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The Modern Vernacular, 'Woman', and Gender Categories in Vietnam's early Twentieth-Century

Abstract

In the early twentieth century, the Vietnamese modern vernacular increasingly became the prevailing form of language. What is the relationship between the modern vernacular (*quốc ngữ*) and the categories of gender? This lecture examines specifically the category of "woman" in Vietnam's early twentieth-century. Whereas some historical scholarship on the subject takes the category of "woman" as an already knowable variable, indeed a transhistorical constant, this lecture will ask to what degree there was continuity or rupture in the category's meaning with the explosive growth of *quốc ngữ*. The lecture will suggest that, unlike elsewhere in East Asia, the seemingly common-sense notion of "woman" as a physiological category had not yet gained dominance. Instead, pre-modern models predicated on sociocultural norms persisted far into the early decades of the twentieth-century. The study's findings have significant implications for future research on Vietnam regarding the category of woman and gender and sexuality studies.