

Rewriting Local History: the Colonial History of the Lương Sơn District, Hòa Bình Province in Vietnam (1886-1954)

Ha Trieu Huy^a

Abstract:

This research article explores the historical importance of Lương Sơn District, Hòa Bình Province, during the colonial time in Tonkin (1866-1954). Recognized as a strategic area that connects the plateau with the mountainous regions of northwestern Vietnam, Lương Sơn experienced rapid growth in its population, landscape, and society. However, the Communist Party's conventional literature obscured the district's rich history of colonial administrative and socio-cultural development. To give colonial Lương Sơn more color, this article uses textual analysis of source materials and new Vietnamese local history literature about the area. This helps historians and locals understand the vital role the district played in the development of Hòa Bình Province, which is evident in its growth under communist rule.

Keywords: *Lương Sơn District, Hòa Bình Province, Tonkin, Mường societies, Vietnam*

Received: 24.10.2024; Accepted: 15.12.2024; Published: 31.12.2024

DOI: 10.59907/daujs.3.4.2024.369

^a Department of Liberal Arts Education, University of Management and Technology; 60CL, Cat Lai City Park, Cat Lai Ward, Thu Duc City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. e-mail: huy.hatrieu@umt.edu.vn

Introduction

Researching local history plays a critical role in adding color to national history, which is usually known as a general account of political concussion across dynasties and political regimes. Nevertheless, comprehensive historical narratives should encompass the social and cultural elements that communities actively shaped, constructed, developed, and transmitted across successive generations. (Morrill, 1981) Thus, the norm of “a nation” originates from the contribution of citizens to their national history. Moreover, local history establishes an intimate connection between the past and present, enabling historians to comprehend the historical evolution of a particular geographical location or region through the availability of past stories, primary historical texts, and administrative policies. (Hey, 1996) Historians hence consult with the authority to formulate critical policies that align with social cohesion, economic benefits, and diversity of communities.

In Vietnam, these efforts have yielded initial results due to an extensive body of research on the local history of each region and province. The Vietnamese communist government allocated substantial financial resources to restore local historical account and then tailor it as a critical role in cultivating their responsibility for building the country and nurturing grassroots’ patriotism. Historians undertook an extensive investigation of original texts, archaeological evidence, and oral histories to vividly resurrect the importance of a specific place in a derivative project. (Viện Sử học, 2024) Nonetheless, they also faced many challenges and limitations that contributed to a perceived neglect of local history due to the scarcity of historical documentation, the rigor of political censorship, and high proficiency in foreign languages likely to serve as significant impediments to uncovering the genuineness of local history to readers.

Lương Sơn District is presently an administrative division of Hòa Bình Province in the northwestern region of Vietnam. This district is a lowland mountainous area with a common terrain of low mountains and plains. The district is geographically bordered by Chương Mỹ and Mỹ Đức districts of Hanoi capital to the east and Kỳ Sơn District of Hòa Bình Province to the west. The district borders Lạc Thủy and Kim Bôi Districts to the south and Quốc Oai and Thạch Thất districts to the north. (Figure 1) (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2017)

The district comprises 17 subordinate communes and one principal town. Situated on National Route 6 of Vietnam¹, this territory is pivotal in bridging the northwestern area of Vietnam with Hanoi, so the area has so far possessed geographical and economic advantages. Also, the abundant availability of natural and people resources also contributed

¹ National Highway 6 connects the capital Hanoi to the northwestern provinces of Vietnam. Its total length is 478 km.

to its strategic position for its local economic growth as a leading district of Hòa Bình. Before the arrival of France, Lương Sơn used to belong to Mỹ Lương District, Quốc Oai Prefecture, Sơn Tây Townlet under the dynasties of Lý and Trần. (Đào Duy Anh, 2020) Nonetheless, there is little substantiation of human existence or civilizations, save for sporadic claims by Communist historians that the Mường people aided the Kinh in their endeavors against the Ming dynasty before the formation of the Later Lê dynasty. Consequently, Lương Sơn is among the most heavily populated districts of the Mường ethnic group. This article does not investigate such dynamic district development in the current time, but keenly focuses on rendering a historical explanation to assert that Lương Sơn passed into a lively colonial history of exploitation and cultural interactions between native people - Mường, Kinh people, and French. (Viện Sử học, 2012) Furthermore, the native culture developed distinctively due to the substantial population size of the Mường people. (Cuisinier, 1985: 80) Historical sources indicate that similar to other areas of Hòa Bình Province, Mường societies inhabited extensive territory and preserved their original culture in Lương Sơn and their autonomous status enabled the proliferation of the feudal lordship model and significantly contested the dominance of the Kinh people in this area.

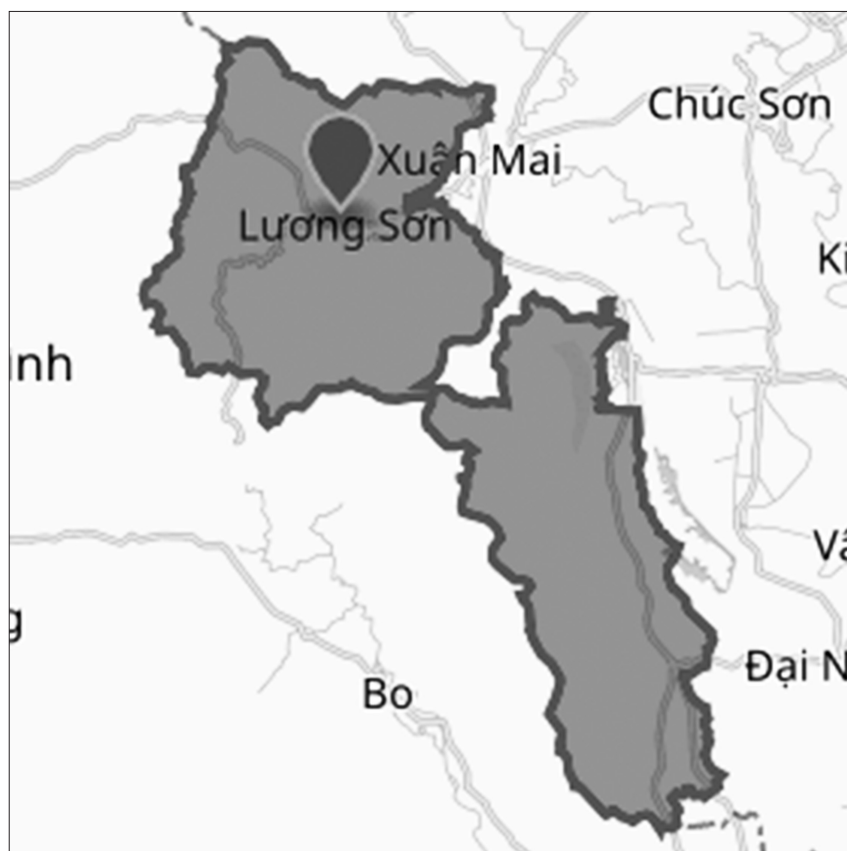


Figure 1. The position of Lương Sơn district nowadays
 (Source: Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2017)

Literature review

Lương Sơn's colonial past has received little attention in historical research. Learning about Lương Sơn's local history is simple because the Vietnam Communist Party has written numerous books detailing the communists' early actions in Vietnam, such as their command to abolish the Mường feudal lordship system, resist French colonialism, and eventually seize political power in this province. Communist historians tend to overemphasize the events that the Communists set in motion. As a result, people do not completely comprehend how the substantial engagement of French and Communist forces in Mường life altered provincial society and culture. (Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2010) These publications, on the other hand, recorded history in chronological order, exaggerated the importance of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and failed to delve deeply into people's lives, cultural dynamics, and political participation during colonial times in Hòa Bình.

