFACE

By

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Drawings, context and friendship: Oger and Ajalbert

As the 20th century began, the Tonkin discovered by Henri Oger was a young protectorate, twenty years old at most - precisely his age. The colonial power was softening, easing into a peaceful period as though it were not the successor to the prior century's brutal conquest. As the weak willed modernist movement of 1907 was promptly smothered, it failed to see flames of violence kindling in 1908 among the colonized who were reduced to the output of their labor and burdened with taxes. Preoccupied by their daily survival, the mass of peasants in the Red River Delta, seven million people, stooped to drag from the soil harvests frequently too small to guarantee subsistence. Hanoi, the capital of the North, was inhabited by a small, urban population made up of merchants and artisans whose origin was in the mass of peasants whose age old gestures are frozen in this work. It was also a jungle, inhabited by an implacable colonial civilization, largely male, three quarters of whom were civil servants, starched and self-important, courted by fortune hunters in search of a concession, a monopoly or a sinecure.

The balance, a mix of adventurers and entrepreneurs of all sorts and origins: Corsicans and Bretons, outcasts from society, disinherited aristocrats, dreamers and thrill-seekers of every sort. This micro-civilization of four thousand Europeans lived in a near vacuum. For social life it had an opera house, a country club, dance halls, a race course; this is without including small watering holes where absinthe flowed, "flagrant" houses with overwrought decors, and opium dens, the only actual exotic touch in the ensemble. At the time, if the colonial creed went unchallenged, the French faithfully reproduced the metropolitan political cleavages, even amplifying them. The power of the Freemasons clashed with that of the archdiocese when the free thinkers opposed the partisans of an iron-fisted regime applied to the popular masses. It was in this city of Hanoi, in a climate of somewhat self-defeating provincial torpor, that the young Henri Oger had set in motion the campaign to achieve his ambitions.

The mentor whom Henri Oger chose for himself, the "confidant in hours of self-doubt" to whom he dedicated his work, was none other than the impressionist poet, lawyer and journalist, Jean Ajalbert (1863-1947). One cannot doubt that the young man was impressed by the loquaciousness and commitment of this early Dreyfus supporter, this chronicler at the "Droits de l'Homme" and at the "Almanach de la Question Sociale", a man who was close to the anarchist circles of which he was a defender and who judged it preferable to leave the bar in order to distance himself from an institution which was, in his eyes, blinded by its guilty complaisance. He had never counted himself among the "lukewarms or the neutrals", and was fired-up to the point where he made enemies among his own. The Parisian newspapers slammed their doors in the face of this fellow, who was indebted to Aristide Briand for the missions to Indochina which enabled him to take care of his needs as well as to renew his creativity. Editor of the "*Avenir du Tonkin*" newspaper, curious about the Indochina where he lived, he became, through the years, a novelist and prolific writer. In 1909 he wrote the preface for "Fumées d'opium" by Jules Boissière, another talented dilettante living on the banks of Hanoi's Little Lake. In the Indochinese milieu it was mostly as a polemicist with a blistering pen that Jean Ajalbert forged his reputation as an untiring critic of colonial excesses. Perpetual rebel, yet a bon vivant, impetuous but proper, he was characterized by Léon Blum as "jovial and bright" and drew his strength from adversity and was, in fact, nourished by it[1].

It seems that Jean Ajalbert enjoyed a powerful hold on the young Henri Oger who was searching for a model. So much so that the latter envisioned publishing a biography of the journalist[2]. The shared choices which joined these two men transpired in the books of one as in the commentaries of the other. They shared a taste

[1]. Jean Ajalbert (1863-1947), of the Académie Goncourt, former administrator of the château de la Malmaison (1907-1917), would later meet with a sudden change of fortune. After the Liberation of 1944, he paid dearly for the pétainist and doriotist connections he enjoyed when writing in the service of the authorities during the Occupation; he joined, in consequence, the group of authors the publication of whose works was forbidden by the Comité National des Écrivains.

[2]. Henri Oger, among his many projects, announced the publication (n°7) of *Jean Ajalbert, vie et travaux avec une bibliographie complète.*

Technique du peuple annamite
AMEUBLEMENT D'UNE MAISON ANNAMITE
LES OBJETS ORIGINE CHINOISE
(Suite d'une monographie)

Cai ông cam tsm

Ce vase est en porcelaine.
Il vient de Chine.
On sait que les Annamites ignorent l'art de fabriquer la porcelaine.
Ce vase doit être étudié ici ; il se rencontre dans la plupart des maisons aisées annamites.
Il se compose d'une partie principale en porcelaine.
Elle affecte la forme d'un cylindre.
L'ornementation est bleuâtre sur fond blanc, comme dans la plupart des porcelaines chinoises.
On aperçoit une divinité bien connue dans la mythologie sino-annamite.
Elle est représentée se promenant au-dessous d'un bananier.
Ce vase est posé sur un pied en bois.
Ce pied est décoré de plusieurs nervures carrées.
Les pieds présentent des découpures circulaires.
Il port le nom de *Châu qui*.
Le *con qui* est un animal très connu dans la mythologie sino-annamite.

for frequenting plain people and straight forward interactions with them that helped in learning the language. Ajalbert made available to Oger the columns of the Avenir du Tonkin where, every two days, were published drawings and short notes.

Truthfully, these notices, collected under the heading, "Indochinese Studies" assume only a slight interest from a scientific point of view. A meager drawing, with a short explanation of the objects and their context mostly reveal only summary knowledge of the subject. In a word, a good observer, Henri Oger knew how to describe things, but lacking rigor, explained nothing.

The contrast with the articles published ten years earlier by Gustave Dumoutier in the same newspaper evidently weigh in favor of the latter. This precursor, who died in 1904 also used line drawings with pleasure and sobriety. But, they were not just raw materials, but rather a visual amenity depicting a proposition which had been thoroughly explored and subjected to true analysis.

While not ignoring Henri Oger's book, Maurice Durand and Pierre Huard were not wrong in drawing largely from the work of Gustave Dumoutier for the many illustrations for their work. *Connaissance du Vietnam*[1], finding there, released from each line, a particularly Vietnamese signature.

Oger willingly recognized a lineage with the pioneers, Luro, Dumoutier, Friquegnon, or even Cadière. He had no pretensions at innovation, but dreamed of a sharing of knowledge as can be seen in his calls for contributions that appeared in the *Avenir du Tonkin*, where he was responsible for the bibliographic column. Henri Oger was not without ambition and could see in his calls for contributions the first step for a study entitled, "Materials for a dictionary of Indochinese biography and bibliography". Begun in the *Revue Indochinoise* in the months following the arrival of Henri Oger in Indochina (1908, no 77-82, March 15 – May 30), this enterprise was as fruitless as it was ephemeral. The editorial committee ended it after three months judging that the author didn't provide the necessary meticulousness[1].

His initial bulimia announced itself by way of a boast: no less than a dozen works or so were in preparation, he claimed – an assertion that must have been thought to display a lack of modesty and earned him a hostile reception. Indeed, a brief mention taken from his introductory essay published in the Corpus would seem to confirm that impression: "*The author has again, inevitably, had to work without the support of any of the organized scientific bodies here in his pursuing a fuller understanding of the country of Annam*", by which he meant more strictly the École des Langues Orientales and the École française d'Extrême-Orient. Solidly planted upon the colonial ferment, on boulevard Carreau in Hanoi, the latter learned institution was hardly known for its indulgences and professed, as Malraux later did, a sovereign disdain for the sharpshooters of learning. But Henri Oger insisted, and as he thanked subscribers for the sympathy and confidence they had shown him, he could not help highlighting how their sentiments were "*more than ample consolation for the baseness and villainy unfailingly visited on any upright and independent researcher in this land*".

L'AVENIR DU TONKIN

Les Etudes Indo-Chinoises

par

(Suite) HENRI OGER

ENQUÊTES COLLECTIVES. M. OGER prie les correspondants de l'Avenir et les personnes qui s'intéressent aux Etudes Indo-Chinoises de lui communiquer des matériaux ou observations sur les trois Enquêtes ouvertes dans ce journal : Constitution d'un Dictionnaire de Biographies et de Bibliographie Indo-Chinoises.— Enquête sur les industries indigènes (procédés, lieux, gestes, outils, statistiques). — Constitution d'un recueil de Folklore Annamite (légendes, proverbes, contes, superstitions) Il rendra compte d'une manière détaillée de tout ouvrage envoyé en double exemplaire.

To be blunt, Henri Oger was treated as a fraud and accused of plagiarism; though publication of the corpus was as much an act of will as a challenge, Oger's detractors replied with a silent disdain that served only to justify the limited initial print run of the work. As a result, the major libraries of Indochina are silent on the matter of its existence.

