

NGUYỄN-CATHOLIC HISTORY (1770s-1890s) AND THE GESTATION OF  
VIETNAMESE CATHOLIC NATIONAL IDENTITY

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By

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## ABSTRACT

The historiography of Vietnamese Catholicism has tended not only towards a polemical French-centric narrative but also one in which the local converts rarely have a voice. Nguyễn's dynastic chroniclers, in the first wave of scholarship, portrayed Catholics as instigators of rebellions and followers of a so-called heterodox cult. In the late nineteenth century, French missionary historians often patronizingly cast Vietnamese Catholics as passive recipients of the Catholic faith in an internally united and supportive community created by the sacrifices of missionaries in a hostile external world. Subsequently, mainstream scholars, journalists and popular writers of the Cold War era, along with Vietnamese state-sponsored researchers after 1975, were interested in proving the collaborative role of Catholicism in the period of European expansionism.

Current historiography, spearheaded by scholars trained at Australian National University in the 1980s, has gradually moved from a binary polemic to a more nuanced view of the past through the perspective of regionalism. And the research from this local-centered angle no longer views Catholicism as a separate, external force but as an integral part of nation-building. This direction toward regionalism contextualizes and situates Catholicism within its larger social and cultural milieu rather than continuing with the conventional binary of revolutionaries and collaborators. But to do this, it is important to bring forth the missing voices of local Catholics.

My dissertation, while including much information from Nguyễn official records and missionary reports, pays greater attention to the sources produced by indigenous Catholic converts and local historians. Moreover, despite the turbulent Nguyễn-Catholic relationship and their history of mutual recrimination, my research demonstrates that the Nguyễn-Catholic interactions, more than any other factors in the nineteenth century, shaped the course of modern Vietnam. The transformation from disconnected Catholic communities into a national political entity was not coincidental with the rise and fall of the Nguyễn dynasty, but very much the result of their interactions.

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## Introduction: If Tombstones Could Tell Their Stories

On 2 March 1983, a 183-year-old tomb was razed to the ground by an order of the municipal government of the Hồ Chí Minh City. The French bulletin, *L'Association nationale des anciens et amis de l'Indochine et du souvenir Indochinois*, describes the complete mayhem between the soldiers protecting the workers and a crowd of several thousand spectators:

Two different waves were forced against each other. The crowd pushed in towards the grave, and the security pushed out. Soldiers held the people back with rifle butts. In a cloud of dust and human commotion, the crowd of spectators tried to reach the sarcophagus in the hope that they could take a piece of its wood. It was a true fit of hysteria. Young and old had only one goal: to lay claim to a memento from the one who had been entombed for so many years. In the pandemonium, and in spite of several interruptions by the waves of onlookers, the exhumation continued to completion.<sup>1</sup>

Five years later, on 18 January 1988, the Ministry of Culture of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam decreed, *Quyết Định 28 VH/QĐ*, as a National Heritage Monument, a tomb built in 1899, along with its attached religious complex at Phát-Diệm of Ninh-Bình.<sup>2</sup> The Ho Chi Minh city branch of the *Hùng Vương Cultural Heritage Association* declared the Phát-Diệm Cathedral as “the most grandiose stone church in the country.... Along with the ancient capital Hoa-Lư, Tràng-An Landscape Complex, Bái Đính Pagoda, Tam Cốc Cave and Bích Động Grotto, and

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<sup>1</sup>“Deux mouvements contradictoires se heurtèrent. La foule se précipita vers la fosse alors que les autorités reculaient. Les soldats présents durent les dégager à coups de crosse. Au milieu de la poussière et des cris de vieilles vietnamiennes essayant d’atteindre le sarcophage pour s’emparer d’un morceau de bois, une véritable hystérie avait saisi l’assistance, jeunes et vieux n’ayant qu’un but, emporter un vestige de ce qui venait d’être, après tant d’années, remis au jour. C’est dans cette atmosphère de pandémonium que s’est poursuivie l’exhumation avec plusieurs interruptions dues aux poussées de la foule,” [Guy Simon, ed.], “Obseques et exhumation de l’Eveque D’Adran,” *Bulletin de l’ANAI*, avril-mai-juin 1999, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Tòa giám mục Phát-Diệm, *Nhà thờ lớn Phát-Diệm* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Hà Nội, 1999), 5.

Cúc Phương National Park, Phát-Diệm church is on the must-see list of famous historic sites. It is not only an eye-catching marvel of Ninh Bình province but a cultural treasure of Vietnam.”<sup>3</sup>

Two tombs with two different fates: the former is that of Apostolic Vicar Pierre Joseph Georges Pigneau de Béhaine [also known in Vietnamese as Bá Đa Lộc] (1741-1799), and the latter that of Father Phêrô Trần Lục (1825-1899); one a French missionary bishop and the other a Tonkinese pastor. Both were Roman Catholic clergymen. Yet the Communist government of Vietnam deemed one to be eradicated while the other was to be commercialized, as if the role of the two men in history made no difference.

Whatever the rationale for these contemporary decisions, these two personages bookend a very complicated period in the history of modern Vietnam, one in which the relationship between the Nguyễn dynasty and the Catholic Church in Vietnam played a crucial role from the end of early modern to the start of modern period, the 1770s-1890s.<sup>4</sup> This dissertation argues that the turbulent Nguyễn-Catholic relationship decisively charted the course of modern Vietnam in significant ways. The Nguyễn ruling elite and the Catholic community merged together in the late 1700s, diverged in the first half of the 1800s, and then converged in the second half of the 1800s. During this formative century, the Catholic population gained national visibility and its collective religio-political identity began to take shape.

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<sup>3</sup>“Thánh đường Phát-Diệm là nhà thờ bằng đá kỳ vĩ nhất trong các nhà thờ đá ở trên khắp cả nước.... Cùng với những thắng cảnh tầm cỡ quốc gia như: Cố đô Hoa-Lư, “Hạ-Long trên cạn” Tràng An, chùa Bái Đính, Tam Cốc-Bích Động, Vườn quốc gia Cúc Phương...., thánh đường Phát-Diệm là một điểm son trên bản đồ thắng tích của quê hương Ninh Bình và của cả Việt Nam,” Quang Huy, “Thánh đường đá Phát-Diệm,” *Thông tin di sản: Chi hội văn hóa Hùng Vương tại thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*, no. 8 (2011): 75.

<sup>4</sup>George E. Dutton, Jayne S. Werner, and John K. Whitmore, eds., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2-3, 146, 335; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 2 ([Sài Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), x-xi.

## I. A Brief History of Vietnamese Catholicism

A historical inquiry on the gestation of Catholicism in Vietnam faces three challenges: first, how to separate French colonialism from the larger history of the indigenous Church; second, how to acknowledge the fluid geo-political nature of the region called “Vietnam;” and third, how to establish a thematic periodization that covers the shift of emphasis on agency from the Eurocentric to local-centered history.

First, it is important to know that Roman Catholicism has been present in this geographical area long before the French invasion. The presence of the French colonists only complicated the dynamics between Vietnamese Catholics and their non-Catholic compatriots. Because throughout its long history, Catholicism has been viewed as a new, alien, and aberrant threat to the local traditions.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this perception is often colored by the eighty-three years of French occupation (1862-1945) and the eight years (1955-1963) of the former Republic of (South) Vietnam (1955-1975) under a Catholic president, Ngô Đình Diệm.

Second, Vietnam scholars have a certain reservation in speaking about this geographical region as “Vietnam” or its people as “Vietnamese” before 1804. Prior to 1804, this region consisted of not only Tonkin *Đàng Ngoài* and Cochinchina *Đàng Trong* but also the Nguyễn-claimed vassal states of Champa, Laos and Cambodia. The appellation *Vietnam* was only a diplomatic compromise worked out between the Nguyễn and the Qing dynasty in 1804. The former preferred to be called Nam Việt, but the latter wanted to keep the Tang provincial name, Annam.<sup>6</sup> In 1838, the name Vietnam went out of existence when the second Nguyễn emperor,

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: a Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Đại Nam thực lục chính biên* [hereafter *DNTLCB*] 1/Q. xxiii (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, Viện Sử Học, 2007), 588.

Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840), changed it to Đại Nam.<sup>7</sup> Not until 1945, did the short-lived Trần Trọng Kim's administration resurrect the name Vietnam, and it has been the official name again ever since.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, one has to acknowledge the inevitable but anachronistic problem in using the name of the modern nation-state for the region before 1804 when it had not been known as Vietnam by its contemporaries.

Third, there is the issue of finding the best thematic principle to name the various periods in this study. Period labels often do not do justice to ongoing movements that culminated in these periods and continued to maintain their own vectors beyond these chronological demarcations. A simple chronicle may provide a helpful chronological system to preserve facts, but it merely suggests a series of disconnected events without exploring any meaningful synthesis. Therefore, this brief historical survey of Vietnamese Catholicism centers thematically on the active agency of the local converts, or the lack of it, as the guiding principle for periodization: the first direct contact in the seventeenth century, the development of the local Church for the next two centuries, the Church of the French missionaries from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, and the revival of the indigenous Church from the 1930s to the present.

#### A. Christianity brought in by Portuguese trading ships

The early stage of Roman Catholicism in Vietnam happened sometime between the fourteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, just prior to the papal appointment of the first two French apostolic vicars to this new mission in 1658. According to Italian Jesuit Christoforo Borri (1583-1632), Odorico de Pordenone (1286-1331), a Franciscan missionary to China, made a short stop at the Champa Kingdom in the early 1300s, but did not

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<sup>7</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q. cxc*, 276-277.

<sup>8</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 1 ([Sài Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 4.



carry out any missionary activities there.<sup>9</sup> The next recorded event occurred around two-hundred years after the alleged presence of de Pordenone. Ferrão Mendes Pinto (1515-1583), a Portuguese ex-Jesuit, described finding a large cross-shaped engraving in the rock off the coast of Vietnam (*Cù Lao Chàm*) that Duarte Coelho, a Portuguese ambassador to Vietnam, had left behind in 1525.<sup>10</sup> Mendes Pinto's account is plausible because a local history also mentions the increasing presence and activities of Dominican missionaries in the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, that local history no longer exists, but Nguyễn historians used that document to mark 1533 as the year of the first known proscription against Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, one cannot know for certain the early activity and the degree of success of these Franciscan and Dominican missionaries.

By the beginning of the seventeenth-century, the Jesuits established pockets of permanent local Christian communities in both Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài. The increasing Jesuit activities coincided with the Tokugawa persecution of Catholics in Japan and the subsequent migration of many European and Japanese Jesuits, along with their Japanese Christian converts, to Hội An. During this period, the Jesuit missionaries, with the assistance of lay local catechists, alphabetized the Vietnamese written language into the *quốc-ngữ* script.<sup>13</sup> The band of lay leaders must have been largely responsible for the early success of the mission, for the early Church

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<sup>9</sup> Olga Dror and K. W. Taylor, eds., *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina & Samuel Baron on Tonkin* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2006); A. Bonifacy, "Relation de la nouvelle mission au royaume de Cochinchine," *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué* [hereafter *BAVH*] 18 (July-December 1931): 279.

<sup>10</sup> Bùi Đức Sinh, *Giáo hội Công Giáo ở Việt Nam* (Calgary: privately printed, 2002), 33; Joseph Dehergne, S.J., *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800* (Roma: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1973), 173.

<sup>11</sup> Bùi Đức Sinh, *Giáo hội Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, 49-52.

<sup>12</sup> Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn, *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục Q. xxxiii* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, Viện Sử Học, 1998), 720.

<sup>13</sup> Gaspar Luis, "Tuồng trình về Đàng Trong, 1621," in *Để hiểu lịch sử Đạo Thiên Chúa ở Việt Nam đầu thế kỷ XVIII*, trans. Hồng Nhuệ (Escondido: Ánh Sáng Publishing, 1994), 16; A. Francisco Cardim, "Truyền giáo trong xứ Đàng Trong," in *Để hiểu lịch sử đạo Thiên Chúa ở Việt Nam đầu thế kỷ XVIII*, trans. Hồng Nhuệ (Escondido: Ánh Sáng Publishing, 1994), 156; Peter Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (Mahwah: Paulist Press), 85; Peter Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes & Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (New York: Orbis Book, 1998), 101-106.

continued to increase its membership even when missionaries were subjected to periods of expulsion from the two kingdoms.<sup>14</sup> However, missionaries, especially the Jesuits, in this era were opposed to ordaining new converts.<sup>15</sup> Frustrated by the Jesuits' resistance to ordaining local converts and by the overbearing Portuguese *padroado* system, the papal court turned to a newly-founded French missionary society, the *Soci te des mission  trang res de Paris* (MEP), and secretly ordained in 1658 two apostolic vicars, Fran ois Pallu (1626-1684) for Tonkin and Pierre Lambert de la Motte (1624-1679) for Cochinchina. These two bishops were sent by Rome to Vietnam with a clear mandate to train and to ordain local clergy as soon as possible.<sup>16</sup> The presence of bishops and the institution of local clergy signaled a new phase in the history of Vietnamese Catholicism: the Church became more indigenous in character.