Lương Sơn is an important place in Hòa Bình Province that shows how Mường culture and social and cultural exchanges are deeply connected with different ethnic groups. Anthropologists from Vietnam referred to the Mường people as an old form of traditional Kinh culture in terms of culture and ethnicity. (Phạm Quốc, 2016; Tana, 2011: 42; Kiernan, 2019: 51)

Trần Từ, an ethnographic authority on the Mường, gave a detailed analysis of the Mường's property ownership, clothing culture, cosmology, and native language. He was the first to thoroughly parse Mường societies and how they progressed, from tradition to the August Revolution driven by Vietnamese Communists in 1945. This was significant because the valley, paddy fields, and low cliffs created a sturdy structure. (Trần Từ, 1996: 4-5) *Nhà Lang's* dictatorship and *Mo Mường*¹'s overreaching role shaped their spiritual life and social order, resulting in quick and elaborate class divisions.

Meanwhile, two famous French-language works by Pierre Grossin and Jeanne Cuisinier are important to the Mường people who lived in Hòa Bình during colonial times. Pierre Grossin used his travels in Indochina to write a book called *La Province Mường de Hoa-Binh*. The book includes Pierre's anthropological reports from each district of Hòa Bình province. Lương Sơn periodically appeared with population figures and the province's administrative order, which was based on positive relations between the French and the Mường people. This is also critical for preserving traditional Mường power. (Grossin, 1994: 29-34) Jeanne Cuisinier, a French anthropologist, authored a massive and extensive anthropological book titled *Les Mường - Géographie humaine et Sociologie*. In it,

¹ Also known as a shaman in daily spiritual life and rituals of Mường people.

she reveals the map of Asia and Indochina, the continent's geological structure, and the geography of the Mường people. Lương Sơn was noted as an important area of Hòa Bình, administered as *châu*, with a large Mường population living in lowland valleys encircled by limestone mountain ranges. Thus, colonial times built and strengthened Mường units, the fundamental administrative structure of Mường communities. (Cuisinier, 1985: 48)

In summary, there is a scarcity of studies that specifically focus on Lương Sơn, making it difficult to assess the district's importance in the overall colonial growth trajectory of Hòa Bình Province. A corpus of sources put too much emphasis on colonial Hòa Bình and how the Mường people designed and developed their native cultural landscape in each particular district. Two critical French anthropological works written by Pierre Grossin (1994) and Jeanne Cuisinier (1985) marked a breakthrough to set a firm ground for the Mường people, their authorities and culture, as well as historical elements involving the development of Hòa Bình. Vietnamese ethnographers like Trần Từ (1996) and Bùi Huy Vọng (2014) have recently written about the Mường. These works talk about how the Mường helped keep their culture alive and how honorable they were of their native history. However, it is notable that a small quantity of scholarly articles and books highlight the significant growth of Lương Sơn during the colonial period. The place lies at the bridge between Hanoi and the northwestern mountainous area of Tonkin, playing a vital role in changing this district's political and cultural climate and promising strategic economic and social growth in the rest of the 20th century.

This article examines the situation of Lương Sơn, where the Mường people decided to settle rather than descend and assimilate into Kinh communities, avoiding the possibility of cultural degradation during their colonial period. Vietnamese historians emphasized the Communist Party's triumph over France, which left traces of conflict and strife in the country's history. However, Lương Sơn has a complex evolution of a mixed-race political environment, with interactions between native Mường leaders, French people, and even Kinh arrivals. How did the French establish administrative supremacy over this territory? How did Mường people interacted with French and Kinh people in Lương Sơn so that social and cultural sphere of this district were subjected to changes. This article addresses these questions.

Methodology

Since this is a historical research paper, I employ historical methods to ensure the authenticity of history and enhance the clarity of primary and secondary sources. People who directly engage with the past produce primary sources, which can be oral, visual, or textual. These sources are invaluable because they offer a variety of points of view and perspectives on

events, issues, people, and places. In this article, I benefited from source materials housed at the National Archives Center I, which offers a wide range of French and Vietnamese documents from the period of France's return to Indochina, as well as original materials concerning the resistance against France and the anti-communist authority of the Mường people.

Secondary sources are records, texts, photographs, and artifacts concerning the history of the Lương Sơn District, produced by French explorers and officials who journeyed to Tonkin and traversed the Lương Sơn District or other regions populated by the Mường people. I primarily concentrated on two significant anthropological works by Jeanne Cuisinier and Pierre Grossin, due to their empirical research on the Mường people and Hòa Bình area. Moreover, the works of Charles Édouard Hocquard (2020) and Pierre Gourou (2015) are likely to offer detailed depictions of Mường society, culture, and commerce. These works provide substantial opportunities for elucidating the history of Lương Sơn and its importance in the development of Hòa Bình and Tonkin. Official documents from the communist regime after the Mường autonomous region was broken up in 1954 in Hòa Bình, along with local historical accounts and Party history texts from Lương Sơn and Hòa Bình, make it easier to research the district's past events and help make a fairer story of local history. Illustrations of the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (French School of Far East Studies) by Cuisinier-Delmas also help demonstrate the social life of inhabitants in Lương Sơn and cultural interactions between Kinh, Mường, and French people in the district.

Colonial administrative history of Lương Sơn district

Prior to the onset of colonialism, Lương Sơn was likely governed by a feudal system. However, there is limited evidence regarding the political evolution and social lives of individuals in Lương Sơn during the medieval period. Lương Sơn is a territory administered by indigenous Mường landlords, who governed the populace according to the distinctive customary laws of traditional Mường societies. The Mường people began their ethnic divergence from the Kinh/Vietnamese in the 7th century, both linguistically and culturally. Scholars recognize them as a pre-Sinic Kinh people, who resisted Sino culture and inhabited elevated regions to preserve ancient Vietnamese culture (Taylor, 1983: 180-248). The Mường people in Hòa Bình, residing in highland regions, maintained closer connections with other ethnic minorities in western Vietnam than with the Kinh Lowlanders. The Mường initiated several rebellions against the excessive intervention of Kinh authority in their manors during the years 1029, 1300, 1351, the 1430s, 1822, 1833, and the 1880s. (Schrock, 1972: 320)

However, Vietnamese historians consistently emphasized the crucial role the Mường played in assisting the Kinh people in fending off the Ming invasion in the 15th century,

citing their significant contribution to the Le Loi¹ uprising in 1428. (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2017) However, there is no convincing evidence to support the Mường People's involvement in this battle. Furthermore, how did Mường societies in Lương Sơn, a short distance from Thăng Long², respond to the tension between the Kinh people and Chinese forces? The notion of a tenuous political link between Mường people and Kinh people remains unclear. Likewise, local historians also argued that the inhabitants of Lương Sơn supported the Tây Sơn warriors in defeating the Qing army in 1789. (Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2010) Native Mường chiefs, on the other hand, rallied Mường clans' support for the Nguyễn Lords during the ascension of Quang Trung's son, Cảnh Thịnh, opined by Pierre Grossin, who was the first French scholar to pen for the colonial history of Hòa Bình. Notwithstanding Mường's support, there is a shortage of historical materials revealing Mường's efforts to stay behind the Kinh people in their battles. Despite their proximity to the Vietnamese capital, the role of the Mường people in Lương Sơn District, and even Hòa Bình Province in these battles remained minimal.