The climate of adversity endured by Jean Ajalbert, a voluntary outcast from the Establishment, and the young Henri Oger in the face of skeptical scientific grandees and incomprehension on the part of his superiors, partly explain why

[1]. Maurice Durand and Pierre Huard, Connaissance du Việt-Nam. Paris, EFEO, 1954, 356p. New edition: Paris, EFEO-De Boccard, 2003.

[1]. The explanation given by Charles Maybon, "Note sur les travaux bibliographiques concernant l'Indochine française" in Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient. Tome 10, 1910, p. 414.

these two men were close. Perhaps the hardships faced by Henri Oger helped radicalize the views of the journalist in whom he had confided. Ajalbert introduced Oger to the Avenir du Tonkin, but both fell foul of the critics. From then on, Jean Ajalbert would afford no respite to erudites who had become over jealous of their prerogatives. A thorn in the side of the EFEO, which he dubbed the school of the facetious, "École facétieuse d'Extrême-Orient", the chronicler repeatedly censured the institution over its quest for "pure science" at the expense, not only of colonial populations, which was bad enough, but also, and perhaps graver still, of the study and use of their languages to concentrate instead on Pali and Chinese, which it regarded as nobler. If the indictment, in *Les nuages sur l'Indochine*, was implacable, the truth is that the charge was justly brought, and these criticisms gave pause for salutary reflection. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the colonial government of the time was hardly disposed to allow "savants", its savants, to scrutinize at too close a hand the populations under its dominion. The EFEO, forgetting this momentarily in 1906, when it began, cautiously and in coded terms, to lend echo to the political ambitions of Vietnamese reformists, briskly jumped back in line, and its Bulletin was obliged to submit to prior censorship. The escape into Indian and Chinese studies thus satisfied as much a desire for self-protection among researchers, who were not exactly pugnacious where the institutions of power were concerned, as any fascination with antiquity. Only later, and with measured steps, did the EFEO genuinely begin a change of course leading eventually to accrued knowledge of the people and their everyday technologies, as the School's abundant photographic collection, which is the perfect counterpoint to Henri Oger's sketches, testifies.

Since the beginning of his military service, Henry Oger's progress in the colonial establishment had been marked by problems of integration. His career as a colonial administrator in the years after 1910 continued in the same vein. Reading his file at the Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, at Aix-en-Provence, and at Centre No 1 of the National Archives of Vietnam in Hanoi, one has a rather ambivalent picture. From the variable "bulletins de notes" and reports one gathers that he was a capable hand, with an impressive capacity for work, upon his arrival in Indochina. During his second stint, in 1911, when stationed at Vịnh, his activity earned nothing but praise; but it was remarked that, given over entirely to his researches, he was somewhat neglecting his administrative duties. As time went by, this failing was more harshly underscored in successive reports, wherein the grade 5 administrator was reprimanded for the high opinion he had of himself and his scientific knowledge. Henri Oger, the civil service functionary, saw himself as a researcher – but was not acknowledged as such. A schoolmate of Henri Maspero at the École Pratique des Hautes-Études, who arrived in the colony at the same time as he, Oger did not know how to fit in at the EFEO and win the prestige he sought. Over the years, he neglected his tasks, irritated a succession of superiors and lost their trust. By 1914 his superiors were inclined to judge him unusable as a bureaucrat. He was repatriated to France the same year for health reasons.

While in Paris, perhaps nudged in this direction by Jean Ajalbert, who sympathized with it, he became involved in the "Maison de Tous" movement. Inspired by the "free public libraries" in America, which had been invented as alternatives to drinking establishments, this initiative aimed to create meeting places on the margins of family, religious and political structures. Socializing freely, with all class distinctions abolished, participants would be at liberty to develop physically, morally and intellectually. In this so-called "unanimist" doctrine, one can discern positivist, hygienist and indeed egalitarian utopianist elements. But this was wartime and patriotism was also in the mix, merged with a strange notion of the "Race historique" defined by Gustave le Bon[1].

In a year, Henri Oger expended much effort in meeting and rallying to this cause as many of the capital's political decision makers as possible. Some lent an obliging ear nourishing his excitement and illusions.

Though he had numerous supporters in Paris, Oger was once more dispatched to Tonkin in September 1916 for a third mission that would end three years later under a cloud. He was made deputy administrator of Quảng Yên Province, where he very quickly brought upon himself the wrath of his direct supervisor in the hierarchy, the *Résident de France* of the same province. To the latter, Henri Oger was a trouble-maker who made matters worse with his proselytism, among the Vietnamese, in favor of the "Maison de Tous", or the "Maison pour Tous franco-indigène". Back in the colony, he was preaching moral and intellectual reform that he dearly hoped would lead to the creation of a lay mutual society at municipal level, but beyond the control of the State, aiming to work towards, in the words of its founder, "economic, technical and social education among the Annamites". Combined with his other errings, the propaganda campaign he led tirelessly on behalf of this Society caused deep anxiety at the highest level of the colonial apparatus and led, in 1918, to a commission of inquiry formed to expose his dealings. Sent back home to France at the beginning of 1919, just as the 350 pages he devoted to the "Maison pour Tous"[2] appeared in the *Revue Indochinoise*, Henri Oger was officially retired from service on 18 December 1920; he never returned to Indochina.

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[1]. Gustave le Bon *Les lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*, Felix Lacan, Paris, 1894.

[2]. Henri Oger collected together several texts, pamphlets and articles under the title: "Comment enrichir rapidement la France et ses Colonies", Revue Indochinoise, février 1919, tome XXXI, pp.101-462.

An original look at Vietnamese material culture from the beginning of the 20th century

The title which Pierre Huard gave to the brief biographical note that he devoted to Henri Oger in 1970 is evocative: "The pioneer of Vietnamese technology, Henri Oger (1885 - 1936 ?)" Nonetheless, it merits being put in context as well as clarification of what, precisely, the author may be considered a pioneer.

At the inception of the 20th century, the principal scientific studies devoted to Vietnamese folk culture had been undertaken by Gustav Dumoutier (1850 – 1904), whose work was published after his death under the title "Essays on the Tonkinese", in a series of articles in the *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (March 15, 1707 – February 15, 1908). Following the example of this established author, the young Henri Oger made no secret of his ambition to acquire a deep and subtle understanding of the colonized society, and in so doing, indirectly denounce the contempt of contemporary scholars towards working folk and their practices. Their respective scientific ambitions were no less different from one another.

Fig. 42. -- Laqueurs.

Gustave Dumoutier developed a comprehensive approach to the society and its organization. To do this, he made multiple, thematic studies in order to render society's different facets, whether of the Annamite commune, of the family, of nutrition, of medicine, of superstitions and beliefs, etc. Thus, in the article devoted to "Games, customs and professions"[1] he was moved to present a series of artisanal trades in the form of brief monographs which were very well documented and augmented with drawings showing precise gestures and stages of fabrication, like the scene in a lacquer workshop. For him the drawing had integrity above all as an illustration and was not in itself the visual support of a particular descriptive or analytical scrutiny.

Henri Oger's approach was of another kind. As he underlines in the preface to his introductory text, he started with the principle that "the current state of Indochinese and Sinological studies requires in large part vast repertoires and inventories". Armed with this certitude, he attached himself to the principle of establishing a large body of material regarding the many aspects of the material life, crafts and industries of the people of Annam.

This quest for exhaustiveness in so vast a domain is one of the features of the work of Henri Oger, and helps establish him as a pioneer. His ambition was to use a broad brush to paint an overall picture of Vietnamese material culture where Gutave Dumoutier had only proceeded one stroke at a time, using studies of a few artisanal activities as the base from which to reflect and generalize on the entirety of Vietnamese society.

Beyond the legitimate satisfaction posted by Henri Oger for having succeeded in carrying out an enterprise of such scope, personally, in other words, without the support of the research institutions, the undeniable originality of his work hangs on his ability to successfully combine an empirical approach on the ground with the exploration of a field, the contours of which had barely begun to be understood: cultural technology.

With a resolutely ethnographic perspective, endowed with a sharp sense of observation, and accompanied by a Vietnamese draftsman, he crisscrossed the streets of Hanoi and the suburbs of the capital in order to capture the formidable diversity of industry, business and folk arts developed by the « little people » without neglecting any aspect of family or public life of the period. We must remind ourselves that at the time, the sociological and ethnographic studies conducted in the field by researchers were few. The academic studies mostly fed off of the observations and information gathered by inspired amateurs (missionaries, soldiers, explorers) and then reconstructed in the form of reports or travel accounts.

[1]. Article published 15 Mai 1907, number 57, *Revue Indo-Chinoise*, pp. 52-167.