#### B. The growth of the indigenous Church, 1660s-1860s

During these two centuries, the Church in Vietnam gradually became an indigenous form of Catholicism. For instance, local clergy and lay catechists far outnumbered European bishops and missionaries. Then, the language barrier prevented the missionaries from gaining direct access to the local converts. Moreover, frequent waves of persecution forced the missionaries to spend more time in hiding than in ministering to the flock. These reasons may explain why the local Church experienced a relatively rapid expansion despite facing grave difficulties.

The local authorities were hostile to Catholics for being implicated in regional conflicts as well as cultural misunderstanding. First, during this period, as the Tr nh clan and the Nguy n clan firmly secured their seignorial rule in Tonkin Đ ng Ngo i (1570-1787) and Cochinchina

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Horacio De la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines: 1581-1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 233-234; Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China—Volumen One: 635-1800* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 462.

<sup>16</sup> Trương Bá C n, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2008), 204-206.

Đàng Trong (1600-1777), each clan tried to claim its political legitimacy by supporting the puppet emperors of the Lê dynasty (1428-1788). Each side employed missionaries as mediators to obtain Western weapons but suspected the missionaries of being spies for the other side at the same time. The other reason, probably most decisive, referred to as the *Chinese Rites Controversy*, was the dispute over the practice of offering ritual sacrifices to Confucius and their ancestors. The papal bull *Ex quo singulari* (1742) closed the dispute with a condemnation and an absolute rejection of the Chinese rites.<sup>17</sup> In response to this condemnation, Vietnamese rulers and their East Asian counterparts declared Christianity to be a perverse heterodox religion because it forbade carrying out the sacred duties of filial piety.<sup>18</sup> From the 1660s to the 1860s, the Church in Vietnam experienced different waves of persecutions. About 70,000 Catholics were killed, 40,000 of whom died between the 1830s and 1860s under the systematic persecutions of the Nguyễn dynasty.

According to missionary reports, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Vietnam had around 500,000 Catholics, of which only thirty-three were foreign missionaries, or a mere 0.007% of the half million local converts. Thus, the predominant makeup of the Vietnamese Church leaders was not missionaries but that of lay catechists, vowed religious women, seminarians, and two hundred plus local priests.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), 69-76.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 87-88.

<sup>19</sup> Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2008), 132-137; Trần Tuyết Nhung, “Les Amantes de la Croix: an Early Modern Vietnamese Lay Sisterhood,” in *Le Vietnam au feminine*, eds. Gisèle Bousquet and Nora Taylor (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005); Trần Tuyết Nhung, “Vietnamese Women at the Crossroads: Gender and Society in Early Modern Đại Việt,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2004).

### C. An indigenous Church changing into a colonial French Church, 1860s-1930s

This period began with the 1862 First Saigon Peace Treaty (*Hòa ước Nhâm-Tuất*) and ended with the 1933 ordination of the first Vietnamese bishop, Nguyễn Bá Tòng (1868-1949). During these seventy years, the public face of Catholicism in Vietnam appeared to be more French than Vietnamese because of the dominant presence of French clergy in the church hierarchy. This shift away from an indigenous Church occurred during the era of French colonialism.

Towards the early 1860s, French warships defiantly entered the ports of Vietnam and demanded the release of imprisoned missionaries and an end to the persecutions of Catholics. In 1862, the Franco-Spanish invasion forced the Nguyễn authorities to sign the first of many treaties that divided the region. Under the provisions of the 1862 First Saigon Peace Treaty, the Nguyễn allowed Catholics to practice their religion, but the imperial court no longer implement the decree or protect Catholics from widespread violence led by local scholar-gentry militias. Between 1864 and 1885, the local literati led two major insurgencies, *Văn-Thân* in the 1860s and *Cần-Vương* in the 1880s. These two grass roots persecutions killed 60,000 Catholics.<sup>20</sup> That is nearly half of the 130,000 total number of Catholics killed since the arrival of Roman Catholicism.<sup>21</sup>

By the 1890s, the French had complete control over Vietnam: a colony in Cochinchina, a protectorate in Tonkin, and tight supervision over the Nguyễn emperors who were at most nominal rulers over the sliver of territory that remained of Đại Nam.<sup>22</sup> As for the local Church, missionaries not only increased in number, but also asserted themselves more in all key

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<sup>20</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược*, vol. 2 ([Sài Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 289-290, 326-327; Keith Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 454, 458, 477.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Keith Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 474-483.

administrative ecclesiastical positions.<sup>23</sup> The charge that missionaries were a tool of the French colonial project is not unreasonable at this time.<sup>24</sup> The cause of the change originated from the decreasing tension between the Vatican and the French government under the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878-1903). In 1892, the pope endorsed the *Ralliement* policy and gave French Catholics permission to support and participate in the government of the Third Republic (1870-1940).<sup>25</sup> French bishops in Vietnam around this time often mentioned in their reports the bitter tension between missionaries and Vietnamese clergy,<sup>26</sup> indicating the discomfort of the local Vietnamese clergy towards the merger of mission and colonization. In this context, the ordination of Bishop Nguyễn Bá Tòng in 1933 was not simply an ecclesiastical event, but represented the culmination of the local Catholics' struggle to free themselves from the paternalistic tutelage of the missionaries of the *Ralliement* generation.

#### D. The decades of political boldness, 1930s-1960s

The ordination of the first Vietnamese bishop in 1933 and the 1963 coup d'état serve to bookend the three decades of Vietnamese Catholic optimism. During this period, many Catholics became prominent and influential in the public sphere. One thinks of the two senior members of the Nguyễn Privy Council (Cơ Mật Viện) Nguyễn Hữu Bài (1863-1935) and Ngô Đình Khả (1857-1923); Empress Nam Phương Nguyễn Hữu Thị Lan (1914-1963); and, finally, the President of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) Ngô Đình Diệm (1901-1963). These personages were political scions of Catholic reformers of previous century. Though the country went through various phases of political crises during and after the World War II, these leaders

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<sup>23</sup> J.P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of the French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 65; Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation*, 79-80, 88.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Michaud, "French Missionary Expansion in Colonial Upper Tonkin," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (2) (June 2004): 287-310; Jean Michaud, *'Incidental' Ethnographers: French Catholic Missions on the Tonkin-Yunnan Frontier, 1880-1930* (Boston: Brill, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> James P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided*, 7-21.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation*, 79-87.

opposed both violence and turning to other global powers for help. Instead, they believed in pursuing a gradual path of national self-strengthening to independence through education, modernization, and legal reform.

Regardless of these eminent personages, Vietnamese Catholics could not maintain the leadership positions in the national political realm that they had enjoyed in the 1930s. Yet, Vietnamese Catholic nationalism hit its high point in the 1950s, only to meet its end in the 1960s. A shortcoming of taking the 1933 ordination to mark the beginning of this phase is that this division does not do justice to the earlier sustained efforts of the local converts that culminated in this event. Even though a markedly prevalent Francophile atmosphere pervaded Catholicism in Vietnam before the 1930s, local converts did not give up their various attempts to insert their national and cultural characteristics into their religious life. For instance, the 1933 ordination of the first Vietnamese bishop owes greatly to the lobbying work of Nguyễn Hữu Bài. In his capacity as a Nguyễn high-ranking official, he made a trip to Rome in 1922 and petitioned the papal court directly to establish an indigenous hierarchy for the Church in Vietnam. His was a defiant act that neither missionaries nor the colonial government took well, because they considered Nguyễn Hữu Bài's diplomatic maneuver with the Vatican as an affront to their authorities and an explicit act of "pursuing a nationalist aim."<sup>27</sup> Between 1935 and 1945, four more Vietnamese bishops were ordained.<sup>28</sup> The last of them was Bishop Lê Hữu Từ (1896-1967). This ordinand clearly manifested his strong desire for religious independence from missionary Catholicism; he did not invite any missionary bishops to participate in his episcopal ordination on 29 October 1945.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 98-100.

<sup>28</sup> Đoàn Độc Thư and Xuân Huy Vũ Huy Bá, *Giám mục Lê Hữu Từ & Phát-Diệm 1945-1954: Những năm tranh đấu hào hùng* (Sài Gòn: Sử Liệu Hiện Đại, 1973), 43.

<sup>29</sup> Đoàn Độc Thư and Xuân Huy Vũ Huy Bá, *Giám Mục Lê Hữu Từ*, 42-53.

The indigenous aspiration for an independent Church was finally achieved in 1960. On 24 November 1960, Pope John XXIII (r.1958-1963) definitively established an independent hierarchy of bishops for Vietnam with his apostolic constitution *Venerabilium Nostrorum*.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, the political turmoil of this period overshadowed this momentous event. Vietnam was in the middle of the civil war. The administration of Ngô Đình Diệm was in the spotlight, not the Vietnamese bishops' conference. Catholic optimism soared momentarily during the eight-year presidency of Ngô Đình Diệm (1955-1963), especially with his successful resettlement program for more than a half million Catholic refugees from the North to the South.

Besides entering the politics of both Church and state, Vietnamese Catholics also worked to re-indigenize religious expression both at the literary level and in popular devotional practices. Catholic printing presses, newspapers, and journals proliferated.<sup>31</sup> The print media opened a forum for lay writers as well as local clergy to debate and advance different, even opposite agendas. Some groups took on the puritanical approach of the nineteenth-century *Ultramontanist* movement to abscond from any secular republican state; others, in contrast, encouraged the local Church to engage in dialogue with the larger society.<sup>32</sup> In other words, there was an atmosphere of openness to explore and experiment with different options on how the local Church should see itself and its role in the fast transforming modern Vietnam. The Catholic media also helped to promote the legendary Marian apparition in La Vang of Quảng Trị province.<sup>33</sup> Popular accounts claim that the Virgin Mary first appeared during Tây Sơn's persecution in 1798. The Buddhists took over the site at once and built a pagoda, so the story goes. Buddha appeared to a village

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<sup>30</sup> Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam Niên Giám 2005* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005), 235-239.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 139-146.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 140-141; Owen Chadwick, *Oxford History of the Christian Church: A History of the Popes 1830-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 195, 198-199; James P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 112-121; Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam Niên Giám 2005*, 503-510.

headman, who dreamt that Buddha told a Buddhist villager to remove the Buddha statue because a more powerful lady than he had already claimed that place.<sup>34</sup> Curiously, the local church authority at that time, Apostolic Vicar Jean Labartette (1744-1823), did not mention this apparition in his letters and reports to his religious superiors in Paris.<sup>35</sup> Not until 1885 did the religious authorities first build a church at La Vang for local pilgrims.<sup>36</sup> With the building of a railroad stop in Quảng Trị in the 1910s and the growth of the Catholic printing media in the 1920s, visiting La Vang came into vogue among the Catholics. In the 1930s, under the patronage of Privy Councilor Nguyễn Hữu Bài, the site gained considerable prestige. He organized visits for high-ranking French officials and church dignitaries; and twice the emperor Khải Định (1885-1925) even sent offerings to pray for a cure for an illness.<sup>37</sup> Like Marian apparitions in many other countries, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, the role of Our Lady of La Vang in this part of Vietnamese history was not limited to religious matters. Popular devotion to her came to embody Vietnamese Catholic nationalism. It was a case of Vietnamese Catholics taking one of the most revered symbols of Catholicism and making it their own. By the early 1960s, Catholic enthusiasm ran high: Rome formally recognized the Marian apparition in Quảng Trị province,<sup>38</sup> the Church was in the hands of its own local hierarchy, and a Catholic occupied the highest position in the southern government.

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 113.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 163.