During the Nguyễn dynasty, Vietnamese kings adopted a more stringent policy to interfere in Mường affairs. Evidently, King Minh Mạng attempted to preclude Mường chiefs from exercising their own power but failed to orient local people toward the authority of Kinh people (Nguyễn Minh Tường, 1993: 37). Lương Sơn was administered inside the Mỹ Lương District, Quốc Oai Prefecture, Sơn Tây Townlet, consisted of 7 *tổng*³ and 49 communes and hundreds of villages. However, the district was upgraded to *đạo*⁴ and Lương Sơn became one of the districts of *đạo*, named Mỹ Đức, proposed by Governor-General Hoàng Diệu.⁵ As such, this district, as he explained, helped defend the Vietnamese capital from the west and *đạo* Mỹ Đức was under the administration of Hanoi Province, along with Thường Tín, Chương Mỹ, Thanh Oai, Kim Bôi, and Lương Sơn. (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2017: 42-44) Prior to the entrance of the French, Lương Sơn, under the scrutiny of native Nguyễn administrators, emerged as a pivotal zone advantageous for defense and capable of mobilizing residents to safeguard the feudal authority from a close range. The elevation of Mỹ Lương's administrative position indicates that local officials sought economic development and anticipated a swift increase in population, so aiming to secure the broad support of the Mường ethnic groups in the area.

¹ Lê Lợi (1385-1443), was a Vietnamese rebel leader who founded the Later Lê dynasty and became the first Emperor of the restored kingdom of Đại Việt.

² The old name of current Hanoi capital.

³ This is an administrative unit of French administrative system, which is also equivalent to a district in modern administrative unit. One *tổng* has several communes.

⁴ A larger administrative unit of a district. It may be equivalent to a borough.

⁵ Hoàng Diệu (黃耀) (1829-1882), was a Nguyễn Dynasty Governor-General of Hà - Ninh.

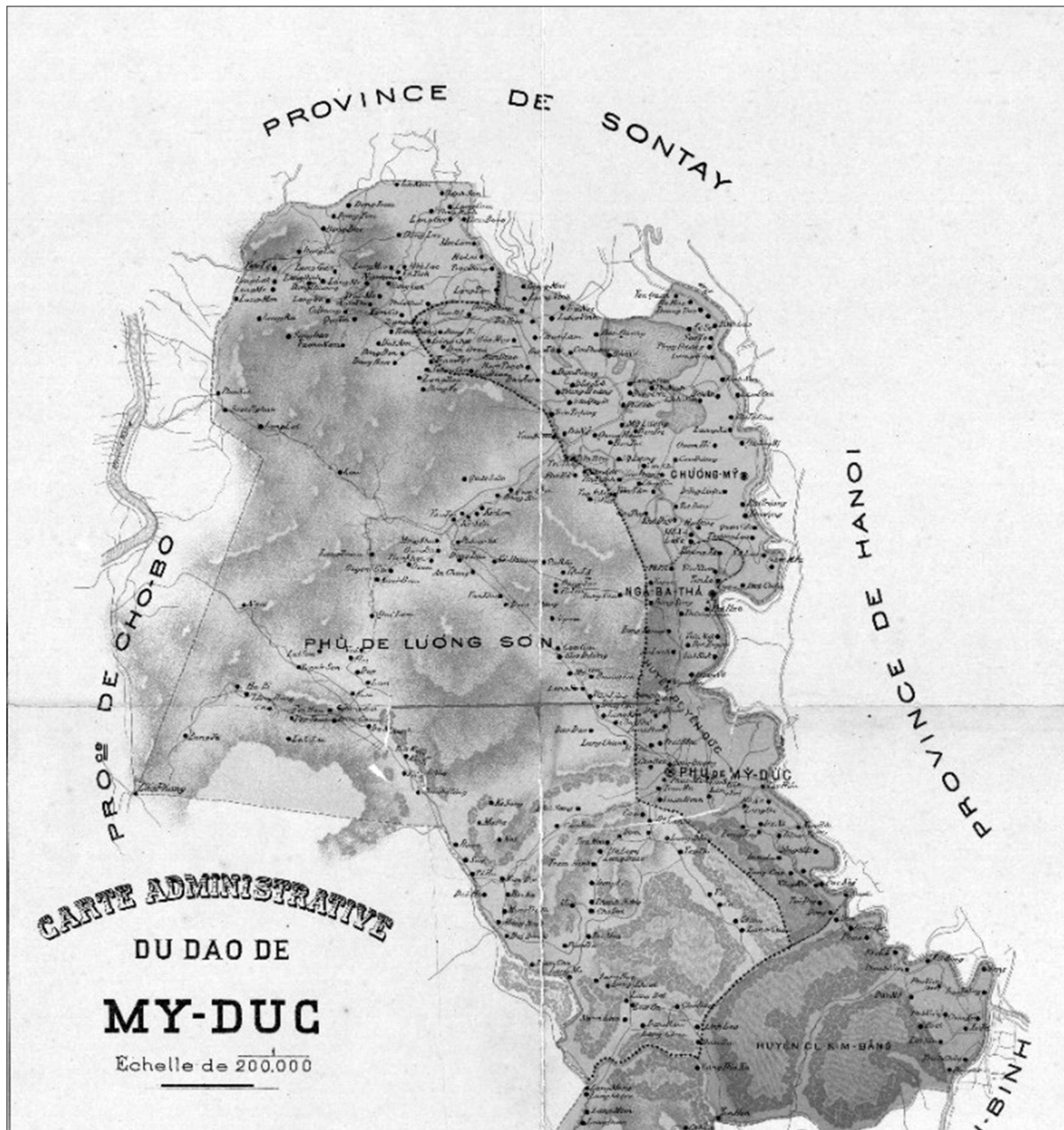


Figure 2. Lương Sơn map in the late 19th century.

(Source: National Archives Center I)

On August 25, 1883, *Treaty of Huế* was reached by a consent between Nguyễn dynasty and France concerning a political division of Vietnam into Tonkin and Annam. In Tonkin, French people appointed a provincial governor to expand colonial power into each province of Tonkin. On May 23, the first year of Đồng Khánh reign, the acting Tonkinese viceroy, Nguyễn Trọng Hợp signed a decree on the establishment of Mùng province and then on July 27, 1886, Paul Bert, a bicameral governor achieved a decision to establish French Hòa Bình. (Gourou, 2017) Consequently, the involvement of the French in Lương Sơn, their

interactions with indigenous populations, the establishment of colonial governance, and the exploitation of natural resources became vital in writing local history.