But above all, the classical orientalism that held sway over the work of learned bodies in continental Asia was alone responsible for selecting, *de facto*, the objects of research and disciplinary approaches to study that it deemed worthy of interest. As a consequence, filtered by archeology, philology and epigraphy, human societies were grasped only in terms of the glorious vestiges of a long gone and distant past.

Henri Oger's long immersion in the daily lives of common people led him to challenge a number of preconceptions held in colonialist insularity and raised to the level of postulates, notably the widely held opinion that "*Industry in the Annamite countryside is almost absent or insignificant*".

For the author, such an assertion proceeded from a profound lack of knowledge of local realities because it omitted the important contribution of artisanal activities and businesses developed by the « peasant-workers » which provided them with an indispensable complement of resources which the rice-based economy was powerless to deliver.

As to the author's methodology for collecting and studying data, it evokes undeniably the first fruits of a sociological study of systems of techniques, notably in the central importance given to the study of physical movements. He insists on the importance of defining with a sequence of sketches the different moves by which a worker or artisan handles and operates a tool or rudimentary machine. This method of sequential processing permits the scholar, in his own terms "*to organize series composing the whole*", presiding over the identification and study of operational chains in the anthropology of techniques. But beyond this, taking as a point of departure the principal that the study of the technological civilization of a people is the study of its material culture, the author arrived at an interest in motions in their own right, especially where production is achieved without any instrument, where the human body itself is the tool. In the end are clearly isolated the four elements in play in any technological process: a primary material which is acted upon; objects (tools, working methods); motions or sources of energy (running water, hauling power) which put objects in motion; specific depictions which underlie the motions of certain techniques[1].

The relevance of any system of inventorization, and all the more so when it lays claim to exhaustivity, is conditional on its capacity to classify the bulk of collected data according to pre-existing classification criteria or to use definitions and the application of typological principles in order to single out hierarchical and coherent groupings. This is what the author proposes by differentiating four categories of techniques: 1. *Industries which extract primary materials from nature* (agriculture, fishing, hunting, transport, gathering); 2. *Industries which process materials extracted from nature* (paper, precious metals, pottery, etc.); 3. *Industries which use processed materials* (trade, stone work, painting and lacquer, etc); 4. *The family and public life of the country of Annam* (musical instruments, magic and divination, games and toys, etc.). Even though these modalities of classification can appear somewhat summary, particularly the fourth category which seems saddled with a motley set of social and cultural practices and attitudes, they nevertheless evoke the four broad spheres of technical activity defined at the beginning of the 1940s by André Leroi-Gourhan[1]: The techniques of acquisition, fabrication, assembly and consumption, understanding that the cultural sphere plays a decisive role in the habits of consumption.

But if the introductory text insists on the necessity of organization according to these four broad categories and on a diachronic sequencing of the analysis of these technical procedures, the end result which one can see in the volume of plates is diametrically opposite: it is perfectly free of any preoccupation with ordering the materials collected in the field[2]. To see this, one need only open randomly to any page, where one may find, the scene of a child flying a kite side by side with the pictorial representation of the punishment inflicted upon guilty adulterers; an itinerant woman selling fruit and a boatman maneuvering his sampan; the wood-sculptor's tools and a deceased being placed in a coffin, etc. The reasons for this remarkable contrast between the rigor of the written word and the inextricable jumble found in the plates volume remains a mystery. In effect, in the section dedicated to how he went about getting the work published, Henri Oger failed to say a single word about the layout of the plates. He describes difficulties encountered during the printing which caused him to resort to a local technique of "stamping" on dó paper: "*The 4,000 plates finished during the summer arrived; it was impossible to pass them under the rollers of the machines. They had warped*." The most likely hypothesis for such a lack of order is that the assembly of drawings making up one plate was carried out by the wood engraver immediately before the actual printing.

This miscellaneous assembly, whether voluntary or imposed by technical constraints, in no way hinders their accessibility; indeed, it faithfully reflects the

(1). Cresswell R., 1992, "Technologie", *Dictionnaire de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie*, Bonte P. and Izard M. (dir.), Paris, PUF, pp. 698-701.

(1). Leroi-Gourhan A., 1943, *Évolution et technique, l'homme et la matière*, Paris, Albin Michel.

(2). One notable exception: Henri Oger published a valuable study on the joss stick industry in Hanoi: "Industrie des bâtonnets d'encens à Hanoi", *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (Vol. XIV, July - December 1910, Hanoi, Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, p. 240-252).

diversity of a colorful, abundant folk culture nourished by an ingeniousness which seems without limit. While preparing this new edition, we went through the volume of plates time and time again and upon each review we felt that we had discovered a new street scene, tool or agricultural technique of which the sketch had escaped us on the prior readings. The simplicity of the lines, the care in scrupulously setting the gesture, the posture of the body, all the way to the expression in the face, while freed from the classic rules of perspective, converge to make each drawing a unique work loaded with real evocative power. One finds oneself roaming through the pages like an inquisitive traveler wandering through the apparent chaos of the Quarter of the 36 streets in Hanoi. Thus, if the work is a powerful machine for winding back the years, the atmosphere of profound humanity which it reconstructs remains palpable today. Obviously, the nature of the businesses has often changed, stalls full of votive objects have been replaced in some areas with à la mode clothing boutiques or souvenir shops for tourists; but family scenes continue to play out, without inhibition, in the streets and the few available public spaces; the sidewalks remain overrun with itinerant vendors and fleeting displays; shops, open to the elements still reveal so many small trades and crafts to every passerby.

Maurice Durand, in the introduction to his reference study devoted to Vietnamese popular imagery[1] rightly notes: "*To use a really banal statement, but which in present circumstances conserves its full value, Vietnamese popular imagery reveals to us the soul of the Vietnamese people as it has been molded by its beliefs, its literature, its ideas, its history, and the typical modalities of daily life*." At the risk of paraphrasing this author, the totality of drawings and sketches presented in this volume, published a century ago, reveals not only the wealth of techniques and Vietnamese folk know-how but constitutes a heritage record of a unique kind.

Compared to it, the series of monographs of artisan guilds presented by Henri Oger in his introductory volume looks very weak, molded by the colonial outlook of the period. Of course, he does identify a number of salient traits of Vietnamese family industries: characteristics which he attributes to the effects of the struggle to survive in the "*overpopulated Tonkin delta*". He also describes the intense division of labor which mobilizes all age groups from children to old people; he observes the scattering of trades and trade into an infinite number of sub-trades and little businesses where each type of food, each type of fruit has its own merchant; he underlines the primary role of women in most production processes.

[1]. Maurice Durand, 1960, *Imagerie populaire Vietnamienne*, Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, vol. XLVII, Paris. 479p.

Certainly, he enthuses sometimes about the quality of manufactured objects and the precise movements of an artisan; some of these reflections can be gleaned haphazardly from the book: "*Thus, bamboo is used in an admirable way*"; "*In fishing, the native has shown an observant nature and an elegance of action which are really admirable*".

But this empathy, without doubt sincere, is contrite in the context of the evolutionist perspective which at the time utterly dominated the social sciences. Thus the author confirms that "*the Annamite People must be entered in the class of Semi-Civilized People, who have made considerable but slow progress*" and embellishes his text with value judgments that contrast with a number of his admiring appreciations: "*The embroiderer has no taste. He doesn't know how to draw.*", "*The native, like many primitive people, looks for an inexpensive price rather than at the quality of the thing*". We would regard such thoughts, in our time, as signs of an unqualified contempt towards the other. But, Henri Oger is simply a man of his time, convinced of the intrinsic superiority of the bourgeois model of occidental civilization over all exotic societies; an ideological system which legitimates for itself alone the colonial enterprise and the civilizing mission of France. In other words, he applies to Vietnamese society a template which sees itself as universal and thus infallible because it is inscribed in the natural order of things. And it is in this spirit that he concludes his introduction by proposing his vision of "*the future of Annamite industry*", a prefigurement of his involvement in the "Maison pour Tous franco-indigène". In order for it to blossom and become an important source of revenue for the colony, Henri Oger pleads for the establishment of professional schools focused on the development of a type of indigenous capitalism in which industry is organized into manufacturing collectives which would progressively replace family based industries, in his eyes too often synonymous with archaism, stasis and an inability to innovate.

What remains now is to make the most of the mine of historical, social and cultural data harbored in these 700 plates of drawings and sketches. In effect, the new edition of this inventory is a significant contribution towards a better understanding of Vietnamese material civilization. But, is not an end in itself. It should provide sustenance for research in a variety of disciplines.

A first approach to this material, this raw data, should encourage the reconnection of the operational networks and coherent technical sequences by isolating and then ordering drawings which show the same artisanal activity, or method of consumption, or aspect of daily life (children's games, cultural practices, artistic expressions, etc.). The analytical table drawn up by the author as well as the Romanized Vietnamese translations of captions in characters are tools which will facilitate this enterprise.

