

Peter Zinoman, Univ. of California-Berkeley

## From Political Metaphor to Social Problem: Deviant Sexuality in the Writing of Vu Trong Phung

This paper traces and attempts to interpret changes in Vu Trong Phung's treatment of the modern transformation of Vietnamese sexual culture under the force of French colonialism. It compares the depiction of deviant sexuality in Vu Trong Phung's obscure, early short story "Thu Doan" [The ploy] (1930) with his treatment of the same topic in his well-known books *Lam Di* [To be a whore] (1936) and *Luc Xi* [VD clinic] (1937) published later in the decade. It argues that differences between Vu Trong Phung's approach to this topic in the early and later years of the 1930s embody a more general shift in the Vietnamese discourse on sexuality during the era - a shift characterized by a move from the instrumental deployment of deviant sexuality as a political metaphor for the colonial condition to the earnest appreciation of it as a pressing social problem in its own right. The argument challenges the common view that the Vietnamese discourse about prostitution and perversity during the colonial era was merely an oblique form of anti-colonial politics and suggests that it reflects a more general anxiety about the modernization of sexuality during the inter-war era.