<sup>36</sup> Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam Niên Giám 2005*, 508.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 162-164; Trần Quang Chu, “Phần 5: Nhân Vật và Sự Kiện,” in Section II/B in *Kỷ Niệm Đại Hội La-Vang Lần Thứ 27 (2005)*, Tổng Giáo Phận Huế, last modified May 22, 2009, [http://tonggiaophanhue.net/home/dulieu/lavang/lavang\\_phan5.htm](http://tonggiaophanhue.net/home/dulieu/lavang/lavang_phan5.htm).

<sup>38</sup> Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam Niên Giám 2005*, 505.



#### E. The period searching for acceptance, 1960s-present

From the 1960s to the present, Catholicism has not only lost its position of influence in society at large but has also been struggling to re-imagine its identity in a politically hostile environment where the state strictly defines and narrowly interprets religious freedom as a granted and protected privilege to pray and worship within church buildings.<sup>39</sup> Two pivotal events characterize this phase of Vietnamese Catholic history: the 1963 *coup d'état* and the 1975 fall of Saigon.

The escalating crises in 1963 debilitated the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and weakened the entire Catholic community. The Buddhists staged demonstrations in all major southern cities and accused the Diem government of pursuing discriminatory policies favoring Catholics over Buddhists. On June 11, an elderly Buddhist monk, Thích Quảng-Đức (1897-1963), self-immolated at one of the major street intersections of Saigon. His picture appeared on the front pages of newspapers worldwide.<sup>40</sup> Five months after the death of Thích Quảng-Đức, on 2 November 1963, the Associated Press announced the end of Diem's dictatorial government with a photo of the mangled bodies of Ngô Đình Diệm and his brother, Ngô Đình Nhu (1910-1963), in the back of an M-113 armored personnel carrier.<sup>41</sup> Rapidly succeeding events in 1963 domestically and internationally left the Vietnamese Catholics befuddled, tacitly accused by the international community of instigating a religious conflict.<sup>42</sup> Thereafter, Catholics were not able

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Phan, "Christianity in Vietnam today," 4; Heiner Bielefeldt, "Tuyên bố báo chí về chuyến thăm Nước Cộng hòa Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt Nam/Press Statement on the Visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief," last modified December 12, 2014, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E>; Peter Phan, "Christianity in Vietnam today (1975-2013): Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* (2014): 3, accessed February 6, 2014, doi: 10.1080/1474225X.2014.882706.

<sup>40</sup> Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and the Bo-Tree: Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam*, trans. Charles U. Quinn (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970), 185

<sup>41</sup> Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation: How the Assassinations of Diem and JFK Prolonged the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 407-442.

<sup>42</sup> Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and the Bo-Tree*, 194, 249-254.

to regroup as a political party as implied in the 1964 memorandum issued by the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference of the South. In this document, the southern bishops instructed their flock that Vietnamese Catholics must not form any political party that would define itself as “Catholic” and stand in opposition to the new military government.<sup>43</sup>

Since the fall of the Republic of Vietnam in April of 1975, the Catholic Church and the Communist government have been in a strained relationship. To use Peter Phan’s description, “[a]t times, it is an intricate *pas de deux*, with a step forward and two steps backward and with the partners occasionally stepping on each other’s toes.”<sup>44</sup> In 1975, the new government of unified Vietnam found a southern Catholic community ready and willing to rebuild a war-torn country. The Communist government faced no strong opposition from the Catholics because the southern Catholics had been psychologically so wounded after the 1963 fiasco while the northern Catholic cohort was decimated by the 1954 emigration to the south. In July 1976, twenty-one bishops of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference of the South once again issued a statement similar to their 1964 memorandum appealing to Catholics to accept and cooperate with the Communist regime.<sup>45</sup> On 5 January 1980, a new Vietnamese Episcopal Conference comprised of thirty-three bishops issued a pastoral letter, the *Thư Chung* 1980, as a promise of collaboration with the secular authorities saying that good Catholics must be good citizens.<sup>46</sup> This letter is often referred to by a title of one of its subsections, “The Church in the Midst of the People” (*Hội thánh trong lòng dân tộc*).<sup>47</sup> It exhorts Catholics to live out the mystery of the incarnation as the Church of Christ must live in the midst of the people.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and the Bo-Tree...*, 253-254.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Phan, “Christianity in Vietnam today,” 14.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Phan, “Christianity in Vietnam today,” 7.

<sup>46</sup> Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, “Thư Chung 1980,” in *Giáo hội Công Giáo Việt Nam niên giám 2005*, ed. Văn phòng tổng thư ký hội đồng giám mục Việt Nam (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005), 240-247.

<sup>47</sup> Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, “Thư Chung 1980,” 242.

<sup>48</sup> Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, “Thư Chung 1980,” 242-244; Peter Phan, “Christianity in Vietnam today,” 7.

However, the state has built itself on a different but still Western-inspired ideology of Marxism. According to this Marxist perspective, religion—especially Christianity—is a “tool of colonial and imperial exploitation.”<sup>49</sup> The strong negative reaction of the government towards the canonisation of one hundred and seventeen martyrs in 1988 amply demonstrated that ideological posture of the state towards the presence of Catholicism in Vietnam. The government pressured the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference to issue a statement against the canonisation of “French and Spanish spies,” but the bishops dodged the demand by stating that the process of declaration of sainthood is exercised in Rome and not within the jurisdiction of local episcopal conferences.<sup>50</sup> Since the issue of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion (*Pháp lệnh về Tôn giáo và Tín ngưỡng*) in 2004, the government has toned down its ideological opposition to religion from advocating its eradication to regulating it through a restrictive system of registration. In the July of 2014 press statement of the United Nations Conference on Human Rights, the United Nation Special Rapporteur summarized the *raison d’etre* of this system in four verbs: “to regulate, limit, restrict, [or] forbid.”<sup>51</sup> The policy, moreover, is far from clear and predictable because it is subject to frequent modifications, arbitrary interpretations, and erratic interference by local authorities.<sup>52</sup> With this ordinance, Vietnamese Catholics as well as the followers of other religions enjoy a larger degree of freedom in practicing their beliefs in comparison to the pre-2000 era. Nevertheless, it is a religious freedom controlled by an authoritarian state and not an inalienable right such as the larger international community recognizes in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an essential for every human being.

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<sup>49</sup> Nguyễn Văn Kiệm, *Góp phần tìm hiểu một số vấn đề lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hóa-Thông Tin, 2003), 19.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Phan, “Christianity in Vietnam today,” 4, 6.

<sup>51</sup> “Để so sánh, các văn bản pháp lý liên quan của Việt Nam đã cho các cơ quan chính quyền nhiều không gian để quy định, giới hạn, hạn chế hay cấm việc thực hành tự do tôn giáo hay tín ngưỡng/By comparison, the relevant legal documents of Viet Nam give Government agencies broad space to regulate, limit, restrict of [sic] forbid the exercise of freedom of religion or belief,” Heiner Bielefeldt, “Tuyên bố báo chí,” [Section IIb], 4.

<sup>52</sup> Heiner Bielefeldt, “Tuyên bố báo chí,” [Section I, Section IIb], 2-3, 5.

Vietnamese Catholicism is intimately connected with the emergence of modern Vietnam. Chronologically, missionaries first brought Catholicism to the shores of Vietnam at the pivotal moment of the usurpation of the Lê dynasty by the Trịnh and Nguyễn clans—an event that divided the country into two kingdoms. Politically, one cannot discuss the role of Catholicism in the formation of the modern nation-state of Vietnam without discussing the Nguyễn religious persecutions, the Franco-Spanish intervention of the late 1850s, French occupation in the late 1880s, or the political turmoil of South Vietnam in the 1960s. Because of the formative role of Catholicism in the history of modern Vietnam, many recent ideologically-driven historiographies are laden with bitter polemic and unresolved issues.

## **II. Historiography**

Written against the backdrop of French imperialism then the post-1945 Vietnam historiography of Nguyễn-Catholic relations closely reflects the presuppositions, biases, and interests of historians since the 1880s. This historiography consists of six genres: confessional history, *ressourcement* history, Cold War era history, anti-canonization history, inculturation history, and regional history.

### **A. Confessional history**

Early contributors to Vietnamese confessional history were French missionaries turned historians, especially Fathers Louis-Eugène Louvet, Adrien Launay, and Léopold Cadière. Their works dominated the field for more than four decades from the 1880s to the 1920s. Three particular goals are evident in this type of history: promoting the cause of sainthood for local and missionary martyrs, soliciting funds for the missions, and accusing the court of Huế of ingratitude after all the French missionaries had done for the founding of the Nguyễn dynasty.

Besides trying to impress church officials in Rome, this type of history had served the missions well in soliciting funds from French and English Catholics. Since these writers had no intention of writing for the local converts, they showed a strong deference to missionaries as the main agents of history. In contrast, they assigned only supporting roles to local converts. Moreover, the task of identifying local personalities mentioned in these narratives is tedious because of their frequent use of sobriquets. In spite of the shortcomings of this confessional genre, these early church historians provided much more than simply a coherent chronological order of the mission's enterprises. They were keen observers of local life and regional politics of nineteenth-century Vietnam.<sup>53</sup>

#### B. Ressourcement history

Between the 1920s and the early 1970s, a new group of historians of Vietnamese Catholicism emerged, and they showed a particular interest in recovering and promoting pre-colonial Christian roots. Their works manifest national pride as authors and readership became more Vietnamese. Unlike the previous missionary historians, these researchers, such as Nguyễn Hồng, Phan Phát Huồn, and Etienne Võ Đức Hạnh, presented their archival findings in Vietnamese. Their endeavor of collecting and analyzing the primary documents closely resembled a new trend of research, *la nouvelle théologie*, in the worldwide Catholic intellectual circles. *La nouvelle théologie* of the early twentieth century advocated using new tools of historical criticism to examine the existing histories in order to return to the sources and thus to revive a more authentic religious practice of the past—*ressourcement*. These *ressourcement* scholars rendered a more academic discipline to their historiography by utilizing archival materials in Europe in order to separate verifiable events from the larger oral accounts steeped in

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<sup>53</sup> Nola Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics and Others in the Pages of the *Annales de la propagation de la foi*," in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (2) (June 2004): 262.

supernatural interventions of the previous confessional history. Regrettably, the political turmoil of the 1960s and the escalation of the Vietnam War in the 1970s drastically altered the trajectory of scholarship on Vietnamese Catholicism. The efforts of Vietnamese Catholic *ressourcement* was quickly overshadowed by the highly politicized historiography of the Cold War.

### C. Cold War era history

The fall of the Ngô Đình Diệm's government in 1963 symbolically marked a turning point in Vietnamese Catholic historiography from *ressourcement* history to Cold War history. For better or for worse, Vietnamese Catholic historiography no longer remained in the hands of Catholic historians. The new scholarship served as a forum for Western scholars, journalists, and popular writers to criticize American involvement in the Vietnam War. Whether in the form of direct commentaries or tangential discussions, research questions often attempted to connect Catholicism with colonialism. Debates were reduced to the role of French missionaries in the Franco-Spanish invasion in the 1860s, the rise and fall of President Ngô Đình Diệm, the mass influx of refugees from the North, and the Buddhist protests in the 1960s as found in monographs of Nicole-Dominique Lê, Trần Tam Tĩnh, Cao Huy Thuần, and Mark McLeod. In addition to the discussion of the political roots of French colonialism in Vietnam, these historians tended to emphasize the incompatibility of Catholic culture with local traditions. This version of Cold War history not only perpetuated a polemical binary rhetoric between heroes and collaborators but also erased from history the indigenous Catholics before the French conquest.

### D. Anti-canonization history

In 1988, Pope John Paul II (r.1978-2005) canonized a group of 117 martyrs—ninety-six Vietnamese Catholics and twenty-one French and Spanish missionaries. This event stirred up a new wave of Hanoi-sponsored writing. The state mobilized its cadre of official historians and

also recruited intellectual members of the Vietnamese version of the Patriotic Church known as the Committee for the Unification of Patriotic Catholics (*Ủy ban đoàn kết Công Giáo yêu nước*) to produce tracts questioning the legitimacy of this canonization. This scholarship resembled the nation-centered binary of exclusion and inclusion but with a fierce all-out effort to denounce the Vatican rather than French missionaries as in the Cold War historiography.