Local historians believe that the French founded Hòa Bình Province on June 22, 1886, as part of a strategy to isolate the Mường people from the Kinh people's enormous influence in the lowlands. The extensive territory of Hòa Bình Province is home to numerous Mường ethnic groups, referred to as "Tỉnh Mường" in Kinh, "Mường Province" in English, and "La province de Mường" in French. (Trần Từ, 1996) The proposal to grant the Mường people further autonomy was rooted in the French perspective that traditional societies were essential for administrators to understand native culture and to depend on village leaders to engage the local population. The secondary sources provide an inadequate and unclear description of this scheme, lacking a robust argument regarding the treatment of local individuals by the French in Lương Sơn. The local history book of Lương Sơn history discloses a severe discord between French Governor Jean-Luc de Saint Peauxpas¹ and Emperor Thành Thái concerning the inclusion of Lương Sơn in the *đạo* Mỹ Đức, belonging to Hanoi Province (Figure 2). Both parties reached a fair agreement, resulting in Lương Sơn becoming one of the six districts of Mường province, with its capital located at Xóm Mòng.² The administrative alternation persisted in 1896, as Lương Sơn emerged as one of four *châu* (districts), comprising five *tổng* (a smaller unit), including Bằng Lộ, Cư Yên, Thanh Nông, Kim Bôi, Tú Sơn and 19 communes. (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2017)

Historians lack clarity regarding the establishment of local government in Lương Sơn by the French, as early records of these activities are insufficient in national historical archives, which predominantly focus on the colonial history of Hòa Bình. Historians generally contend that colonial intervention in Lương Sơn led to changes in population dynamics, settlement patterns, authority structures, and territorial boundaries. Historical evidence from the local communist party history of Lương Sơn suggests that the French viewed Lương Sơn as a key site for the establishment of extensive plantations, mineral extraction, and gold mining operations. (Ủy ban nhân dân huyện Lương Sơn, 2017) Historians have identified a Frenchman named Paillare as the inaugural exploiter to establish a plantation in Lương Sơn. Local reports indicate that French envoys in Hòa Bình conducted a thorough investigation of oil potential in Lương Sơn during 1911-1912, thus validating this assumption. Local historians have raised concerns regarding the French, in collaboration with the Mường village administration, enforcing strict laws aimed at

¹ Jean-Luc de Saint Peauxpas acted as French Governor-General of Indochina from May 31, 1889, to April 18, 1891.

² This place still remains today. Its geographical location includes the rural area adjacent to Lương Sơn town, which is home to a large population of Mường people.

subjugating the indigenous population of Lương Sơn. Historians indicate that the French primarily sought to extract coal, gold, silver, and copper from the earth. The French appropriated Mường-controlled territories, converting them into plantations under their administration, thereby contributing to the economic growth of Lương Sơn. (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2017: 53)

Nonetheless, French authority in Lương Sơn was limited, as I discovered no substantial evidence indicating that the French aimed to extend their political influence in Lương Sơn; rather, they conferred greater autonomy upon local Mường chiefdoms to govern in line with Mường customary law. Mường rule in Lương Sơn continued to follow the mainstream of feudal administrator with one *Tri châu* (知州)¹ and a vice *Tri châu*, which was suppressed in position in 1932. (Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình, 1932: TSHB, File 7) In Mường societies in Lương Sơn, I argue that Mường people in Lương Sơn still followed the regime of *Nhà Lang* as central power and *Quan Lang* became the head of a Mường commune. (Grossin, 2018) *Lang Đạo* and *Lang Cun* were the assistants of *Quan Lang* along with the shaman, the elder, and assistants. (Quách, 2021) Lê Như Chương, a Tonkinese mandarin, became the leader of Lương Sơn District in the 1920s. In the 1930s, Đàm Quang Vinh relocated the capital of Lương Sơn and built a new town around it to serve as the capital of the current district. This evidence demonstrated that the local administration in Lương Sơn continued to maintain the Nguyen dynasty's political system, with little influence from the French administration or the Kinh dynasties.

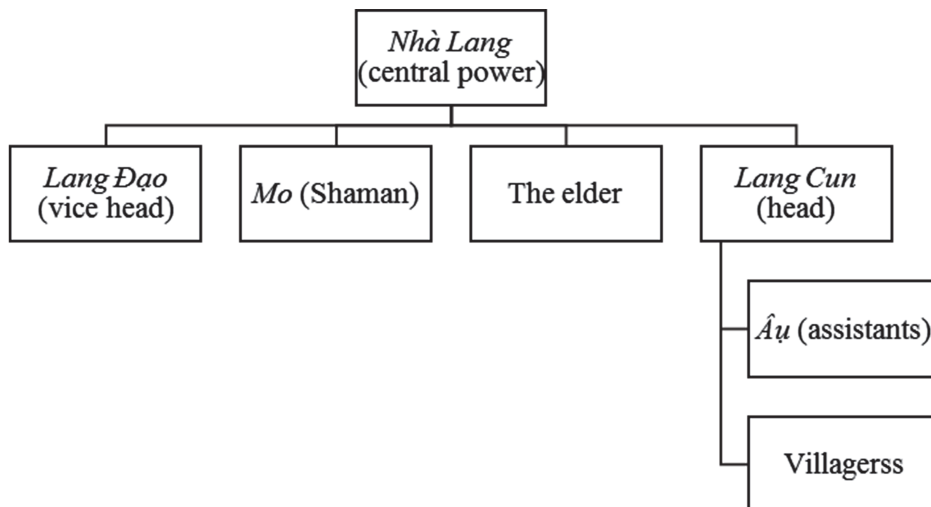


Figure 3. Traditional social structure of Mường people in Hòa Bình province.

(Source: Ha Trieu Huy, 2022, 135)

¹ This is an official position in the mandarin system of feudal dynasties in China and Vietnam. The district governor is the head of a district, with the highest authority in both civil and military matters in the area.

The Mường people in Hòa Bình's capital may have experienced the French and Western government early on, but the Mường in Lương Sơn remained relatively undisturbed by other ethnic groups until the 1930s. The influx of French individuals to plantations for business purposes and the movement of Kinh people from the lowlands to Lương Sơn did not result in the collapse of the Mường government in Lương Sơn. Because Lương Sơn is between the Kinh and Mường regions, researchers need to find out how the Kinh first came to the area and how the two groups could share their cultures. (Bùi Huy Vọng, 2014) However, the Archives Center lacks historical data documenting ethnic communities' cultural performances. Cuisinier-Delmas, a French anthropologist, and his collaborators visited the Hòa Bình region in 1937-1938. This field trip provides valuable facts about the lifestyles of people in Lương Sơn.