This indispensable preliminary stage could be prolonged by a dynamic study of the evolution of the techniques of production and consumption during the century that just ended. The fact that some trades and families of techniques have endured unchanged while others have transformed themselves through time, when they have not simply disappeared, calls for thought about the phenomena of adoption, dissemination, creation and technological reformulation; and mirrors for us the changing modes of consumption.

As an example, we made a comparative synthesis of the different stages of *dó* papermaking at the beginning of the 20th century and as they occur today (see below). It revealed an astonishing similarity in the motions and tools employed. In this continuity of manufacturing procedures we may detect a faultless underlying transmission of technical knowledge.

Another possible field for research might start from the postulate which states that every technique is an original social creation in the sense that it is a servant of society and not the inverse. Any technique, whatever it is, has two intimately connected dimensions: a physical aspect tied to the manner in which it acts on material, and an elucidative aspect which relates to its "style". Studying this second dimension should uncover collections of social and cultural norms that, in fact, interfere with the operation and evolution of the technical procedures themselves (relating to body posture, interaction with tools and taboos, gender-oriented division of labour, religious practices and beliefs associated with the use of certain tools or materials). More prosaically, an analysis combining the "style" of objects produced with their modality of use may tell us something of the esthetic canons adhered to at the time and, more generally, how the few city dwellers and peasant masses lived. One must give thought to the dominant tendencies, to convergences of aspect, form and use.

One can also envisage a semantic approach to folk techniques and knowledge, derived from the vernacular terms and denominations used in the descriptive captions, or a study of professional guilds and the socio-geographical principles of organization among craft villages transposed to Hanoi according to a spatial logic, on a street by street or neighborhood by neighborhood basis, etc.

In the final analysis, without claiming to raise an exhaustive list of potential trails to explore, nor to map the contours of a program yet to mature, our proposition simply aims to underscore all of the pertinence and usefulness in the pioneering work of Henri Oger for historical and contemporary Vietnamese studies.

The workshop is now open.

A textbook example, the technique of papermaking as seen by Henri Oger

The album of drawings was printed from wood-engraver's plates on traditional *dó* paper, just as the popular prints were. It is no surprise that Henri Oger assembled no less than thirty-eight images associated with tools and techniques that describe the entire paper-production process – and many more if one includes those concerned with printing, the use of votive objects made of paper and popular Tết prints. Because these sketches are dispersed among the over 700 plates, rather than featuring all together, it is a tall order to imagine the linearity by which one operation succeeds another. This reproach could easily be leveled at the Corpus as a whole, since not one technical process, not one practice, from funerals to opium smoking, has been treated in continuum. The interspersion of iconographical themes representing a given theme fragments an otherwise logical sequence. One might better regard them as raw materials, some of the pages being beyond the ken of the layman, requiring commentary, discussion and further study to reveal their value.

It does seem, though, that the author gathered precise data from which to craft a minute chronicle of the different phases of paper production at the village of Yên-Thái. While he is a little brisk in his four-page presentation on paper manufacture in the introduction, everything leads us to suppose that he planned to exploit this material in a text dedicated solely to the art of papermaking. Beyond that, he relies on sources, such as the Chinese corpus cited in his bibliography, for guidance. Sadly, this hasty framework is nothing but indicative: in the end one scarcely knows whether one is dealing with bamboo-based paper, as described in Chinese books, or the *cây gió* that Henri Oger discusses in the introduction, or the mulberry paper shown in the caption for the sketches.

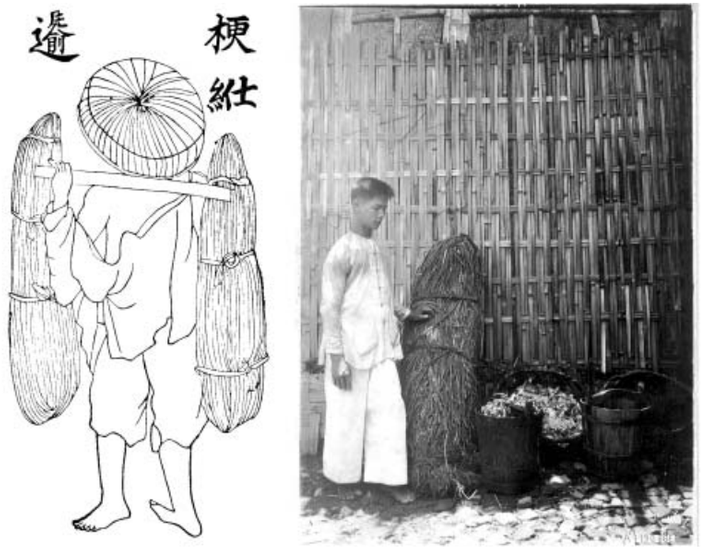
For greater clarity, we have reprised the author's original scheme by isolating within the corpus those drawings that deal with the different stages in the papermaking process. To appreciate the full precision of the illustrative work undertaken under the watchful eye of Henri Oger, we provide a series of photographs that simultaneously reconstruct the process much as it was practiced in the village of Yên-Thái at the beginning of the 20th century, and as one can observe it today in the village of Dương-Ổ (commune of Phong-Khê, district of Yên-Phong)[1].

[1]. The old photographs are taken from the collection of the EFEO in Paris (EFEO), at the Institute for Social Sciences Information in Hanoi (Viện Thông Tin Khoa Học Xã Hội, cataloged VTT) and from the Edgar and Jules Imbert collection (IM) held at Audiovisual Communication and Production Centre of the Ministry of Defense (ECPAD, Paris). The Imbert collection images date from 1906-1908, and are contemporary with those of EFEO and VTT (the latter inheriting the former EFEO collections in Hanoi returned to the Vietnamese, 1954). The recent shots have been taken by P. Le Failler in Bắc-Ninh in 2007 (EFEOHN). Henri Oger's images from the corpus are cataloged HO and indicate the plate. Captions from these VTT, EFEO, and HO images are as shown on the original plates; IM and EFEOHN captions are the work of this volume's editors.

Papermaking is still a major industry in the village, providing livelihoods for almost 3000 people, but the manufacture of dó paper has been largely superseded by large scale reclaimed-paper processing and the making of votive papers. Despite this marginalization, however, traditional practices survive, mixed with some technical improvements, as the comparison between yesterday's and today's images demonstrates.

Detail from the Map of Hanoi and its Environs, 1/20000, sheet n°1, drawn up in 1892-1893 by M. Husson, Lieutenant of Naval Artillery. At the centre one can make out the villages involved in traditional papermaking. The words "fabrique de papier", further east, still on the south shore of the large lake, indicate the site of the Schneider mill (the first Frenchman to import a paper making machine, in 1892).

Let us add, in conclusion, that, in order to accurately reconstruct the chronology of the different stages of production, we have taken pains to show the early 20th century iconographical reproductions (drawings, photographs) to the older generation at Yên-Thái. They have taken the trouble to comment on these old images and we are grateful to them for it.



HO Pl. 148, Transportation of bundles of mulberry branches for papermaking;
VTT 00352 - Ô 4, Yên-Thái, raw materials: bark of Dó, bark of Mò, pieces of paper.

Paper-making. Until quite recent times, dó paper was still manufactured at Yên-Thái (or Làng Bưởi), a village on the outskirts of Hanoi on the western bank of West Lake, an area which is now part of the capital but which lay in earlier times within the province of Hà-Đông. Although it is impossible to say exactly when the craft began, the village of Yên-Thái has, for seven centuries, been known for its paper in the same way that Bát-Tràng is known for its pottery or Ngũ-Xã for its bronze casting. A 1921 study recorded 126 families making a living from paper making, although it is worth noting that the adjacent villages of Hồ-Khẩu and Đông-Xã also depended on paper. Between the three centers, a system of specialization operated: at Yên-Thái writing paper and paper for printing were made, at Hồ-Khẩu and Đông-Xã better quality and larger format papers were produced, suitable for making popular images. The craft was a greedy one, requiring considerable water and firewood for the ovens, and fell victim to growing competition from the paper industry. At Yên-Thái, where all paper was produced by hand, papermaking was abandoned in the early 1980s.

As Henri Oger says, traditional *dó* paper is resistant and light, produced using the bark of the eponymous shrub (rhamnoneuron balansae), a variety of Daphne, but often mixed with dướng or paper mulberry bark (Broussonetia paperifera L.). The barks, which came from Quảng-Ninh, Hòa-Bình, Bắc-Cạn and Thái-Nguyên provinces, were sold in 33 kg sheaves and brought to the village on barrows or carried by porters.