Nguyễn Văn Kiệm, the leading voice of this genre, interpreted Nguyễn-Catholic history from the perspective of Marxist grand theory on the evolution and succession of historical epochs. According to the theory of universal economic modes of production, human society progressed from Asiatic, ancient, feudal, modern bourgeois, then finally to a socialistic mode. Nguyễn Văn Kiệm argued that Christianity had outlived its historical usefulness, which should have lasted only from the fourth to the fifteenth century. When human society evolved from the feudal to the modern bourgeois mode, the prestige of the Church had been adversely affected. In the sixteenth century, therefore, churchmen fanned out to the Far East and to the New World in a desperate attempt to compensate for their loss of power in the Old World. In this view of historical evolution, Christianity lost not only its independence from and prestige over Europe's secular rulers, but it also acquiesced to secular power when churchmen allied with statesmen and turned their theological heritage into a philosophical justification of European expansionism. Therefore, the proselytizing efforts of Catholic missionaries in Vietnam since the seventeenth century were fundamentally political in nature. This theoretical framework continues to influence the current state-sponsored historiography to this very day.

### E. Inculturation history

After the intense polemical anti-canonization scholarship of the late 1980s came the inculturation school spearheaded by a new group of historians, theologians, and social scientists including Peter Phan, Roland Jacques, Trần Tuyết Nhung, Brian Eugene Ostrowski, Trần Quốc Anh, and Phạm Trung Hưng, to name but a few. They joined forces to shift their investigation from questions concerning the Church and state issue to those focused on religion and culture. They applied techniques of textual analysis to local Catholic literature in order to understand the historical, social, and cultural contexts of Vietnam in the late Lê and pre-Nguyễn era. Surprisingly, a new cluster of Vietnam state-sponsored scholars, such as Nguyễn Hồng Dương and his cohort, are also reassessing Catholic topics from social and economic perspectives. Overall, inculturation studies resemble the *ressourcement* project of the early to mid-1900s. However, in their effort to recover and emphasize the pre-colonial indigenous Catholic roots, scholars of inculturation inevitably falter when attributing either praise or blame to individuals or organizations with categories that might have never entered the consciousness of these historical agents.<sup>54</sup>

### F. Regional history

At the same time as the development of the inculturation studies in the field of Vietnamese Catholicism, another school of scholars have been reappraising the role of Catholicism within the Southeast Asian geopolitical context rather than in as part of the dominant Chinese world order. For example, Alain Forest focuses his study on the difference in social ties between the village elites and the peasantry of Thailand and of Vietnam. Jacob Ramsay investigates the relationship between the Catholic communities and the local

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<sup>54</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes & Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (New York: Orbis Book, 1998), 192, 198, 200, 202.



government in Cochinchina in the immediately preceding colonial period. Or, Charles Keith identifies the racial tension between local converts and French missionaries as a political catalyst for the birth of Vietnamese Catholic nationalism in the 1930s. This historiography thus moves away from the confinement of national histories to the complex multi-layers of complicated local, regional, and global relationships.

From this survey of six thematic historiographies on Vietnamese Catholicism—confessional, *ressourcement*, Cold War, anti-canonization, inculturation, and regional—one can observe that various ideological biases and anachronistic labels have blurred the role of Catholicism in Vietnam since the seventeenth century. Among these different historiographies, in my view, the approach of regional-centered history holds considerable promise of offering corrective measures by moving away from the conventional binary narrative between a Western military or cultural threat and a local response. That said, one cannot ignore the many valuable insights contributed by scholars working in other historiographical modes. The writers in the confessional school remind us of the violent and brutal realities. The *ressourcement* work is far from complete because scholars have not yet fully taken advantage of the primary sources. The Cold War researchers' interpretation still holds sway in the public perception of the role and the impact of Catholicism in the history of modern Vietnam. Nevertheless, the general population has not benefited from the discussion and new findings that academia has generated. The anti-canonization argument forces the local church to be more courageous in examining its association with the colonial past and its Eurocentrism. And finally, the methodology of textual criticism from the school of inculturation proves exceptionally valuable in probing and reconstructing a history of thoughts and practices among the rank and file members at the local scene.

This review of relevant literature makes me acutely aware of my own personal stance because even the most seasoned scholars still occupy some ideological vantage point.<sup>55</sup> In my own case, in choosing the Nguyễn-Catholic topic, I must admit that I work out of a nexus of my own presuppositions, biases and interest. As a Jesuit, my temptation will be to wallow in indignation over the heavy-handed Roman decision over the eighteenth-century Rites Controversy. As a Catholic priest, I will be more susceptible to a litany of persecutions and martyrdoms of confessional history. As one of the boat people fleeing the Communist government in the 1980s, I may read back anachronistically the Party-state's current restrictive policies on religions into the Nguyễn-Catholic tensions of the nineteenth century. Moreover, to maintain an objective perspective on the Nguyễn-Catholic relations is a challenge because this history is also a family story. On my maternal side, I can map my ancestry chart to Minh Mạng. On my paternal side, I can trace my lineage to one of four survivors of the *Văn Thân* massacre of Dương Lộc village in 1885. Consequently, my biases will show in favor of selecting, arranging, and underscoring the interactions of Catholics and the Nguyễn ruling circle. Nevertheless, I hope my careful use of diverse sources in tandem, with allowance for mutual correction, may assist me in rendering an objective presentation of the Nguyễn-Catholic history.

### **III. General Outline of the Dissertation**

There is surely no topic of Vietnamese history more politicized than the Nguyễn-Catholic history. Furthermore, its historiography has been not only towards a polemical French-centric narrative but also one in which Catholic converts rarely have an active role in that history. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to clarify the role of Catholicism in forming the modern national identity by pulling together data from dynastic records, missionary reports, and local

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<sup>55</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1-6.

histories. While many findings are not new, they have never been juxtaposed in such a way as to bring out the local Catholics as active agents of history. My overarching argument is that during the fast pace of the nineteenth-century socio-political evolution of Vietnam, it was the domestic agenda, and much more than any pressing Western military threat, that lay underneath the true motives of the Nguyễn anti-Catholic policy. A proliferation of underground Catholic literature at the time of persecution suggests that, as an unintended consequence of that policy, Catholics were drawn together by their shared experience of being used as political pawns by the Huế government. The Catholic community was galvanized to transform itself from a loose association of disparate religious hamlets into a national religio-political entity by the end of the nineteenth century. They widened their social network beyond their immediate primordial village, began to engage into political debate about what constitutes “just rule,” and challenged the Nguyễn state to govern by the rule of law.

This dissertation consists of five main chapters. The first traces a trio of principal factors which, over 400 years, explain the strong underlying martyrdom mentality of Vietnamese Catholicism. The next four chapters are arranged in chronological order of periods of roughly thirty years. The outcome of each period is to set up the central issues of its successor. The martyrdom mentality of Vietnamese Catholicism was relieved by an alliance between the power-seeking Nguyễn monarchy and Catholics. Further Nguyễn power-seeking generates Nguyễn aversion toward former Catholic ally, which eventuates in annihilation of Catholic political leverage, and Catholic ambivalence on the eve of the French colonization.

Chapter 1 draws largely on the *1873 Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*, a pastoral manual for local clergy, to demonstrate the intriguing convergence of three European traditions of purity that emerged in early modern Europe, and had a direct bearing on the strong martyrdom mentality of

Catholicism in Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> The three traditions are: an Iberian fear of being contaminated by the non-Christian world, a post-Tridentine apprehension of straying from simple and clear catechetical orthodoxy and ritual purity, and a French *dévo*t spirituality of distrust toward the secular world. This confrontational tendency of Vietnamese Catholicism is particularly crucial for understanding how the Catholic Church in Vietnam survived many persecutions especially the nineteenth-century systematic campaign to eradicate Christianity under the Nguyễn dynasty.

Chapter 2 narrows that history to the last three decades of the eighteenth century; it investigates the Nguyễn-Catholic strategic alliance that restored the Nguyễn seigneurial power in Gia Định. Two key primary sources for this chapter are a collection of fourteen letters written by Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and a Catholic local history, *History of the Great South* [*Sử ký Đại Nam Việt quốc triều* (SKĐNVQT)], written by an unknown Christian author in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. *History of the Great South* (SKĐNVQT) begins with the decline of the Nguyễn seigneurial rule in Đàng Trong in 1737 and ends with the investiture of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh as Gia Long emperor in 1804 in Hà Nội. Though the narration follows the dynastic chronological framework, it does not use the dynastic reigning years as in standard contemporary practice but organizes events according to the Western calendar. Its usage of non-regnal-year system suggests that this document is essentially a dominant Catholic perspective as well as independently from the official narrative. Furthermore, its author speaks directly to southern readers who seem to share a common knowledge of local landscapes. It speaks about places by their colloquial designations instead of proper administrative names, thus it is also a local history. Because of the author's strong partiality for Catholicism, *History of the Great South*

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<sup>56</sup> Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse, *Synodo Sutchuense: Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*, trans. Giám mục Bảo Lộc Phanchicô Phước [Puginier] (Địa phận Tây Đàng Ngoài: Ninh Phú Đường, 1873).

offers a rich source on many converts with high social and political profiles that Nguyễn-Catholic historiography often overlooks.<sup>57</sup>

Chapter 3 reconstructs the history of the development of the Nguyễn dynasty's anti-Catholic policy by rooting this history in the ruling elites' own experience as they moved their power center from Gia Định to Huế. This chapter covers the souring of the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance as the Nguyễn emerged as the dominant political power from the 1800s to the 1830s. Since the Nguyễn had not adopted an anti-Catholic attitude as their official policy until the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict, official chroniclers only gave scant attention to its circumstances prior to the prohibition.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, though still relying on dynastic records to provide a chronological framework, this chapter supplements official documents with data gathered from letters, travel logs, and memoirs written by missionaries and foreign adventurers. As for the local Catholic voice, besides the *History of the Great South*, here the study includes another local history, *Việt Nam giáo sử diễn ca*, produced in the traditional epic style. Its author was Đặng Đức Tuấn (1806-1874), a local Catholic priest of the Bình Định province.<sup>59</sup>

In chapter 4, I highlight the absolutist style of the Nguyễn empire-building strategy from the 1830s to the 1860s. Here, I closely analyze the imperial proscriptions against Catholicism, especially Minh Mạng's blueprint of cultural reform—Ten Moral Maxims (*Thập Điều*)—issued in 1834.<sup>60</sup> Among the extensive body of the Nguyễn legal codes and edicts, the seventh of Minh Mạng's ten maxims of 1834 produced the most deleterious effect on Vietnamese Catholics. A study of this document brings a deeper appreciation of the motives behind the Nguyễn anti-

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<sup>57</sup> Léopold Michel Cardière, “Les Français au service de Gia-Long: Nguyễn Ánh et la mission, documents inédits,” *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué* (hereafter *BAVH*) 13, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1926): 1-50; *Sử ký Đại Nam Việt quốc triều* (hereafter *SKĐNVQT*), 2 ed. (Saigon: Tân Định, 1885).

<sup>58</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxvi*, 415-416.

<sup>59</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, “Việt Nam giáo sử diễn ca,” in *Đặng Đức Tuấn tinh hoa Công Giáo ái quốc Việt Nam*, ed. Lam Giang and Võ Ngọc Nhã (Saigon: Tân Văn Ấn Quán, 1970), 29-120.

<sup>60</sup> *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 232-237.

Catholic policy from the local perspective by centering this investigation on the perspective of the Nguyễn authorities in their encountering and actively responding to Catholicism.

Chapter 5 re-examines the process of formation of Vietnamese Catholic national identity through the life of Father Phêrô Trần Lục as a case study. This chapter uses the layout of Phát-Diệm Cathedral itself as a primary source to reconstruct his life. The Phát-Diệm buildings and their architectural ornaments are not just for show or simply a gathering place for Catholic worship; they provide hints of local agency that the objects on their own do not acknowledge, and of which their craftsmen were probably unaware. From a reconstruction of this indigenous priest, I show how the rank-and-file members of a religious minority group found themselves battered by a politically ambivalent world, forced to negotiate for their very survival in the midst of official persecution, sectarian violence, and the spread of Western imperialism from the 1860s to the 1890s.

All translations from French and Vietnamese are mine, except where noted. Moreover, Western sources render different spelling for certain parts of Vietnam, so I go with the spellings; such as Tonkin, Saigon, or Hanoi; where these name are well established in English usage. As for the rest of other places, I keep the Vietnamese monosyllabic style of spelling for geographical names. For instance, Saigon would have been Sài Gòn. Lastly, as for names of local converts, if their Christian names and full names are available, I use them altogether according to the local Catholic practice. That is a Christian name first then followed by a full name, such as Phêrô Trần Lục or Micae Hồ Đình Hy.