Prior to 1945, Kinh and Vietnamese populations lived in Lương Sơn District, as indicated by his use of the term "Annamite" people. The Mường people remain an ethnic minority in Lương Sơn, and it is difficult to argue that they readily embraced communism espoused by Kinh communists in the surrounding areas, as many historical writings on Hòa Bình imply. Historical documents do not reflect the extent to which Lương Sơn residents were involved in the political upheaval caused by Việt Minh soldiers in 1945. The Communist Party of Lương Sơn's historical record reveals that Lương Sơn was without Việt Minh forces during the peak of the August Revolution in 1945, until individuals motivated by the Việt Minh from adjacent provinces came on August 26, 1945. Until 1945, the Việt Minh and Kinh populace in Lương Sơn experienced low morale.

After 1945, Vietnamese Communists said that individuals cultivated antimonarchical sentiments and readily became adherents of communism in numerous provinces of Vietnam. However, that assumption is not valid in provinces governed by ethnic groups other than the Kinh people. The Việt Minh in Lương Sơn, however, did not succeed in bolstering its nascent administration and wielded considerable political authority. The history of Lương Sơn from September 1945 to February 1947 solely details the intense conflicts between the Việt Minh and the Vietnam Nationalist Party.¹ The proposal to establish an independent political entity for the Mường people and recruit them to combat Việt Minh forces led to a comprehensive plan to transform Hòa Bình into an autonomous area for the Mường within the French Union. Eventually, French people established Mường Autonomous Territory or *Territoire Autonome Mường* or *Pays Mường* in French, which has Hòa Bình borough as a capital and its flag, featured by a five-pointed star symbolized the five *châu* (州, districts) in the center of a green background (Figure 4). Mường soldiers also became a critical force in French Army to inhibit the expansion of Việt Minh activities during the Indochina War

¹ *Việt Nam Quốc dân Đảng* in Vietnamese.

(1946-1954), called the 1st Mường Battalion (Figure 5). (Comité d'Issy-les-Moulineaux et Vanves, 2012; Davidson, 1988: 113) Lương Sơn District was one of the châu in the Mường Autonomous Territory and remained important in restoring the role of French and Mường people against Việt Minh or Vietnamese people.

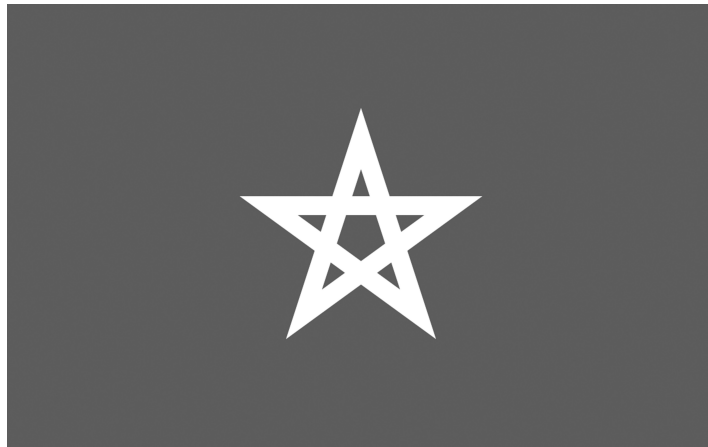


Figure 4. The national flag of Mường Autonomous Region.

(Source: Le Trait d'Union, 1999)



Figure 5. The pennant of the 1st Mường Battalion is decorated by General de Lattre de Tassigny.

(Source: Comité d'Issy-les-Moulineaux et Vanves, 2012)

Political landscape of Lương Sơn after the August Revolution remained largely unknown in historical sources. As being a strategic district of Hòa Bình province, it was continually controlled by Mường and returning French masters so that political participation of Mường people was guaranteed. Until August 1948, French soldiers established 30 strongholds along the National Route 6 to protect occupied territories and reduced the aggression of Việt Minh within the province. Đinh Công Tuấn was delegated to become the native head of *Pays Mường* and showed his allegiance to Emperor Bảo Đại.¹ (Collection des documents du cabinet de Bao Dai Hanoi, 1954), who then became the chief of the State of Vietnam (1949-1954) Over the course of the First Indochina War (1946-1954), Việt Minh continually waged a guerrilla war and executed political sabotage in the district. In 1950, local historians indicated that Việt Minh stayed behind people to assassinate the district head, and vice district head, and dismantle the colonial authority there (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình, 2017: 55). The terrorist of Việt Minh forces in Lương Sơn and other parts of Tonkin urged France to undertake a fresh initiative to form the 1st Mường Battalion to repel the Việt Minh offensive and strengthen the political dominance of the French and Mường populace in Hòa Bình. Beginning in 1950, Mường Country was incorporated into the Domain of the Crown and was granted specific regulations for Montagnard regions in Vietnam in accordance with the *Dụ*² no. 6/QT/TG directive issued by Bảo Đại. Vietnamese historians believed that Mường Country was merely a de jure political entity, lacking de facto authority, as Việt Minh forces reclaimed Hòa Bình in 1952. (Thabaut, 2004) French documents reveal that the 1st Mường Battalion persisted in its conflict against the Việt Minh and garnered support from areas inhabited by the Mường population. (Le Trait d'Union, 1999: 15)

There are no historical documents documenting the existence of Mường villages in Lương Sơn or the tactics employed by the French to recruit Mường citizens for the 1st Mường Battalion in the Lương Sơn District. However, the Communists' position in Lương Sơn, as well as their administrative and military authority over Route 6 and nearby districts, remained insignificant. Hòa Bình, located around 70 kilometers west of Hanoi, was essential to the Vietnamese resistance as it facilitated army mobility to the northwest and west of Hanoi and served as a base along the supply line from China and the northern territories. General de Lattre decided to begin an attack in March 1951. The Battle of Hòa Bình, like many other battles in the First Indochina War, saw French and Việt Minh forces clash. In accordance with General de Lattre's strategy of luring the Việt Minh into open combat so that French

¹ Bảo Đại (1913-1997), or Nguyễn Phúc Vĩnh Thụy, is the last Emperor of feudal system of Vietnam. He continued to hold political power as the chief of the State of Vietnam (1948-1955).

² Meant "a decree" in English.

aircraft bombardment could be most effective, he orchestrated French offensives around Hòa Bình, along Route 6 and the Black River supply routes. French forces successfully took Hòa Bình on November 22, 1951, with little fatalities. (Võ Nguyên Giáp, 2006) According to official papers from the Vietnam Communist Party, Lương Sơn was a key base of support for the Việt Minh, contributing significantly to increased military activity during the Hòa Bình campaign in 1952 and the Điện Biên Phủ campaign in 1954. Despite losing the battle of Hòa Bình, the protection of Mường people, as well as evidence that more than 1000 Mường people were safely evacuated from Hòa Bình along National Route 6 following this defense, demonstrated that the Việt Minh did not maintain strict control over the Mường people.

Colonial socio-cultural landscape of Lương Sơn District

The disadvantage of Vietnamese local historians is that they do not offer a more comprehensive view of the social and cultural history of a certain location but instead focus solely on administration and battles in order to serve the political purpose of propaganda and empower the ethnocentrism of Vietnamese people. Despite the abundance of data indicated by the availability of source materials, the concept of local history writing challenges the completion, objectivity, and credibility of national history in Vietnam. The reluctance to extensively utilize primary sources in languages other than Vietnamese diminishes the significance of local history and undermines the role of a single region in the overall development of the country.