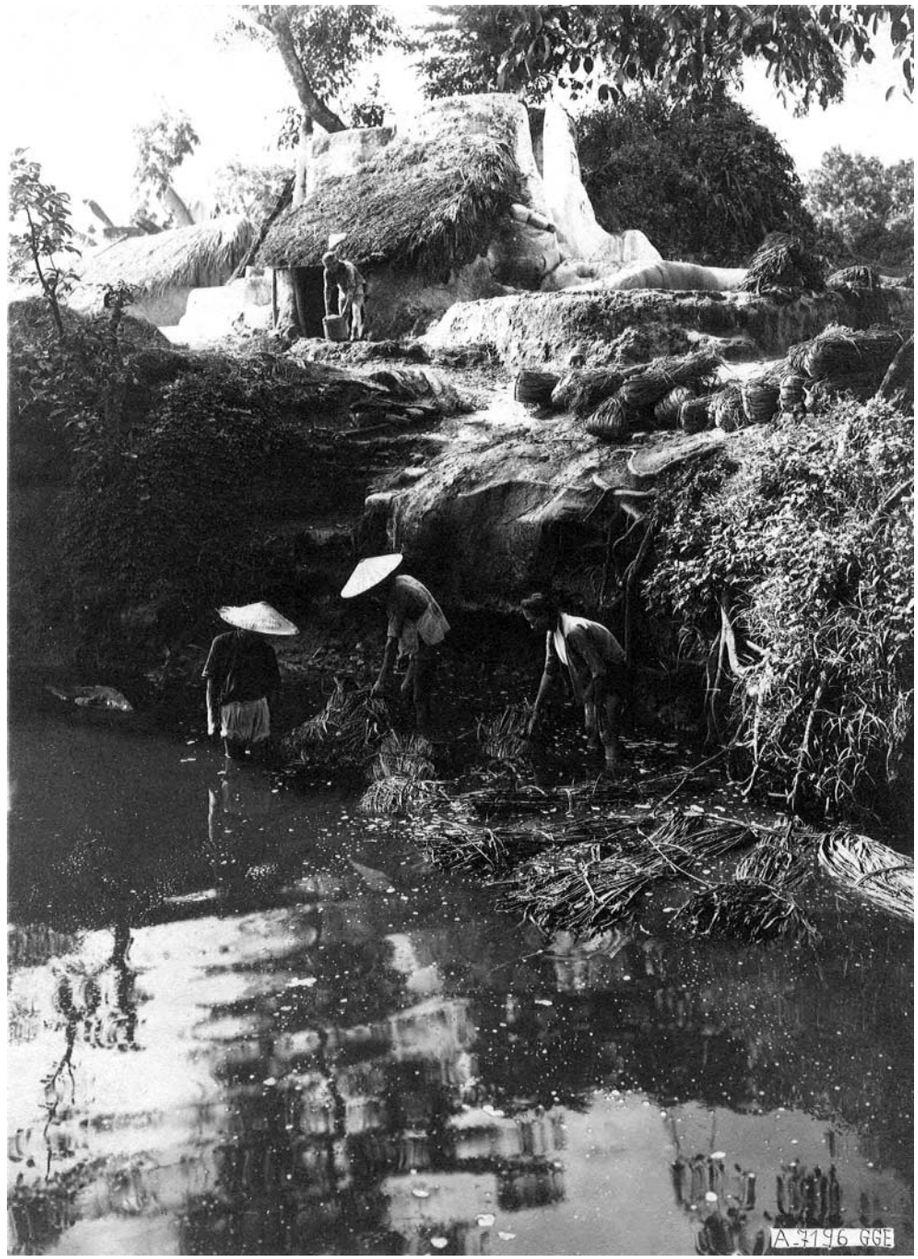
EFEO 4187, Hanoi, worker with "draw", a Japanese model, used to lift off the blackish outer layer of the paper bark or "cay gio" cultivated in Tonkin.

Now we will consider the principal fabrication procedures, one by one.

Retting. Bark is stripped from the branches and the pieces are pre-soaked directly in the Tô-Lịch river for a period anywhere between one and three days, then drained. When prior soaking is complete, proper treatment may begin. The brown, well-wetted bark is then trimmed to remove the more obvious knots, before being cut into pieces and tied in bundles. The bark will steep in tanks containing a solution of milk of lime (12 kg of lime to 100kg of dó) for 24 hours[(1)].

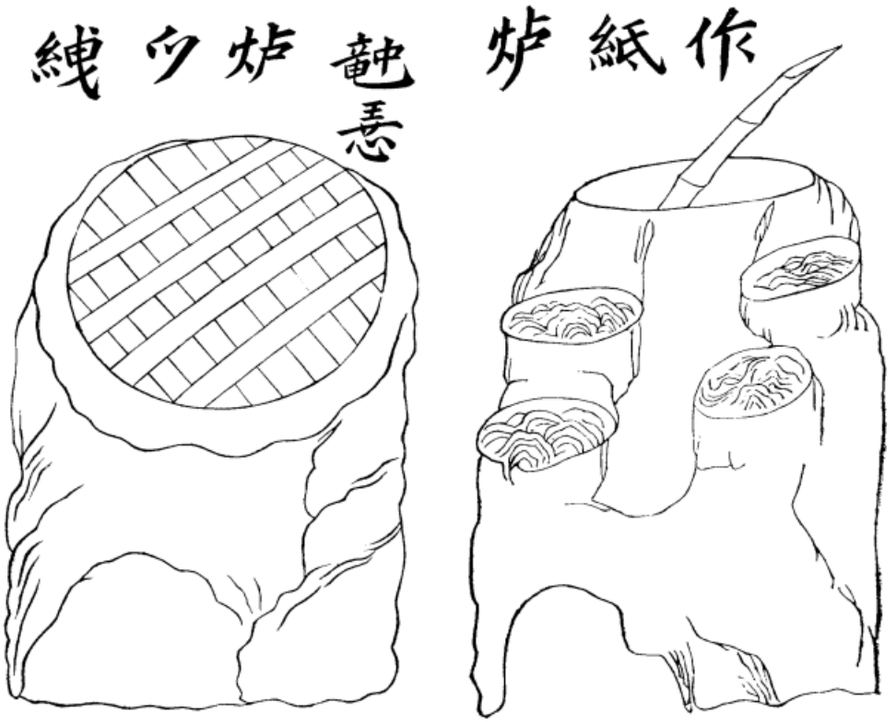
IM-IT 62-885, Maceration of bark in a lime bath

[(1)]. For more details of the tree itself and its culture see the article in 2 parts in F. Claverie "L'arbre à papier du Tonkin", *Bulletin économique de l'Indochine (BEI)* n°24 (December 1903) p.821 and after, et BEI n°25 (January 1904) p.75-88 ; M. Crevost "Sur quelques matières végétales à papier de l'Indochine" BEI n°123 (January-April 1917) p.117-134, and Dard Hunter, 1947, *Papermaking in Indo-China*, Chillicothe, Ohio: Mountain House Press, 102 p.



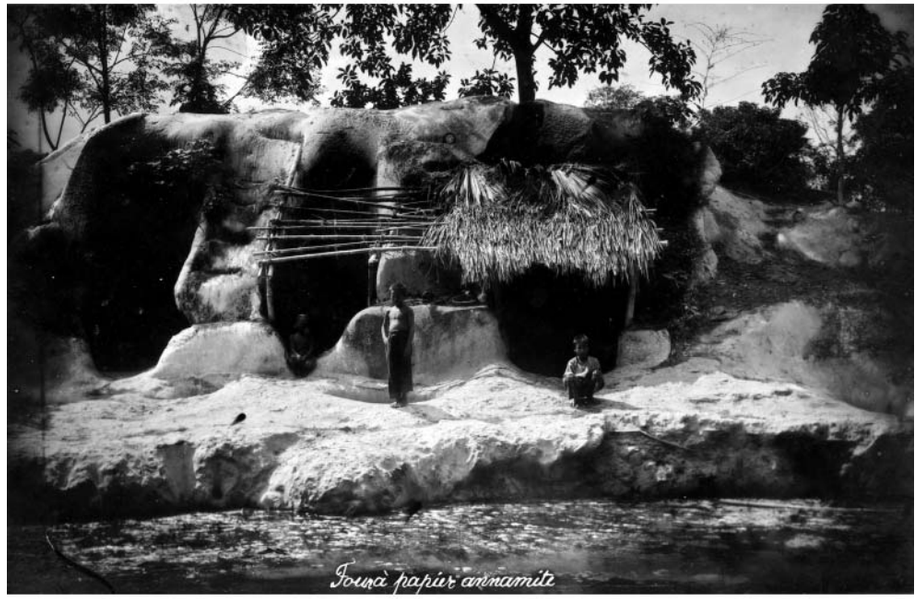
VTT 00350-Ô 4, Yên-Thái village: Immersing the Dó branches in stagnant ponds.