## **Chapter 1: Cultural Purity, Doctrinal Purity, and Spiritual Purity—Three Foundational Facets in the History of Vietnamese Clergy Formation as Reflected in the *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên***

As visitors enter the campus of Phát-Diệm Cathedral, their eyes are drawn immediately across a large rectangular artificial pool which reflects a massive grey stone structure with layers of curving roofs—the Fragrant Pavilion (*Phuong Dinh*). This sight had once cast its spell over Graham Greene who not only referred to this pavilion in his novel, *The Quiet American*, but also placed it at the most critical turning point when the French-Indochina War became the Vietnamese-American War. In the midst of a chaotic battle, a flood of fleeing refugees, and flashing explosions of rockets and bombs, people processed with banners, incense-burners and the golden monstrance. They passed “the white statue of the Sacred Heart that stood on an island in the little lake before the Cathedral, under the bell tower with spreading oriental wings and into the carved wooden cathedral with its gigantic pillars formed out of single trees and the scarlet lacquer work of the altar, more Buddhist than Christian.”<sup>1</sup>

Besides its aesthetic purpose, the reflecting pool serves a practical function of allowing the air to circulate before the age of electric fan. A breeze carries earthy scent from the surrounding rice fields, swirls around the stone columns in the shape of bamboo trunks, then flows upward to meet the sculptures of the four evangelists presiding over the four corners of *Phuong Dinh*. One can still see local people rest and nap in the shadow of the drum-and-bell tower in order to alleviate the languor of a summer afternoon. For visitors, the East-West cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 46.

hybridity of the site has a different effect. They may not fall asleep, but they can be easily mesmerized and drawn into a deep contemplation of a long deep-rooted history of Catholicism in this region. And, for such visitors, this dissertation guides them through an integrative history, as I adopt Joseph Fletcher’s approach to his study of Central Asia, between the global forces and the religio-political histories of Vietnam in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> This chapter covers the former, and the next four chapters focus on the latter.



Fig. 1. Reflection pool in front of Phuong Đình Bell Tower at Phát-Diệm, 2004. Photo by Gioan Baotixita Nguyễn Văn Thành.

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Fletcher, “Integrative History: Parallels and Interconnections in the Early Modern Period, 1500-1800,” in Joseph Fletcher, *Studies on Chinese and Islamic Central Asia*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, ed. Beatrice Forbes Manz (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1995), 33-35.



## I. Correcting the Monolithic Representation of Catholicism

Scholars of Catholicism in Vietnam have not yet paid attention to the predominant prophetic Catholic culture that developed in Vietnam since the late sixteenth century. When missionaries came to the Far East, they often compared and took solace in the parallels between their situation and that of the Early Church. They did not discuss a millennium and a half institutional development of their Catholic Church which was quite different from the time of the apostles.<sup>3</sup> According to John O'Malley's *Four Cultures of the West*, by the early modern period, Roman Catholicism has evolved and simultaneously operated in four different cultural modes: the prophetic culture, the academic and professional culture, the humanistic culture, and the artistic culture.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, O'Malley places the emphasis on the style of expression in a culture: "[*How*] things were said was just as important as *what* was said, even though the *how* and the *what* could never be neatly separated."<sup>5</sup> He uses art to illustrate the subtle but important distinction between the *what* of the message and the *how* of the style: "We regard Michelangelo as a great artist not because of *what* he painted or sculpted, usually conventional subjects, but because of *how* he painted or sculpted those subjects—because of his style."<sup>6</sup>

The prophetic culture is the oldest among the four. Its roots stretch back to the apostolic community in Jerusalem and even earlier to its Judaic tradition. This culture has many celebrated reformers. It unapologetically shouts out its incomprehensible message because it feels the obligation to render audibility to the utter otherness of God even at the cost of being martyred.

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<sup>3</sup> George Elision, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 13-29.

<sup>4</sup> John W. O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6-24.

<sup>5</sup> John O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> John O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West*, 31.

Shouting is its mode of discourse which demands of its hearers an immediate conversion and its society a radical systematic change.<sup>7</sup>

As for the other three cultures, they ground themselves in the Greco-Roman soil. When the early Christian group dispersed over the Roman Empire, they incorporated intellectual elements of the Greco-Roman cultures into their belief and practices. The academic and professional culture still thrives in universities and monasteries. This culture does not shout but quietly conducts close examinations in order to combine reason with revelation to formulate defined concepts and clear cut definitions. This culture does not demand but persuades its hearers with confidence in the ability of the intellect to obtain the Truth that its intellectual process has produced.<sup>8</sup>

The humanistic culture, like the academic and professional culture, stems from the Greco-Roman elite culture. This culture attracts poets, orators, and statesmen. Life, according to this culture, fills with layers of meaning. Ambiguity does not pose a threat to this culture but a source of inspiration for its literature. The disciples of this culture train in the art of eloquence. If the academic and professional culture pursues the Truth—the maximum, the proponents of humanistic culture open for compromises in order to achieve the common good—the optimum. Practitioners of academic and professional culture live in monasteries and universities; disciples of humanistic culture *lycées* and “Latin Schools.”<sup>9</sup>

The artistic culture adopts, preserves, and celebrates the Greco-Roman stylistic expressions. Patrons of this culture might come from the elite circle, but its products mainly are for popular consumption. Artists and performers dominate this culture. Their products consist of but not exclusively to fine arts in museums and churches as of Michelangelo’s and Raphael’s.

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<sup>7</sup> John W. O’Malley, *Four Cultures of the West...*, 6-9, 37-75.

<sup>8</sup> John W. O’Malley, *Four Cultures of the West...*, 10-14, 77-125.

<sup>9</sup> John W. O’Malley, *Four Cultures of the West...*, 14-19, 127-177.

People experience this culture directly when they participate in the liturgy, when they chant, or when their clergy don Roman vestments. The first three cultures are verbal cultures; the last a material culture. The producers of this culture communicate through the senses and often without words but through symbols and rituals.<sup>10</sup>

Based on John O'Malley's synthesis of Christian influences on Western cultures, I argue that the *what* of Vietnamese Catholicism is rather indistinguishable from its European counterpart. They both share the same theological content and organize on a similar hierarchical structure. On the other hand, the *how* of Vietnamese Catholicism exhibits a bias in favor of the prophetic culture that consists of the fifteenth-century Iberian angst, the post-Tridentine rigidity, and, in particular, the seventeenth-century French *dévo*t rigorism.

## II. From Toledo in 1449 to Tonkin in 1873

Over 424 years, from 1449 in Spain to 1873 in Vietnam, many things were swept along in the movements of people who traveled across the globe. Initiatives and changes emanated from Spain, the Papal States, and France. In 1449, the city of Toledo in Spain officially launched a campaign to purge the "New Christians" and their alleged heterodox cultures.<sup>11</sup> In 1545, the Roman Catholic Church called for the gathering of both religious and secular Catholic leaders at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) to map out its own reformation.<sup>12</sup> In 1632, following the death of their leaders, Cardinal Pierre Bérulle (1575-1629) and Michel de Marillac (1563-1632), the *dévo*t hardliners lost their grip on the French court, and thus the *dévots* withdrew from politics and focused their energies on the religious sphere.<sup>13</sup> What may appear temporally and spatially

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<sup>10</sup> John W. O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West...*, 19-22, 179-233.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Aleksander Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France 1560-1715* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89-109, 176-178.

unrelated in these three events turned out to be the central tenets embedded in the *Synodus Vicariatus Sutchuensis* (SVS). The SVS sternly warns local clergy to be on guard against non-Christian cultures, constantly refers to the post-Tridentine liturgical practices and its catechism, and strongly suspects any value of the secular world. Even though this is a nineteenth-century document, it rehearses the fifteenth-century Iberian cultural bias, the sixteenth-century dogmatic Tridentinism, and the seventeenth-century puritanical French spirituality. The *Synodus Vicariatus Sutchuensis* serves as a capstone that holds the arches of their European trajectories on one side and guides the shapes of the Far East missions on the other.

It took seventy years for the *Synodus Vicariatus Sutchuensis* to be effectively implemented in the Vietnam missions. Apostolic Vicar Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse (1750-1815) of Sichuan vicariate authored the *Synodus Vicariatus Sutchuensis* in order to respond to new pastoral issues that emerged along with the growth of the Church under his care.<sup>14</sup> Bishop Dufresse noticed a growing divergence of opinion in the resolution of pastoral problems. He also observed that different Catholic communities tended to follow individualistic approaches that had been established by each local pastor and his catechists. Therefore, in 1803, he called for a provincial synod to forge a consensus of pastoral practices in his vicariate. In 1832, impressed by this document, the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* ordered all vicariates in the Far East to adopt the directives of the SVS.<sup>15</sup> In August 1841, during the brief respite between the death of Minh Mạng and the investiture of Thiệu Trị (1841-1847), Bishop Étienne Théodore Cuenot “Thế” (1802-1861) of the Cochinchina mission called for a new synod at Gò Thị. At this gathering, Bishop Cuenot, two other missionaries, and thirteen Vietnamese priests agreed to

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<sup>14</sup> Gabriele-Taurino Dufresse, *Synodus Vicariatus Sutchuensis* [hereafter SVS] (Roma: Congre de Propaganda Fide, 1869).

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Jeanne, “The Early Church of Sichuan Province: A Study of Conditions Leading to the Synod of 1803,” trans. T. Le Blanc and P. Barry, *Tripod* 15 (1983): 63; Josef Metzler, *Die Synoden in Indochina, 1625-1934* (Paderbon: F. Schönigh, 1984), 127.

adopt the SVS.<sup>16</sup> However, just how the synodal directives could be implemented was highly questionable. For one thing, the ongoing persecution prevented the clergy from putting the instructions of the SVS into effect. In fact, just six months after the Gò Thị Synod, one of the three missionaries at the synod was arrested, then over the next twenty-one years the Vietnam missions lived constantly on the brink of annihilation until the signing of the 1862 Saigon Peace Treaty.<sup>17</sup> For another, when Bishop Cuenot sent the Gò Thị document to Rome for approval, the document was lost because Italy was in the middle of the 1848 Revolution.<sup>18</sup> The pope and his court fled from Rome, thus the Gò Thị's adaptations of the SVS did not receive the endorsement from the Roman curia.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the document did not appear in print until 1893.<sup>20</sup> In 1873, Paul François Puginier "Phước" (1835-1892) adapted the SVS and published his own version, *Công Đồng Từ Xuyên (CDTX)*, in Vietnamese. Though this 1873 CDTX came thirty-two years after the Gò Thị Synod, the Puginier's adaptation of the SVS was available in print and in Vietnamese twenty years before the Cuenot's Latin copy. Only from 1873 on, could the SVS and its other adapted versions hold sway on the formation of indigenous priests in the region, which it continued to do until the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965).

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<sup>16</sup> Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyen Dynasty in Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 93-99; Étienne Théodore Cuenot, *Synodus Vicariatus Cochinchinensis, Cambodiensis et Ciampoensis, habita in provincia Binh Dinh anno 1841* (Hongkong: Typis Societatis Missionum ad Exteros, 1893), 49; Josef Metzler, *Die Synoden in Indochina, 1625-1934*, 130-131.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Irénée Duclos, "Letter from the Rev. Mr. Duclos, to his Lordship R. Cuenot, Vicar-Apostolic of Cochinchina," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 5 (March 1844): 72.

<sup>18</sup> Josef Metzler, *Die Synoden in Indochina, 1625-1934*, 155.

<sup>19</sup> Josef Metzler, *Die Synoden in Indochina, 1625-1934*, 157, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Stephanus-Theodorus Cuenot, *Synodus Vicariatus Cochinchinensis Cambodiensis et Ciampoensis, habita in provincia Binh Dinh anno 1841* (Hongkong: Typis Societatis Missionum ad Exteros, 1893).