Lương Sơn District has historically been one of the most significant areas of Hòa Bình Province. Nestled between highland and lowland regions, the district preserves the Mường people's culture while countering the external influences of the Kinh people from the lowland area. When setting foot on Lương Sơn in 1926, Jeanne reveals that this region has a Mường majority in light of the favorable geographical location of Lương Sơn as a region of low mountains and simple cliffs (Cuisinier, 1985: 60). From the founding of Mường province in 1886 until the August Revolution of 1945, Lương Sơn District emerged as a prime place for financial allocation by the French, owing to the abundance of natural resources and the cultural identity of the Mường people. Consequently, the French could have engaged local populations and utilized accessible natural resources to fulfill their ambition of establishing economic prosperity for their benefit.

Post-1945, Lương Sơn remained a significant faction inside Mường Country, supported by the French and Mường anticommunists. The local history of Lương Sơn District, as presented by local historians, depicts the area as a contentious zone between the Việt Minh and the French, alongside the Mường Battalion, during the Việt Minh's guerrilla warfare,

which disregarded the *Pays Muồng* as a legitimate political entity in Vietnam. (Ủy ban hành chính kháng chiến tỉnh Hòa Bình, 1949) Notwithstanding the political and military assistance from France, the Muồng people underscored the importance of their unique identities to secure the loyalty of areas where they constituted the majority population. French documents suggest that these defensive strategies were successful until France's defeat in the war and subsequent exit from North Vietnam in 1954. Unfortunately, these comparisons are not often made in academic discussions about Lương Sơn District, Hòa Bình Province, and the political history of Tonkin after 1945.

Prior to 1945, Lương Sơn was home to a significant Muồng population. A census conducted in 1936 and 1937 indicates a population of 52,014 Muồng people in Hòa Bình Province, 30,383 in Phú Thọ Province, and 50,000 in Thanh Hóa Province. (Cuisinier, 1985: 77) Lương Sơn was reported to have had 17 villages and around 25,000 inhabitants in this district. However, the villages were distributed relatively sparsely (Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình, 1931: TSHB, File 6). The cultural advancements of the Muồng people in Lương Sơn were not diminished by Vietnamese culture. Jeanne Cuisinier (1985) asserted that the Kinh people, residing in the eastern part of the district, did not take their teachings seriously. This lets the native Muồng culture conquer Lương Sơn and reinforces their strong sense of Muồng ethnicity. This situation further supports the unverified assumption that communists incited the Muồng people's uprisings to seize political power in Lương Sơn during the August Revolution in Vietnam.

In colonial times, security emerged as a significant concern for Lương Sơn. There exist 31 records of *Tri châu* convening a tribunal to adjudicate and render verdicts for criminal prisoners. Security concerns were heightened among local leaders due to Lương Sơn's strategic position, linking the lowland and highland regions and facilitating the transport of goods by Chinese merchants along the Black River for trade in Hanoi and other markets within the Red River Delta. According to Jeanne's writing, Chinese immigrants intervened in Tonkinese lands in the early twentieth century and promoted their sale with the Muồng people, resulting in a solid commercial relationship in the Lương Sơn District. (Cuisinier, 1985: 96) Moreover, the Muồng people were skilled at exploiting wood, and local vendors could also transport wood products to the lowlands for sale. (Hocquard, 2020) Security issues often arise from illegal opium trafficking, organized crime, and acts of pillage. (Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình, 1910: TSHB, File 18, File 23).

Lương Sơn also used to be a reap area of economic growth of Hòa Bình during the colonial time. Residents engaged with tax policies of French people and fulfilled their personal, land and poll taxes mission. (Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình, 1921: TSHB, File 154; Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình, 1922: TSHB, File 96). Concerning the economic presence of French people in Lương Sơn and their land acquisition like Vietnamese historian

discourses in the local history work, there is a paper on this situation in the collection of Agriculture, Forest, and Commerce Department of Indochina, which is an authorization to occupy agricultural concessions in the Lương Sơn District granted to Europeans residing in the Tonkin provinces from 1901 to 1910 (*Fonds de la Direction de l'Agriculture, des Forêts, 1910*). Besides, I found that Lương Sơn District used to be in possession of large coffee and tea plantations and serve for export around Quất Lâm¹ - a village located in the east of Lương Sơn District in the collection of the Indochinese Financial Department (*Fonds de la Direction des Finances de l'Indochine, 1935*).

Lương Sơn District serves as a notable illustration of the cultural interactions between the Mường and French during the colonial period. The Mường people clearly maintain their native culture and transmit it to future generations through oral traditions. Nevertheless, the sole written records from the colonial era are in French. Concerning Mường societies in Hòa Bình, Jeanne Cuisinier provided intriguing insights into the ways Catholicism infiltrated Lương Sơn societies during the colonial era. Catholic priests also engaged in evangelizing the Mường people, who sought to preserve their traditional beliefs and strong connection to the traditional Mường worldview. Cuisinier noted that approximately 1000 Mường Catholics were documented in the Lương Sơn District of Kim Bôi. (Cuisinier, 1985: 97) However, there was no church erected in the district and in the case of delivery, Mường people in Lương Sơn still sought help of a native midwife rather than a nun's assistance.

Furthermore, cultural interactions between the Mường and Kinh populations were distinctly evident in the Lương Sơn District during the colonial period. Cuisinier posits that social division in Lương Sơn was less pronounced than in other districts due to a narrower gap between the affluent and the impoverished. In Lương Sơn District, the Mường people consumed Daly River satinash tea as a daily beverage, similar to the Kinh people. Visitors occasionally choose tea as their preferred welcome drink. In terms of funeral customs, because of a lack of general local regulations, Mường people were subjected to Vietnamese solutions in their funeral, such as using the mourning stick and a long white hat for daughters of the dead (Cuisinier, 1985: 313). Economic exchanges between the Kinh and Mường people are also illustrated in the case of Xóm Má because this site became a local market to cater to the need for trading. Cuisinier also uncovers that the number of Mường and Kinh vendors remained equal at this site (Cuisinier, 1985: 432). I also located a few photos of Cuisinier-Delma, a member of the *École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO)*, who led a field trip to Hòa Bình in the 1940s. The community's impact on the local economy and

¹ This name no longer exists. The current position of former Quất Lâm is now at the National Route 6 of Vietnam and in the middle of Lương Sơn Town of Hòa Bình Province and Xuân Mai Town of Chương Mỹ District, Hanoi.

culture in the Lương Sơn District is unclear (Figures 6 and Figures 7). The findings support the idea that the Kinh people arrived in Hòa Bình before 1945 and interacted with the Mường, resulting in gradual social and cultural changes in the district. Until recently, Kinh ethnicity has remained a minority population in Lương Sơn area, threatening the survival of local Mường culture.