Cooking. Earthen ovens were built on the banks of the Tô-Lịch itself or by the ponds where the bark was macerating. Dó bark is placed in a cauldron which is heated over a rice-straw fire, having been stopped by a wooden lid (according to Henri Oger) or a ball of clay to trap the steam as the bark cooked, either by braising, as at Yên-Thái (8 to 10 hours)[1] or in a bain-marie as at Bắc-Ninh.



HO Pl.602, 649, Vats for mulberry bark.

IM-IT 62-892, Bưởi's ovens.

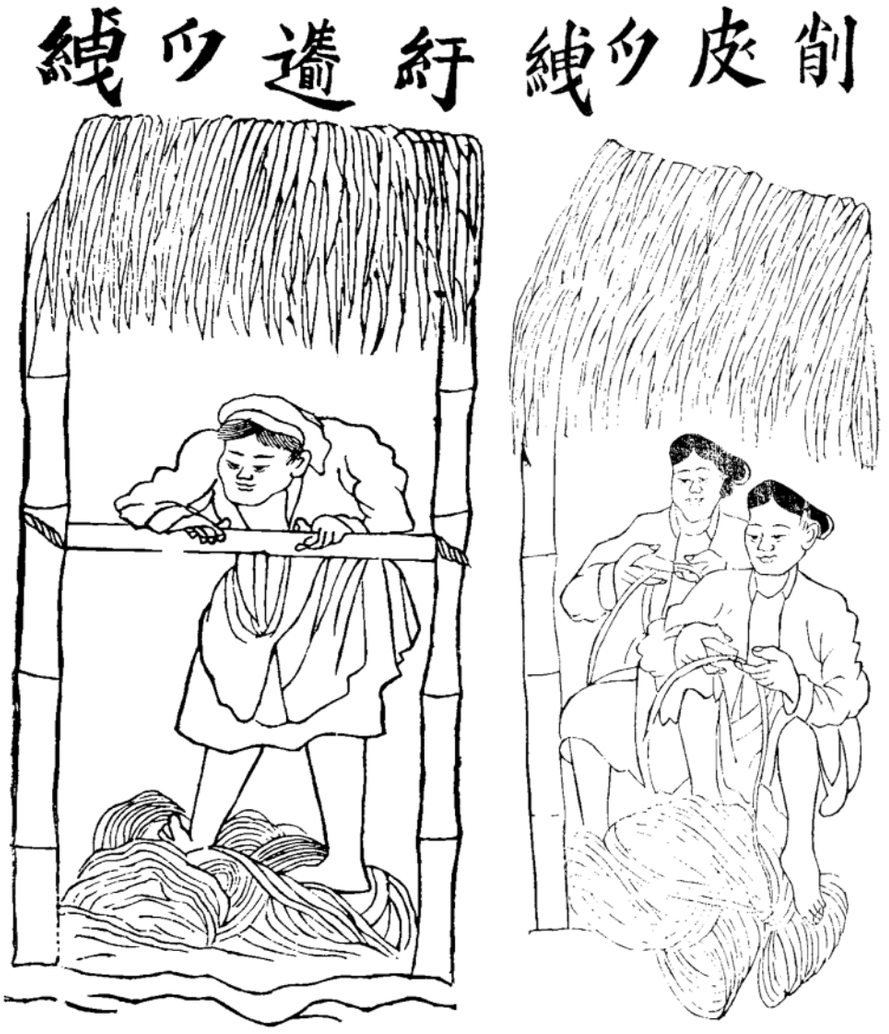


VTT 00347 - Ô 4, Bưởi village. dó bark ovens for papermaking.

[1]. F. Claverie mentions a cooking time of 3 to 4 days or more. (*op.cit.*)

Rinsing. The bark is then carefully washed in clean water to get rid of impurities. Large baskets of woven bamboo were used for this. After a first rinse, the bark is again immersed in lime solution for a few days. Stripping of the fibers may now begin in earnest.

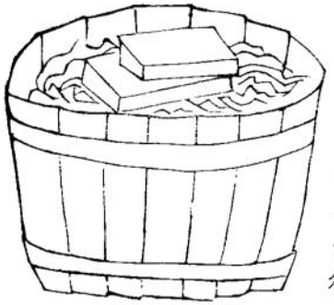
HO Pl. 498, Treading strips of mulberry bark; Pl. 574, Washing strips of mulberry bark.

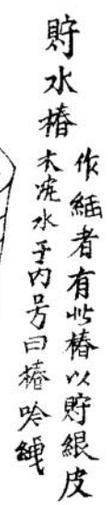


HO Pl. 516, Treading strips of mulberry bark; Pl. 628, Preparing strips of mulberry bark.

Stripping and sorting. Women use a knife to remove the dark outer layer of bark and expose the lighter, nobler inner fibers, which will yield the best quality paper. The dark parts are treated separately to manufacture a lower grade product. The bark, after having been sorted, is again bundled up and left to soak in tanks filled with clean water.

EFEOHN. Preparing strips of *dó* bark.





HO Pl. 41, Tub in which mulberry strips are soaked for papermaking.

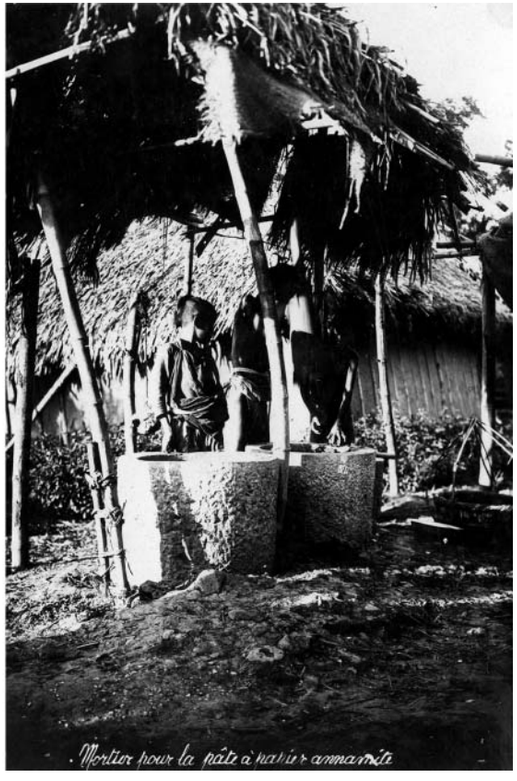
EFEOHN. Paper vat.

VTT 00359 - Ô 4, Removing dó bark after the first phase of 3 days' immersion in lime solution to produce the best grade paper.

HO Pl.48, Draining mulberry bark used for papermaking.

Beating and preparing the pulp. Having once more been washed and drained, the bark is beaten. In the villages, large stone mortars are still to be seen, used by the men to beat by hand, or tread with the feet, or pound using a beam-operated device, to obtain the raw pulp. Once the pulp reached a suitable consistency it was placed in containers of clean water for further maceration. Today, this exhausting work has been replaced by the use of home-made electric mixers.

HO Pl.161, Pounding paper pulp.



EFEO 3039, Mortar for papermaking pulp.

IM-IT 62-886 and IT 62-887, Pounding the bark with a pestle.

The pulp is given a final rinsing in bamboo baskets.

EFEO 3475, Hanoi, papermaking, cleansing the pulp.
IM-IT 62-888, Paper pulp washing process.

The pulp. The pulp, called *huyền phù,* is placed in a cauldron and diluted according to the number of grams it is to yield. It is stirred periodically to ensure good homogenization. When one dips one's hand into the vat, it is almost impossible to feel anything other than a liquid mass, slightly oily to the touch. In olden times, *mò* wood (a variety of Clerodendron) was added to the mix, since the mucilage the wood contains, which would lightly fatten the pulp, allowed the paper to be stacked without the leaves sticking to one another. Delivered in log form, the wood was reduced to shavings and soaked for twelve hours, the time needed to release its gelatinous matter into the pulp. Roughly 2kg of *mò* per 60 kg (picul) of bark were incorporated. Nowadays, this vegetable additive has fallen into disuse and an unknown chemical is used instead, a manufacturers' secret formula, which however has identical properties.

HO Pl. 287, Immersion tank for mulberry strips used to make paper.
HO Pl. 388, Stirring the soaking tank for mulberry strips.

EFEOHN, churning to mix the liquid paste for papermaking.