### III. The 1873 *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên* (CDTX)

Through textual analysis of the 1873 *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*, we may gain a deeper appreciation of how these three global forces not only brought Catholicism to Vietnam but also shaped future Vietnamese Catholic national leaders. The main thrust of the 1873 CDTX is to exhort readers to live out a morally rigorous life of the prophetic tradition. This hundred-page document has been considered a handbook of practical guidance rather than a painstakingly thorough theological analysis of sacraments. It is not for general readership, but exclusively addressed to the local clergy.<sup>21</sup> Its ten chapters vary in length, not all of equal importance. The theology, addressed in Chapter 1, supposedly provides the foundational and theoretical principles behind the sacramental life of the Church, but the topic receives only a meager treatment in three pages. On the topic of vocation and a process of advancing a candidate to the priesthood, Chapter 8 intriguingly comprises only three and half pages.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, Chapter 6 and Chapter 10 offer fifty-three out of a hundred pages on sins, personal sanctification, and pastoral responsibilities of a priest.<sup>23</sup> This uneven emphasis on different topics is part of a long history of strategies, successes, and failures in the process of building a cadre of indigenous Roman Catholic clergy.

The 1873 edition (CDTX) is not an exact copy of the 1803 SVS that Cuénot had adopted in 1841.<sup>24</sup> The 1873 CDTX includes additional notes from an unnamed commentator that fit with the situation of the Catholic community in Tonkin. The mysterious commentator never identifies himself, but there is plenty of textual evidence to suggest his identity. The 1873 CDTX makes many references to the local practices of Catholics in Vietnam and especially in the West Tonkin Vicariate. One clue pointing to the commentator's identity comes in the section regarding the

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<sup>21</sup> Pierre Jeanne, "The Early Church of Sichuan Province," 56.

<sup>22</sup> SVS, 60-63.

<sup>23</sup> SVS, 32-56, 72-101.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs*, 95.

celebration of the sacraments. Here, the commentator reminds priests to put on proper Roman vestments unless they are hearing confessions. In the latter case, priests were exempt from this rubric because of a time-honored Vietnamese tradition to be garbed in “áo dài” while hearing confession.<sup>25</sup> In the Latin version of *SVS*, the text simply says that it is permissible to wear “*in veste saeculari*.”<sup>26</sup> In the chapter on Mass and confession, the *SVS* invokes an instruction from a bishop that requires a woman to wear a veil to cover her face while attending Mass or during confession.<sup>27</sup> However, in the Vietnamese text, the commentator recognizes that it has not been a norm among Vietnamese Catholics to wear the aforementioned veil. Instead, the *CDTX* states that “such practice is not required in Annam, yet it is an appropriate thing to imitate.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it is clear that this commentator is well-versed in the day-to-day running of the Church in Tonkin, including such matters as how much a Mass stipend a priest should receive. He warns priests not to use the Mass to seek financial gain for the “West Tonkin Vicariate has established that only one *quan tiền* is asked for each Mass.”<sup>29</sup> In this instruction, the text specifically names Tonkin, a place name not found in the original *SVS*.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the Ninh Phú Đường, the name of the publishing house on the first page of the document is another clue to the commentator’s identity. The Ninh Phú Đường publishing house was founded and financed by the apostolic vicar of West Tonkin.<sup>31</sup> Finally, whenever there is a change made in the text, the commentator carefully uses parentheses to separate his work from the original passage.<sup>32</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> “Lại đừng kể phép Giải tội, vì trong địa phận này đã cho mặc áo dài phân đò mà làm phép ấy xưa nay; còn các phép khác, thì phải mặc áo dòng cùng dây stola mới nên làm,” *CDTX*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> “Et stolam adhibere, excepto sacramento poenitentiae, quod in hoc Vicariatu ministrari in veste saeculari huc usque toleratum est; vestis autem illa sit talaris, et non brevis,” *SVS*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> *SVS*, 22; Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs*, 95.

<sup>28</sup> “An nam chẳng buộc, song cũng là sự xứng đáng,” *CDTX*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> “Địa phận tây đàng Ngoài cứ một lễ một quan tiền,” *CDTX*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> *SVS*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Trương Bá Cẩn, *Lịch sử phát triển Công giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2008), 746-747.

<sup>32</sup> *CDTX*, 26.

comments are written in an authoritative tone to the clergy in his vicariate. The commentator does not hesitate to use the Vietnamese peremptory first person pronoun, “ta,” to endorse his changes from the original *SVS*. To be a “ta,” to make changes in the liturgical practices in a diocese, and to have a commanding authority over all the clergy, this unnamed commentator must have been the apostolic vicar.<sup>33</sup> So, one can conclude that the anonymous but not so hidden commentator is almost certainly Paul François Puginier (1835-1892), the Apostolic Vicar of West Tonkin between 1868 and 1892.

This recognition draws ones attention to the subtle differences between the *1803 SVS* and the *1873 CDTX*. Since the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* endorsed the 1803 document in 1832 and demanded that other vicariates adopt its directives, the 1873 text of *CDTX* not only illustrates how the 1832 mandate was carried out but also hints at the broader historical forces lurking in its rhetoric and in its theological nuances. Analysis of these details in the text uncovers links to cultural threads that are not quite acknowledged and places that are not really shown.

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<sup>33</sup> “Về phần ta cũng muốn cho người nữ cung kính Minh thánh đường ấy nữa, cho nên ta buộc rằng: khi nó chịu lễ thì cũng phải trùm cái màn ấy, và mặc áo sạch sẽ nữa. (An nam chẳng buộc, song cũng là sự xứng đáng),” *CDTX*, 20.



#### IV. Iberian Cultural Purity Found in the 1873 *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*

One frequent criticism by the Nguyễn court against Catholicism was that this religion instilled nonsensical fear of hell and created constant anxiety about eternal damnation. One may wonder what the Nguyễn officials knew about Catholic teachings and how they obtained information about them. However, if the first or the only Catholic document that a person had read about Christianity was the *1873 Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*, one would have to agree with that criticism. In the first line of the first chapter, the document asserts: “In Church, there is nothing greater than the sacraments which are the absolute necessity for salvation.”<sup>34</sup> Then, the rest of the first paragraph expounds on the vital importance of the personal sanctity of a minister in performing the sacraments because the alternative to salvation is damnation.

Priests, since you are entrusted to celebrate the sacraments, be on your guard. You need to keep yourself perfect, pure, and ardent. Steer clear of mortal sins. Otherwise, while you are working to save souls, yet you are going down on the road to perdition. Ask God to grant you the grace to be free from serious sins. Though, if you know that you are not in the state of grace, do not perform any sacraments until you make a perfect contrition. Nevertheless, it is preferable that you find another priest to make your confession. The Book of the Roman Rites demands: “If you are impure and in a sinful condition and still celebrate the sacraments, you commit a mortal sin which results in the eternal death.”<sup>35</sup>

The text presents the message of salvation as a grim reality. All humanity engages in a cosmic battle, and the treacherous world is trying to entrap us with sins. In the two and half pages of the first chapter, the word “tội/sin” is repeated nine times.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “Trong thánh Yghêrêsa chẳng có sự gì tốt và cần cho được rỗi linh hồn đời đời, hơn các phép sacramentô Đức Chúa Jêsu lập ra,” *CDTX*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> “Ấy vậy đấng làm thầy là kẻ chính việc phải làm các phép ấy liên, thì phải ra sức ăn ở tuyền vẹn, sạch sẽ, sót sáng cùng giữ mình cho khỏi phạm tội nặng cách nào, kéo đàng khi giúp kẻ khác được rỗi linh hồn, mà mình ra lý đoán cho mình hư mất đời đời chẳng? Chớ gì Cha cả ban ơn cho ta khỏi mắc tội nặng lúc nào! Song, ví bằng có biết mình chẳng may đang mắc tội trọng thật, thì đừng có dám làm phép sacramentô nào, khi chưa giục lòng hết sức mà ăn năn tội cách lộn trước đã, hay là mình có thể gặp thầy cả khác mà xưng tội được tùy thì, tùy nơi trong lúc bấy giờ, thì nên xưng tội cho chắc việc y như trong Sách các phép dạy, vì chung có lời trong sách ấy rằng: ‘Người nào làm các phép cách dơ dáy chẳng xứng đáng, thì mắc tội trọng phải chết đời đời,’” *CDTX*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *CDTX*, 3-5.

In the *CDTX*, an appeal for taking a non-compromising stand against the world tends to recur frequently. Local clergy must remain vigilant against the natural tendency to torpidity. Local converts need to stay alert, lest they backslide into their native culture of deception. The author of the text voices his grave concerns over profane local habits and his deep misgivings about the natural dispositions of indigenous people:

It has been observed again and again about the converts of this region that if there is no one to encourage them or teach them about the moral precepts of our religion, they stubbornly cling to the customs of their country. They may learn about what is evil, but they will not abandon those habits. They take advantage of the disagreement among the teachers of our religion. However, if all the priests share one mind and one heart, then these people will obey and observe whatever the priests teach either about moral life or ritual practices of the Church. One can see evidence of our success in the matter of opposing the old worship of Confucius, spirits, and the dead. They no longer practice usury. These are the abuses, the casting aside of which was once thought impossible to convince people to do.<sup>37</sup>

In a similar tone, the text, on three other occasions, expresses a strong concern over the ignorance of the people, their superstitious practices, and their tendency to revert from true worship to their old tradition full of distraction and deception (*dối trá*).<sup>38</sup> The document also expresses deep reservations about indigenous priests. The *CDTX* constantly reminds priests to guard against their lazy nature. Laziness (*làm biếng*) is repeated twelve times when the author chides local clergy (*các ông bản quốc*) for their failings in instructing people about the moral precepts of the Church, in celebrating Mass in correct Latin, or in advancing in spiritual sanctity.<sup>39</sup> On the formation of seminarians, Chapter 8 unambiguously reveals evidence the Church authorities' doubts about the quality of local clergy. When seminarians reach their last year of

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<sup>37</sup> “Đã tỏ xưa nay tính bản đạo mới miền này vốn nó thế này, là nếu không xui giục cùng dạy nó các lễ trong đạo cho kĩ, thì nó cố theo thói nước nó, và những lễ rồi nó đã học hành chẳng có bỏ đâu, nhất là khi nó thấy kẻ làm thầy chân giữ mình chia làm nhiều bè chẳng hợp nhau. Song le nếu các ông thầy cả đồng tâm thuận ý mà khuyên dạy, thì dù luật nào trong đạo, cùng lễ phép nào trong thánh Yghêrêsa mặc lòng, nó cũng đồng tình mà vâng giữ cả, thầy cả dạy nó thế nào, nó liền vâng thế ấy; vì thế cho nên nó đã bỏ dứt cả sự dối trá về sự thờ ông Không, ông bà ông vải, cùng sự đặt nợ ăn lãi, cho vay mà cầm đợ và các sự giao hứa lễ trái,” *CDTX*, 54-55.

<sup>38</sup> *CDTX*, 11, 32, 35-36.

<sup>39</sup> *CDTX*, 6, 8, 12, 30, 33, 34, 44, 53, 59, 68, 92.

formation, bishops entrust them to missionaries, not to the local clergy.<sup>40</sup> Missionaries assumed a so-called sacred responsibility to safeguard the local clergy from possible sacramental contamination because of their broken Latin. In order to prevent any doctrinal slippage even among the seasoned clergy, the synodal directives ordered indigenous priests to undergo an annual review session with European priests. Missionaries would then evaluate their performance and make recommendations to their bishops based on the local clergy's knowledge of sacramental theology and Latin.<sup>41</sup> The cultural bias and condescending paternalism found in the *CDTX* point us to a long history of Iberian racism in the early modern Church.

#### A. Evolution from Iberian racial bias to cultural purity

The origin of the prejudice against non-Western culture lay deeply in the long anti-Semitic “purity of blood” (*pureza de sangre* or *limpieza de sangre*) policy of the fifteenth-century Iberian world and the efforts to bar the “New Christians” of Jewish or Moorish ancestry (*conversos*) from civil or ecclesiastical positions.<sup>42</sup> The obsession with cultural purity within the broader Catholic tradition chronologically unfolded in three stages in early modern Europe under three different systems: the Iberian anti-Semitic policy, the *Patronato (Padroado)* system, and the *Propaganda* system. The politico-ecclesiastical world of Spain and Portugal in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries created the unfortunate saga of discrimination against Iberian Jews or Muslims who converted, by force, to Catholicism, and their descendents—the *conversos*. The missionaries of the *Patronato* system instituted this biased policy against all “New Christians” in the empire.<sup>43</sup> The racial bias became the cultural prejudice of the missions well into the modern

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<sup>40</sup> *CDTX*, 58.