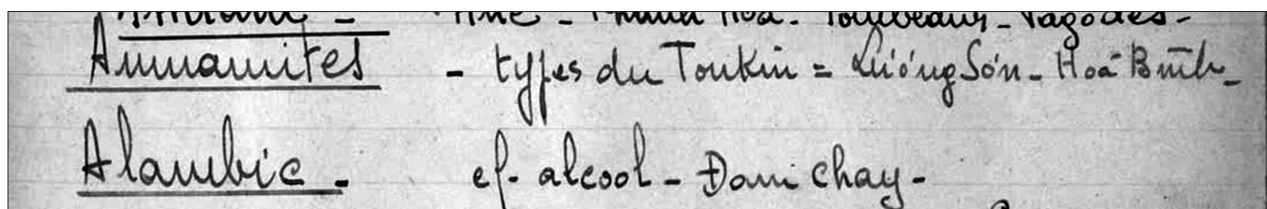


Figure 6. The writing of Cuisinier-Delmas on Annamites (Kinh/Vietnamese).

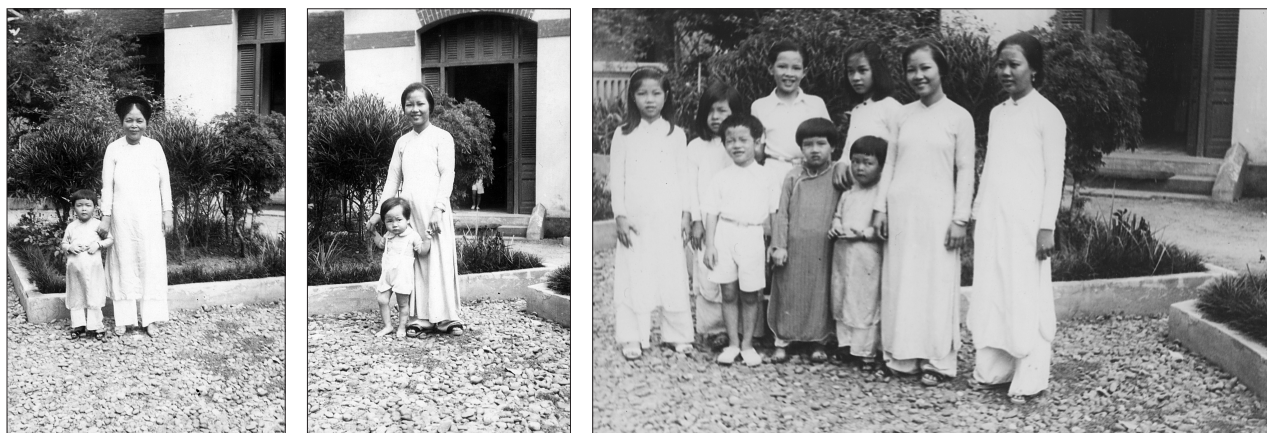


Figure 7. A Kinh family in Lương Sơn District in 1937-1938.

(Source: *École française d'Extrême-Orient*)

After 1945, there were no records of multiple dimensions of politics, society, and culture in Lương Sơn District or its development in the Mường Autonomous Region. The Archives 1 does not have any specific French-language documents pertaining to the “Pays Mường” after 1945. In the collection of the Head Office of Bảo Đại in Hanoi, there are three files on the Mường Autonomous Region, but they are still insufficient to cast new light on the fate of Lương Sơn after the Communists waged the guerrilla war during the first Indochina War (1946-1954). The provincial archives of Hòa Bình Province do not contain any materials pertaining to the Lương Sơn District and lack specific details about the economic, cultural, and societal changes that occurred during the Indochina War. Following the Battle of Hòa Bình in 1952, French troops forced at least 1000 Mường refugees to flee from the Mường Autonomous Region. Who are they? Where did they go? And how was Mường’s authority

suspended and abolished by Communists in 1954? These questions need answering in the local history of Lương Sơn District.

Conclusions

As a case study, this article highlights the importance of understanding the local history of Lương Sơn District for both historians and residents, enabling them to comprehend the historical influences shaping the district and to contemplate its past. The Vietnamese Communist Party history book documents the historical account of Lương Sơn. However, local history often includes multiple narratives and perspectives. Incorporating social and cultural history allows for the inclusion of marginalized voices and experiences, which can offer a more comprehensive view of the community's past. Colonial history of Vietnam is complex due to the enduring socio-cultural factors affecting the populace during colonial times and the district's relevance in the context of French bourgeois colonial governance, which continues to influence historiographical discourse. Currently, there remains a lack of statistics and literature regarding economic growth, cultural activities, the lives of ethnic groups, and the interplay between colonial administration and native societies. Following the August Revolution in 1945, detailed accounts regarding the integration of Mường societies into the revolutionary framework and their relationship with revolutionary authorities remain scarce. The persistence of Mường societies in Lương Sơn, supported by the French post-1945, along with the heightened involvement of Mường individuals in assisting France against the Việt Minh and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, remains a subject of academic investigation. The Mường people who emigrated following the Battle of Hòa Bình and their subsequent experiences after the Fall of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954 remain a subject of inquiry for historians.

This essay seeks to cover two key features of the Lương Sơn District during the colonial period and solve the current study gap. The notion that the Kinh people were not involved in the district is challenged by the fact that French and Mường mandarins controlled the district alongside people of mixed ethnicities. Until the late 1930s, the Kinh people were neglected and had little effect on French authority or traditional Mường societies in Lương Sơn. The Mường community in Lương Sơn had little interest in Kinh politics, as evidenced by their desire for the French to return and the low number of Mường fighting for the Việt Minh. Instead, they followed traditional Mường ways of social and political organization and worked closely with the French to diminish the influence of the Việt Minh and communism in their land. Cultural contacts were observed among ethnic groups in Lương Sơn, including the Mường, Kinh, and French. This event demonstrates societal and cultural changes and highlights Lương Sơn's significant role in the district's economic growth. It serves as a hub for modern industries to thrive alongside traditional farming practices by Mường peasants.

Acknowledgements

This article is dedicated to my late paternal grandpa, who left his original hometown to move to the Lương Sơn district of Hoà Bình province in 1964 in response to a governmental call by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam for the building of a new economic zone in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. I was captivated by his intriguing tales of how newcomers like him cultivated untamed areas, broadened residential zones, and enhanced the district's infrastructure as quintessential illustrations of socialism in action. Nevertheless, the prior history of the district has not provided me with clarity, which piques my interest in revisiting that chapter.

Also, this paper serves as a token of my appreciation to those who came along with and encouraged me throughout my research into the local history of the Lương Sơn district. I would never have been able to publish this piece without the generous help of two high school friends of mine. During her leisure time, Ms. Ngọc Anh Tran visited the National Archives Center I in Hanoi, where she assisted with gathering source materials and sent me documents via mail. In a similar vein, Ms. Hoa Mai Le contacted the local archives center in Hoà Bình province. It was my parents who instilled in me a love for my hometown; therefore, I want to thank them for that. I also owe thanks to two referees who gave me invaluable feedback to enhance the quality of this manuscript.