Laying of the sheets. A purpose-made wooden mould is used consisting of a frame in two sections enclosing a lattice of bamboo, and called the *liêm seo*. The mould is dipped in the vat, then subjected to a series of movements, working from the outside inwards, to allow the pulp to settle on the mesh. Then the frame is lifted out, shaken right and left and given a final jiggle to drain off the liquid and ensure an even lay of paper. A fine layer of pulp thus remains on the mesh. To finish the procedure, the frame is then placed on the edge of the vat and the upper wooden section removed, so that the mesh on which the wet paper has been formed may be detached. The mesh is overturned, so that the sheet on the underside may be precisely laid on the pile of previous sheets, whereupon the mesh can be peeled off and returned once again to the mould, which may now be closed again. To achieve this movement, known as *làm seo*, with due dexterity requires an expert hand, and it is usually executed by a female worker; it takes little more than ten seconds and is repeated with an almost mechanical rhythm.

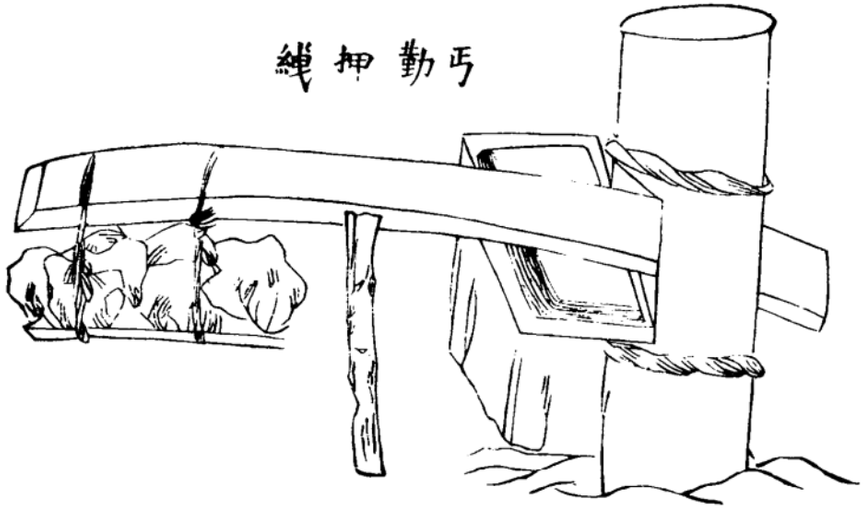
VTT 00407 - Ô 4, Hà Đông. The bamboo mould is dipped into the basin, the macerated bark fiber then forms a sheet of moist paper.

HO Pl. 556, Making paper.

EFEOHN, Dipping the mould.

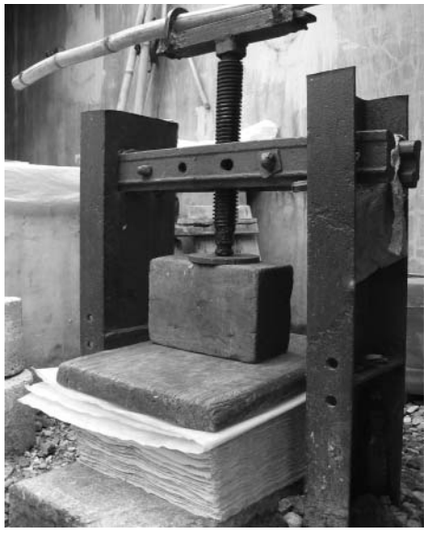
IM-IT 62-890, The sheets of paper are piled one on top of the other to drain.

The paper is not laid on interleavings (like the felt used in Europe) but directly onto the preceding sheet. Sheets are stacked on a pallet of 500 to 1000 units, i.e. in a block roughly 20cm high.

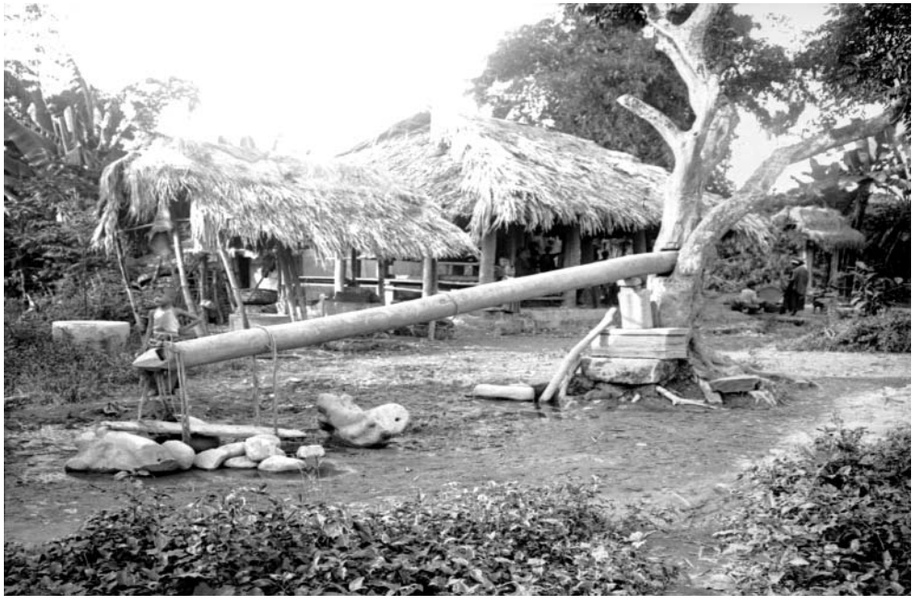


HO Pl. 90, Paper press.

Pressing. The block of fresh paper receives an initial pressing using a wooden plate and a brick for a speedy expulsion of excess liquid. Then it is laid under a press which progressively squeezes out moisture and lends cohesion to the paper. In olden times, the press was a crude affair comprising a piece of wood with one end inserted into a hole in a wall or tree trunk and operated like a lever on the stack, worked with gradual motions so as not to crush the fibers. Nowadays, a screw press does the task. The less water the paper contains prior to being sent for drying, the more homogenous it will be. After pressing, the block still contains 50% water.



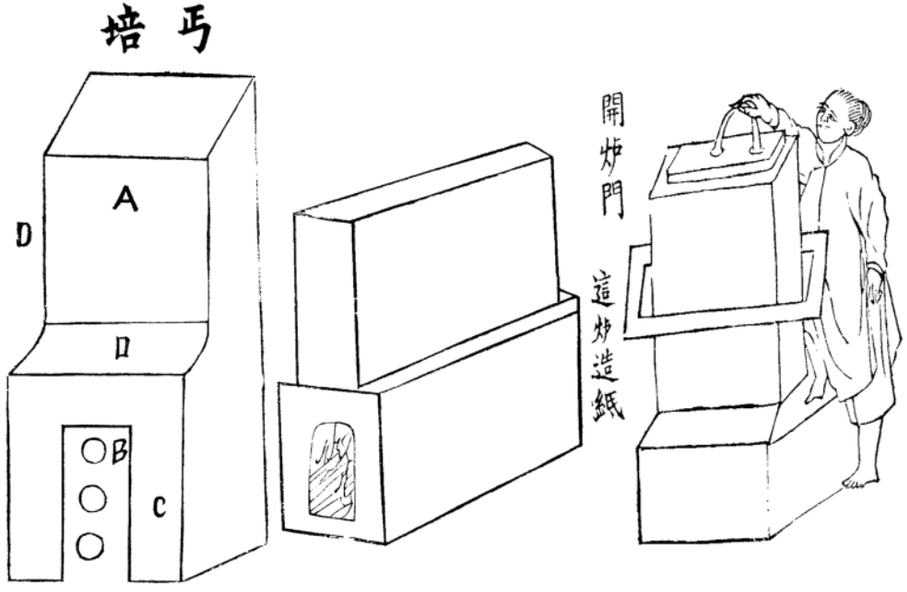
EFEOHN, Paper (screw) press at Bắc-Ninh.



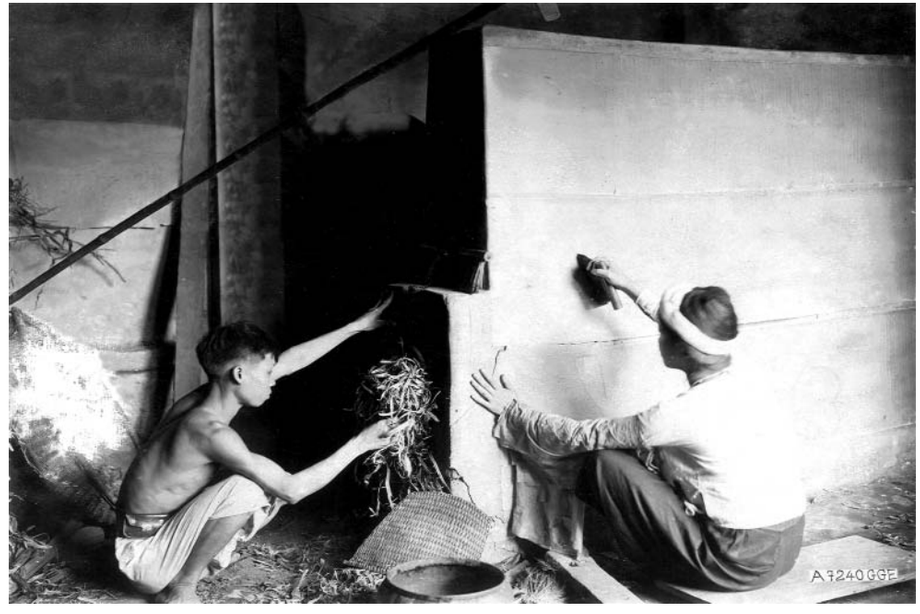
IM-IT 62-891, Paper press.