<sup>41</sup> *CDTX*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Aleksander Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews*; Thomas M. Cohen, “Jesuits and New Christians: The Contest Legacy of St. Ignatius,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 42/3 (Autumn 2010).

<sup>43</sup> John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, 2d ed. (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 1987).

period. And the members of the Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* who bought into this mentality developed this prejudice into a misguided sense of European cultural superiority. From the perspective of the Roman Curia, there was only one legitimate culture—the post-Tridentine tradition.<sup>44</sup>

#### B. The anti-Semitic root of fifteenth-century Spain

In the process of state building in the fifteenth century, Spain singled out the “New Christians” as its imagined public enemy. The “New Christians” were held responsible for the popular belief that their Jewish ancestors helped the Muslim invaders to occupy Spain. The discrimination first became an official policy in the city of Toledo in 1449. Three decades later, a bishop of Zamora, Diego de Simancas (?-1583), fanned the flames of persecution against the *conversos* with his tract defending the statute of Toledo. He endorsed the biased belief that the “hereditary vices” had not only endured ritually through secret practices at home but also had been transmitted genetically by blood to their descendants.<sup>45</sup> According to this argument, vices became permanent character traits of a racial group and even visibly manifested “in their ugly physiognomy.”<sup>46</sup> The obsessive atmosphere of antagonism towards the “New Christians” reached its height in the mid-fifteenth century. The Jesuits were founded, coincidentally, in the following century. The issue of blood purity haunted the new order in its earliest years after its inception.<sup>47</sup> In the Fifth General Congregation in 1593, the Jesuits officially excluded persons of Jewish or Muslim descent from trying to join the Jesuit order. The discriminative prohibition was not fully rescinded until 1946.<sup>48</sup> As a missionary order, the Jesuits had to deal with the issue of

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<sup>44</sup> Ray R. Noll, ed., *100 Roman Documents Relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy (1645-1941)*, trans. Donald F. St. Sure (San Francisco: The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1992); George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985).

<sup>45</sup> Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews*, xvi, 32-35; Cohen, “Jesuits and New Christians...,” 28.

<sup>46</sup> Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews*, 138, 142.

<sup>47</sup> Cohen, “Jesuits and New Christians...,” 1.

<sup>48</sup> John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 188-189.

“New Christians” not only at their European home base but also in the New World and in the Far East. The hysteria against the “New Christians” at home created ramifications for the racist aspects of the policy of formation of local clergy and for the bigoted perception of non-Western cultures, including those in Vietnam.

C. From Spanish obsession with pure blood to Iberian imperial racism

Under the *Patronato* system, missionaries from religious orders failed to develop an adequate local clergy because of their preoccupation with racial purity. The stigma of the illegitimate bloodlines, reserved in the Iberian world for those contaminated with Jewish or Moorish ancestry, was transferred to the inhabitants of non-European territories. The blame now lay not so much on the impurity of blood but on the impurity of culture, as shown in the 1581 Synod of Manila and the 1585 Third Council of Mexico.<sup>49</sup>

At the 1581 Synod of Manila, academic and professional culture provided philosophical language and arguments to justify the expansion of the Spanish empire at the expense of local rulers. Clergy in Manila grouped the imperative mission to spread the Gospel, the philosophical precepts of the natural law, and political theory into a refined spiritual and legal defense for the Spanish Crown. They argued that in the light of God-given natural law, legitimate rulers should always be immediately ready to contribute to the spread of the Gospel. If native rulers sought to prevent their people from hearing the Christian message, it was self-evident that these rulers were not on the side of God but of evil. Therefore, a Catholic king was justified in taking over their government. Besides providing a rationale for conquest, this argument also discredited the entire indigenous cultural system on the grounds that it had supposedly supported an evil regime.

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<sup>49</sup> Horacio de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines: 1581-1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 22-25; John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, 2d ed. (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 1987), 193-230.

Sin had corrupted and obscured the light of reason in all cultures that failed to support the Christian faith.<sup>50</sup> Erroneous cultures had no rights but must be purified.

In 1585, the Third Council of Mexico issued a similar condemnation of the Indios culture for failing to recognize and embrace celibacy—held as the highest virtue in the post-Tridentine moral pantheon. This condemnation was the result of the failure of a premature attempt to establish a seminary for the natives in Mexico. After fifteen years in Mexico, the Franciscans opened a college, Santiago Tlatelolco, where native boys were taught and put on track for the priesthood. It was a complete failure, because celibacy was not honored as a virtue in that culture. To his utter disappointment, the Franciscan archbishop of Mexico reported to the Spanish king on the failed attempt: “We do not know whether it will continue in existence much longer, as the best grammarians among the native students *tendunt ad nuptias potius quam ad continentiam* [have a stronger tendency to marriage than to celibacy].”<sup>51</sup> The *Patronato* system applied the decision made in Mexico to the rest of the empire. A century later, when the Spanish crown revisited the possibility of ordaining local clergy, the archbishop of Manila described the issue thus:

the little inclination that the Indios have for theological and [ethical] studies, and [claimed] that there was the additional difficulty of their evil customs, their vices, and their preconceived ideas—which made it necessary to treat them as children, even when they were fifty or sixty years old... [O]n account of the sloth produced by the climate, and of effeminacy and levity of disposition, it was evident that if they were ordained priests and made ministers to the Indios when they were not sufficiently qualified for this, though the necessity there was for them, they did not again open a book, and with their vicious habits set a very bad example to their parishioners. What should be done was to send from Spain those religious who were most zealous for the conversion of souls.<sup>52</sup>

From the Old World to the new mission territories, the focus of such vilification shifted from impurity of blood to impurity of culture. Local customs were demonized, their character

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<sup>50</sup> Horacio de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines: 1581-1768*, 23-28.

<sup>51</sup> John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, 194.

<sup>52</sup> John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, 195-196.

attacked, and even the climate was not spared from scathing comments. In the Philippines, the Church did not begin to ordain its own clergy until the seventeenth century. Those priests were in reality not indigenous people but young men of Spanish blood, born in the Philippines.<sup>53</sup>

D. Revisiting the Jesuit acclaimed cultural accommodation

The Jesuits, like other religious orders, were reluctant to explore native vocations until they faced religious persecution in the kingdoms outside of the Spanish empire. In the Philippines, until the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1768, the Jesuits did not receive any native Filipino, even as a lay brother whose life was devoted to “low and humble services” in the order.<sup>54</sup> However, from the beginning of the evangelization in East Asia the Jesuits had recognized that the success or failure of their efforts depended on collaboration with local converts.<sup>55</sup> In 1552, twenty-one years after the death of Francis Xavier (1506-1552) on Shangchuan Island, a Visitor to the Eastern Missions of the Society of Jesus, which extended from India to Japan, by the name of Alessandro Valignano, S.J. (1538-1606), spearheaded a policy of accommodation between the Judeo-Greco-Roman Christianity and the East Asian cultures. In his capacity as Visitor with plenipotentiary power from the Jesuit Superior General to oversee the Far East missions, he required the European Jesuits in Japan to eat and dress like Japanese Buddhist monks. For the China mission, Valignano authorized Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) to employ Confucian vocabulary to express Christian doctrines and permitted the new converts to perform Confucian and ancestral rites.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, 195.

<sup>54</sup> Horacio de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines: 1581-1768*, 233-234; Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 113, 128.

<sup>55</sup> Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 125-126.

<sup>56</sup> Josef Franz Schutte, S.J., *Valignano's Mission Principles for Japan—Volume I: From his Appointment as Visitor until his First Departure from Japan (1573-1580), Part 1*, trans. John J. Coyne, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), 30-36.

Nevertheless, accommodation and collaboration figuratively ended at the door of the Jesuit residence. Behind that Jesuit door, conformity to the elite Jesuit Renaissance humanism was the expected norm. The same 1593 General Congregation, which excluded *conversos* from gaining admission to the Jesuit order, made a distinction between Jesuit mission and Jesuit membership:

The Society desires to be all things to all men.... But this does not necessarily mean that it must derive its members from every social class.... Its workers should be acceptable to people of every nation throughout the world, and they should be such that their services may be willingly and confidently sought by those whose favorable or unfavorable attitude (as Father Ignatius of holy memory pointed out) is of great importance in providing or withholding opportunities for the service of God and the salvation of souls.<sup>57</sup>

Valignano, the champion of accommodation, was open to accepting Japanese into the Society of Jesus; on the other hand, he accepted them only if he could westernize them through education. This cultural bias underlined Valignano's accommodation to East Asians because they were "white" and as cultured as Europeans.<sup>58</sup> Shortly after his arrival in Japan, Valignano mapped out an ambitious plan to create a European-style system of education that could even grant academic degrees.<sup>59</sup> He surmised that the future of the Church in Japan depended on the careful cultivation of the younger generation according to the European model.<sup>60</sup> The plan to foster the academic and humanistic cultures came to an abrupt end when the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868) in 1614 issued an edict proscribing Christianity. The Japanese Church was almost completely decimated by the ruthless Tokugawa persecution.

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<sup>57</sup> Horacio de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines: 1581-1768...*, 201, 236.

<sup>58</sup> Alessandro [Alejandro] Valignano, "Capítulo I," *Sumario de Las Cosas de Japon (1583)*, ed. J. L. Alvarez-Taladriz (Tokyo: Nissha, 1954), 5.

<sup>59</sup> George Elision, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan*, 69.

<sup>60</sup> Alessandro [Alejandro] Valignano, "Capítulo X: Del modo que ha de tener la Compañía para conservarse y llevar adelante bien esta empresa de Japón," *Sumario*, 150-151.



E. The *Propaganda Fidei*—the enforcer of cultural purity in the missions

At the height of the religio-politically charged seventeenth century, the Holy See designated to another Roman congregation—the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*—the responsibility for directing and coordinating the work of the mission.<sup>61</sup> For the missions in the Far East, the period of experimentation on adaptation and accommodation ended. The *Propaganda* was the right arm of the Holy See which imposed cultural uniformity on Church members. It was the *Propaganda* that missions sent reports to, received financial support from, and submitted requests for advice on controversial topics. In keeping with the spirit of the age, the *Propaganda* functioned like a command center for the Roman Curia where the confrontational prophetic culture picked the arts and performance culture as its battleground. This Roman congregation involved and monitored the Rites Controversy from 1645, when the Dominican priest, Juan Baptista Morales, O.P. (1597-1664), denounced the Jesuit accommodation to Rome, to 1741, when Benedict XIV (r.1740-1758) issued *Ex Quo Singulari* to condemn unequivocally any Asian shapes and forms of ancestral worship.<sup>62</sup> The centralizing Roman Curia felt threatened by any attempt to accommodate Asian ritual sensibility, such as ancestral tablets, honoring Confucius, or the usage of languages other than Latin in the liturgy. The Curia believed that compromise even on the slightest point would undermine the whole edifice of codified Catholic identity. Unfortunately, the promoters of this Catholic tradition forgot how much their celebration style and liturgical ornaments were themselves borrowed and adapted from the Roman pagan rituals. Inadvertently, the original battle for *limpieza de sangre* evolved and sanctioned a misguided sense of European cultural superiority that imposed European solutions on non-European soil.

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<sup>61</sup> Châtellier, *The Religion of the Poor*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985).

In the Iberian world, the purity of blood policy hindered the development of local clergy. From this Iberian historical context, it was not by chance that the *1873 CDTX* also repeatedly warned the Vietnamese clergy and people to guard vigilantly against their sloth and morally depraved cultural environment.<sup>63</sup> According to the word of the bishop of Manila a century earlier, indigenous clergy with years of pastoral and local experience as well as seminarians were both expected to submit to the supervision of the missionaries because it was “necessary to treat them like children.”<sup>64</sup> In mission territories, the discrimination based on blood purity in the Iberian peninsula became prejudice based on the so-called impurity of culture in Asia.

#### **V. Post-Tridentine Doctrinal Purity Found in the *1873 Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên***

The *1873 Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên* does not only demand local clergy and other converts to be on guard against the surrounding non-Western culture, but it also demands priests to vigilantly safeguard post-Tridentine doctrinal purity and pledge loyalty to papal teaching authority. The remark at the end of *CDTX* epitomizes this twofold obligation:

We must demonstrate our absolute obedience to the Holy See. All granted privileges, laws, and teachings have been summed up in this synodal document. Now we surrender our judgment to the Holy See. The Holy See has the full authority to remove, correct, and change any of its items. We reserve that ultimate authority to the Holy See.<sup>65</sup>

One must note that by the time *CDTX* was published, in 1873, France had already launched several military campaigns against Vietnam, and the Nguyễn authorities had yielded six southern provinces to the French in the 1862 and the 1867 treaties. In 1873 itself, Francis Garnier (1839-

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<sup>63</sup> *CDTX*, 54-55.