References

- Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ tỉnh Hòa Bình (2010). *Lịch sử Đảng bộ tỉnh Hòa Bình (1929-2010)*. Hà Nội: Chính trị Hành chính.
- Bùi Huy Vọng (2014). *Người Mường ở Hòa Bình*. Hà Nội: Văn hóa thông tin.
- Collection des documents du cabinet de Bao Dai Hanoi (1954). *Thư nhân danh dân tộc Mường của ông Đinh Công Tuân, Chủ tịch Hội đồng Hành chính Mường tỉnh Hòa Bình bày tỏ lòng trung thành với Quốc trưởng*. National Archives Center I.
- Comité d'Issy-les-Moulineaux et Vanves. (2012, December 2). Le 1er bataillon Mường. <https://www.souvenirfrançais-issy.com/article-le-1er-bataillon-Muong-112046843.html>
- Cuisinier, Jeanne (1985). *Người Mường: Địa lý nhân văn và xã hội học*. Hà Nội: Lao Động.
- Đào Duy Anh (2020). *Đất nước Việt Nam qua các đời*. Hà Nội: Hồng Đức & Nhã Nam.
- Davidson, Philip B. (1988). *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press.
- Dossier de Gestion du Nord-Vietnamien (1918). *Dossier individuel de Le Nhu Chuong (1445), Thong su de 1ère classe au chau de Lương Sơn (Hòa Bình), originaire du village de Dong Linh, canton de Hoang Dao, huyen de Duy Tien, province de Ha Nam. 1918-1945*. National Archives Center I. HSQLBV, File 449.

- Fonds de la Direction de l'Agriculture, des Forêts (1910). *Autorisation d'occupation des concessions agricoles aux chaux de Lac Thuy, Luong Son de la province de Hòa Bình accordée aux européens, demeurant aux provinces du Tonkin. 1901- 1910*. National Archives Center I, DAFCI, File 557.
- Fonds de la Direction des Finances de l'Indochine (1935). *Prime à l'exportation du café accordée à Bertrand, planteur à Quat Lam (Hòa Bình)*. National Archives Center I.
- Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình (1910). *Rapports des Tri chaux de Da Bac, Ky Son et Luong Son sur les opérations contre la bande de Nguyen Van Kiem, sous chef de canton du canton de Hòa Bình, chaux de Ky Son. 1908-1910*. National Archives Center I, TSHB, File 18.
- Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình (1911). *Assassinat de Chu Man, chinois débitant d'opium à Cho Doi, chaux de Luong Son (Hòa Bình). 1909-1911*. National Archives Center I, TSHB, File 23.
- Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình (1921). *Rôles des impôts personnel, foncier et des corvées des indigènes des chaux de Da Bac, Ky Son, Lac Son, Luong Son et Mai Chau, province de Hòa Bình de 1921*. National Archives Center I. TSHB, File 154.
- Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình (1922). *Roles d'impôts personnel et foncier des indigènes habités dans les chaux de Da Bac, Ky Son, Lac Son, Luong Son, Mai de la province de Hòa Bình. 1922*. National Archives Center I. TSHB, File 96.
- Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình (1931). *Recensement de la population des villages du chaux de Luong Son, province de Hòa Bình en 1931*. National Archives Center I. TSHB, File 6.
- Fonds de la Résidence de Hòa Bình (1932). *As suppression des emplois de Pho Tri Chau dans les circonscriptions de Luong Son, Lac Son, Ky Son, Da Bac et Mai Chau, province de Hòa Bình. 1932*. National Archives Center I. TSHB, File 7.
- Gourou, Pierre (2017). *Người nông dân châu thổ Bắc Kỳ*. TPHCM: Trẻ, Viện Viễn Đông Bác Cổ Pháp & Tạp chí Xưa & Nay.
- Grossin, Pierre (2018). *Province Mường de Hoa-Binh*. Paris: Hachette Livre Bnf.
- Ha, Huy Trieu (2022). "Traditional social structure and its changes in current Mường societies in Hòa Bình province, Vietnam". *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University* 10(1), 131-159.
- Hey, David (1996). *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hocquard, Charles Édouard (2020). *Một chiến dịch ở Bắc Kỳ*. Đà Nẵng: Đà Nẵng.
- Kiernan, Ben (2019). *Việt Nam: a history from earliest time to the present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Le Trait d'Union (1999). "La vie de l'amicale - Amicale des Anciens de la Légion". *Le Trait d'Union* 38(2), 14-15. <https://doczz.fr/doc/2592854/la-vie-de-l-amicale---amicale-des-anciens-de-la-l%C3%A9gion>
- Morrill, John (1981). "The Diversity of Local History". *Historical Journal*, 24(3), 717-29.

- Nguyễn Minh Tường (1993). “Chính sách đối với các dân tộc thiểu số của triều Nguyễn nửa đầu thế kỷ XIX”. *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu lịch sử*, 271(6), 37-44.
- Phạm Quốc (2016). “Dân tộc Mường có từ bao giờ”. Retrieved from Heritage World Website: <http://thegioidisan.vn/vi/dan-toc-Muong-co-tu-bao-gio.html>, March 8.
- Quách Công Nam (2021). Cách thức tổ chức xã hội của người Mường ở Hòa Bình: Từ truyền thống đến hiện đại. *Tạp chí Khoa học Trường Đại học Tân Trào*, 7(20), 109-115. <https://doi.org/10.51453/2354-1431/2021/495>
- Schrock, Joann L. (1972). *Minority Groups in North Vietnam*. Dept. of the Army/U.S. Government.
- Tana, Li (2011). “Jiaozhi (Giao Chỉ) in the Han Period Tongking Gulf”. In J. A. Anderson, *The Tongking Gulf Through History*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 39-53.
- Taylor, Keith Weller (1983). *The Birth of the Vietnam*. Berkely: University of California Press.
- Thabaut, André (2004). *Médecin Lieutenant au 1^{er} Bataillon Mường - Indochine (1954-1955)*. Paris: Editions L’Harmattan.
- Trần Từ (1996). *Người Mường ở Hòa Bình*. Hà Nội: Hội Khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam.
- Ủy ban hành chính kháng chiến tỉnh Hòa Bình (1949). *Tài liệu về âm mưu của thực dân Pháp năm 1949*. Trung tâm lưu trữ tỉnh Hòa Bình. File 26.
- Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Hòa Bình (2017). *Địa chí tỉnh Hòa Bình*. Hà Nội: Chính trị Quốc gia.
- Viện Sử học (2012). *Đại Việt sử lược*. Hà Nội: Văn hóa thông tin.
- Viện Sử học (2024). Hội thảo khoa học: *Những vấn đề đặt ra trong quá trình biên soạn sách “Lịch sử tỉnh Hòa Bình”*, April 8; <https://viensuhoc.vass.gov.vn/hoi-thao-toa-dam/hoi-thao-khoa-hoc-hung-van-de-dat-ra-trong-qua-trinh-bien-soan-sach-lich-su-tinh-hoa-binh-124.0.html>
- Võ Nguyên Giáp (2006). *Tổng tập Hồi ký*. Hà Nội: Quân đội Nhân dân.