Drying can be done very simply, in the fresh air under the rays of the sun, with the aid of a line which helps the sheet establish its own stability. But the village of Yên-Thái was known for the almost exclusive use of an oven-drying method. In this, sheets are placed on the outer walls of an oven, carefully arranged in such a way that fingers may be readily inserted to lift off the paper when the process is concluded. Temperatures are in the region of 30°, and should not be too high otherwise paper will not dry slowly and retain its suppleness and its white, delicately unbleached tint, with no trace of premature yellowing. Claverie, in 1903, remarked that *dó* paper was sold in Hanoi at a price of $2.50 to $3 per thousand sheets of premium quality (white), $2 for second grade (yellowish), and $1.50 for third grade (brown paper for wrapping).

HO Pl.240, Paper drying oven.

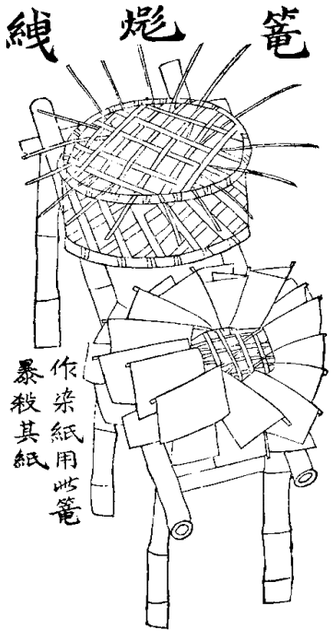


HO Pl. 453, 185, 244, Paper drying oven.

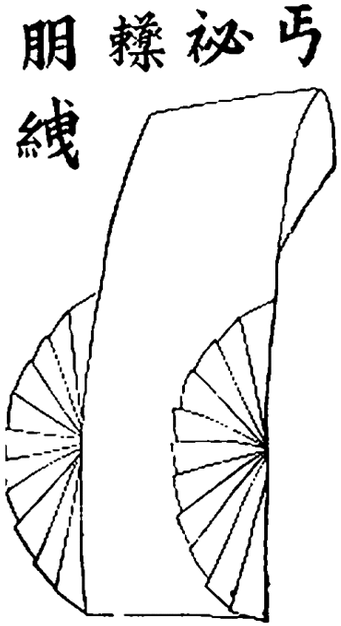


VTT 00368 - Ô 4, For drying, the sheets are “pasted” to the side of the oven.

IM-IT 62-893, Drying paper.

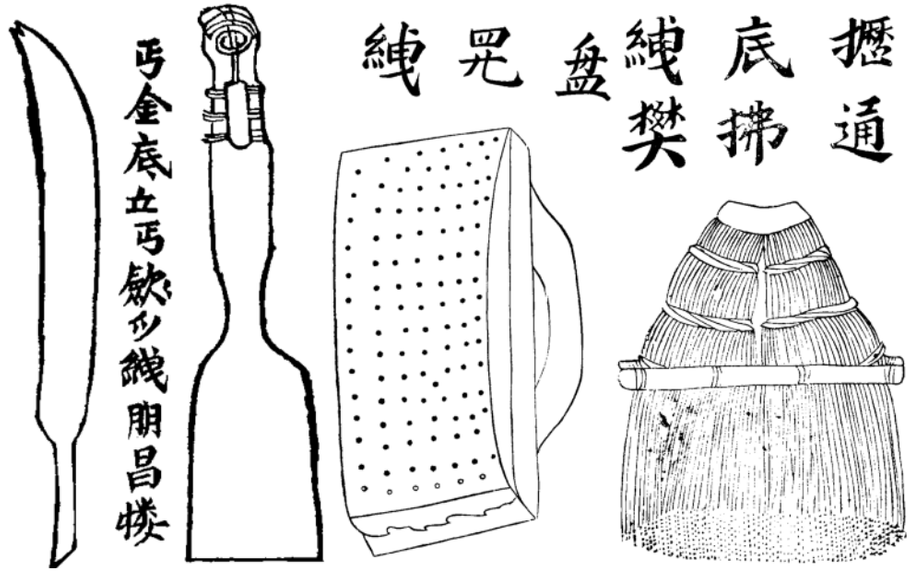


HO Pl. 537, Dryers for colored papers.

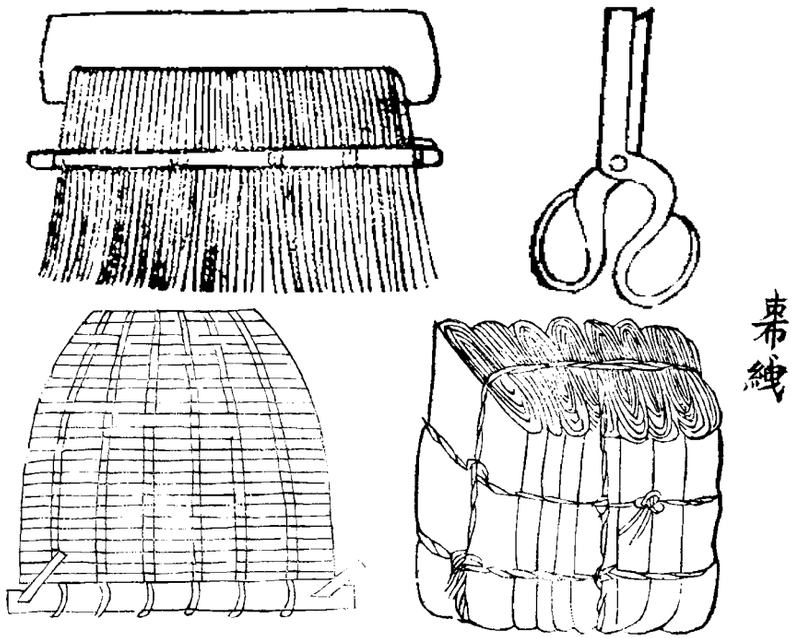


HO Pl. 643, Drying paper.

Oger took special pains to describe ***tools and maintenance of the equipment.***

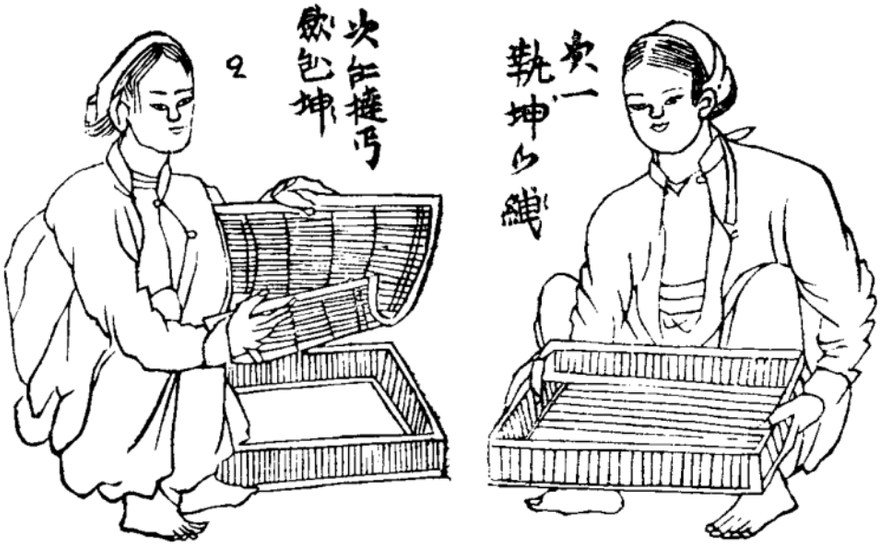


HO pl. 469, paper-making knife; Detail of the paper pounder; Pl. 554, Papermaker's scraper; Pl. 169, Brush used to spread sheets of paper on drying racks;



HO Pl. 27, Papermaking brush; Pl. 56, Square tipped scissors used by stationers; Pl. 290, Immersion basket for strips of mulberry bark; Pl. 414, Bundling paper.

HO Pl. 390, 203, 493, Repairing paper-making mould.



HO Pl. 378, Paper-making mould; Pl. 28, Woman holding a paper mould.