<sup>64</sup> John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, 195.

<sup>65</sup> “Vậy ta là kẻ phải vâng phép chịu lụy Tòa thánh, cho nên các phép, các luật đã lập ra đây, và mọi lời dạy bảo đã tóm lại trong các luật ấy, cùng luật sách công đồng, thì ta phó cả mặc ý Tòa thánh xét đoán; mà Tòa thánh bỏ sự gì đi, hay là sửa lại, hay là thay đổi điều gì, thì ta sẵn lòng vâng cử mà bỏ và sửa cùng đổi như vậy,” *CDTX*, 93.

1873), a French naval lieutenant, led an attack and captured the citadel of Hanoi.<sup>66</sup> Yet, this document does not once mention France, while on the other hand it makes reference to the Holy See thirty-nine times<sup>67</sup> and to the papal authority and the Roman Curia eighteen times.<sup>68</sup> This document appeals to the *Roman Catechism* and the *Roman Missal* as two authoritative sources to resolve doctrinal questions and reinforce sacramental rubrics. The Council of Trent is brought up twelve times, other councils only twice.<sup>69</sup> In other words, the *1873 CDTX* played a key role in shaping the Vietnamese Catholic community, but its author and commentator stayed away from the politics of the day. The ecclesiastical leaders of Vietnam missions used the *1873 CDTX* as a blueprint to build their own world—the Tridentine confessional world.

#### A. The Council of Trent (1545-1563)

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) and its post-Tridentine tradition were parts of the ongoing response to prophetic calls all around the Catholic world to reform the Church. Over the preceding centuries, initiatives arising from the prophetic culture had demanded that the Church stop various forms of abuse and return to its Gospel values. By the sixteenth century, these initiatives had passed from being sporadic movements at provincial levels, led by individual inspirations, to a more rationalized universal campaign, driven by church leaders or secular rulers.<sup>70</sup> Reformers wanted to carry out a more comprehensive approach to correct the widespread liturgical abuses and the inadequate training for diocesan, that is, the secular clergy. They found missals and breviaries of the Roman Rite filled with superstitions, redundancies, and scribal errors.<sup>71</sup> They judged that the crux of the problem lay in the haphazard preparation of

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<sup>66</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 2 ([Sài-Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 362-363.

<sup>67</sup> *CDTX*, 3, 6, 7, 8, 8, 11, 11, 13, 13, 13, 13, 20, 31, 38, 43, 59, 62, 64, 64, 65, 65, 66, 66, 69, 72, 76, 76, 77, 89, 90, 91, 91, 91, 91, 92, 92, 93, 93, 93.

<sup>68</sup> *CDTX*, 8, 10, 11, 13, 26, 28, 32, 43, 44, 45, 55, 66, 67, 67, 85, 89, 95.

<sup>69</sup> *CDTX*, 3, 15, 22, 23, 29, 29, 36, 46, 47, 47, 50, 62, 62.

<sup>70</sup> Louis Châtellier, *The Religion of the Poor*, 12, 95.

<sup>71</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 192, 268.

candidates for priesthood. Unlike the training of clergy for religious orders, the formation of secular clergy consisted of little instruction but simply the imitation of a local priest, whose education might have been equally limited.<sup>72</sup>

Confronted by the growth of the Protestant Reformation and political unrest in his Holy Roman Empire, Charles V (1500-1558) pressed religious leaders and the pope to systematize those reforming initiatives. The Council of Trent was, then, convened.<sup>73</sup> Trent's participants first established the principle of not taking any particular stand on long-running controversies. They evaded these controversial topics with theological nuances. For example, in Trent's decree "On the Sacred Books and Apostolic Traditions," the Council Fathers affirmed the legitimacy and the continuity of the Catholic Church with the apostolic traditions without defining those traditions.<sup>74</sup> In the decrees of Trent, the writers employed the subtle language of academic culture so that interpretation proved necessary. Unfortunately for Charles V, in the complex politico-ecclesiastical world of the early modern era, the papacy would not yield to secular pressure that easily. Charles V could force the pope to convene the council, but the pope held tight to his traditional role as the authentic interpreter of the Church's beliefs.

#### B. Catholic Confessionalism—the post-Tridentine prophetic tradition

From the end of the Council of Trent in 1563 to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic Church fortified itself with papal decrees, doctrinal statements, and tightly regulated rituals, as did Protestant politico-religious institutions.<sup>75</sup> Each denomination and new nation synthesized and conformed internally coherent and externally exclusive groups with their

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<sup>72</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 212-214.

<sup>73</sup> Louis Châtellier, *The Religion of the Poor*, 12, 95.

<sup>74</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 91-98, 262-263.

<sup>75</sup> Wolfgang Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State: A Reassessment," in *Catholic Historical Review* 75 (1989), 383-404.

own religious and moral styles.<sup>76</sup> Under the pressure of mutual competition, Catholics and Protestants hastened to define their membership through ritual and theology. They formalized the identity of their group through exclusive ritual practice. They departed from lofty theological speculations but thrived upon controversies. Membership was defined by choosing one of those irreconcilably antagonistic positions.<sup>77</sup>

Tridentine culture formed and defined the Catholic Church. Three years after the closing of the council, Paul IV (r.1555-1559) confirmed the council's decrees, but he forbade the printing of commentaries except with permission from himself or later popes. Instead of making the documents of the council available, he issued the *Index of Prohibited Books* in 1559. Subsequent popes followed suit. Pius IV (r.1559-1565) ordered Catholics to recite the eight short articles summarizing Catholic faith and practices spelled out in the "Tridentine Profession of Faith" (*Professio Fidei Tridentinae*) along with the Nicene Creed at Mass every Sunday; Pius V (1566-1572) offered to Catholics *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* (or *The Roman Catechism*) in 1566. "The Profession of Faith" and *The Roman Catechism* reduced the theological nuances to clear-cut catechetical formulas, without any compromise. For instance, instead of preserving the vague acceptance of traditions, the "Profession" turned theological statements into solemn oaths: "I most firmly accept and embrace the apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions and all other observances and constitutions of the same [Catholic] church."<sup>78</sup> The *Index*, for four centuries after the Council of Trent, played a prominent role in Catholic life. It guaranteed papal censorship and gave the Church the authority to ban books.

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<sup>76</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Viking, 2004), xviii, 34.

<sup>77</sup> Heinz Schilling, "Confessionalization in the Empire: Religious and Societal Change in Germany between 1555 and 1620," in *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 641-642, 669.

<sup>78</sup> John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 283.

Besides popes and their doctrinal statements, an archbishop of Milan, Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), became an author of the Tridentine culture. The council first authorized to bishops, with their local synods, the autonomy to execute its decrees in their domains. Charles Borromeo, a zealous reforming archbishop of Milan, tapped into the authority given by the council and successfully carried out reform in his diocese. In 1577, his directives were published in *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae*, called, simply, the *Instructions*. Two years before his death, all his synodal decrees to reform his Milan diocese were collected and appeared in *The Acts of the Church of Milan (Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis)*. These two documents regulated minute details in faith life and buttressed their regulations with disciplinary measures. Though not so intended by Borromeo, these two books quickly achieved a normative status in the Catholic world.<sup>79</sup> Simultaneously, the Roman Curia exerted its power through two newly founded Roman offices: the Congregation of the Council in 1564 and the Congregation of Rites in 1588. These two Roman congregations gave themselves the authority to supervise the diocesan implementation of the council.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to the Council of Trent, the Tridentine tradition had no place for subtle nuances, and thus for public consumption it reworded decrees of the council into simple affirmations and summaries.<sup>81</sup> The former spoke with academic theological nuances, the latter with catechetical certainty. The combination of the synodal decisions from Milan and the directives from the Roman congregations shaped the Tridentine tradition for the rest of the Catholic world over the next four hundred years until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This included very specific instructions on the formation of local clergy in nineteenth-century Vietnam.

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<sup>79</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 260-285.

<sup>80</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 260, 267-269.

<sup>81</sup> O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 262-263.

### C. The 1873 Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên as a testament to the post-Tridentine doctrinal purity

The 1873 document exudes the doctrinal certainty of the Tridentine era and alludes to the reforming efforts of the Council of Trent. Not only does the *1873 Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên* reveal the influence of the Milanese synods and the Roman congregations, it repeatedly cites the *Roman Catechism* and the *Roman Missal* as two authoritative sources to resolve doctrinal questions and reinforce sacramental rubrics. Three times the 1873 edition of *CDTX* specifically mentions and quotes Charles Borromeo as the authoritative voice on how to celebrate the sacraments. As in the instruction on how to listen to a penitent at confession, *CDTX* names all four professed principal sources of authorities—ecclesiastical laws, Trent, liturgical rules of Roman rites, and Charles Borromeo:

After people have confessed their sins, factor in their intellectual ability, their stage of life, and the degree of seriousness of the sins in order to give proper penance. The goal is to benefit their souls. Even with small children, do not hastily dismiss them without asking them to do penance. It is an opportunity to teach them what sin is and what punishment may be deserved for committing a sin. Instill fear, so they will not want to commit sins. But, for giving out penance, do not rely on your own liking. Base your judgment according to the rules of the Church, the directives of the Council of Trent and of the Roman rites, and the teachings of the saints of the Church especially the model laid out by Carôlu [Charles Borromeo].<sup>82</sup>

Like the *Acta* of Borromeo, this 1873 Vietnamized version gives minute details in its disciplinary specifics. In the section dealing with marriage, priests function like enforcers of morality in the Catholic community. The document spells out how and when to withhold

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<sup>82</sup> “Song le cho dễ phân biệt kẻ nào nên giải tội cho, kẻ nào phải buộc, thì bảo các đấng làm thầy cả phải cứ cho kỹ mấy điều trong sách lễ luật thánh Yghêrêsa, và các đốctôrê cùng ông thánh Carôlu đã truyền,” *CDTX*, 37; “Vốn có nhiều lúc sự giam người ta hay là sự làm phép Giải tội cho nó, thì là sự cản, và là như thuốc hay cho được chữa nó, như lời ông thánh Carôlu đã dạy trong sách người ta đã dọn về phép Giải tội, mà rằng: ‘Thầy cả chẳng giải tội cho kẻ còn lòng thù oán ghen ghét người ta mà chẳng muốn bỏ, cùng kẻ chẳng muốn là của người ta, khi có thể là được, cùng chẳng sẵn lòng bỏ tội trọng, chẳng lánh dịp tội nặng,’” *CDTX*, 44-45; “Lại khi người ta xưng tội đoạn, phải liệu cách khôn ngoan tùy sức, tùy bậc, tùy tội nó, mà dạy nó việc đền tội xứng đáng sinh ra ích phần linh hồn cho nó. Dù phải trẻ con, mặc lòng, thì cũng chẳng nên bảo nó về không, mà chẳng dạy nó việc đền tội, để từ thuở bé nó đã hiểu biết sự tội là gì, và đáng phạt là dường nào, cùng lấy làm sợ chẳng dám phạm tội; song le cho được dạy việc đền tội, thì chớ cứ ý riêng hay là trí khôn mình, một phải cứ lễ luật thánh Yghêrêsa, mực Tòa công đồng Tridentinum cùng sách các phép Rôma, và các thánh đã truyền, nhất là cứ mẫu ông Carôlu dạy sau này,” *CDTX*, 46-47.

sacraments in different scenarios when the involved parents fail to secure a Catholic marriage for their children.<sup>83</sup> On fifteen different occasions, the document directs the clergy to *The Roman Catechism* and *The Roman Missal* for theological instructions.<sup>84</sup> Judgments from Roman Congregations are readily used to respond to complicated pastoral cases, especially when the cases involve non-Christians.<sup>85</sup> In place of the *Index*, the *CDTX*—although it does not have a list of banned books—prohibits outright Taoist Classics, such as the *Yijing* (the *Book of Changes*), and their commentaries because of their superstitious elements.<sup>86</sup> Confucian texts do not receive any higher regard than Taoist texts. The *CDTX* urges clergy not to cite Confucius or any Asian philosophers in homilies.<sup>87</sup>

In brief, for the sake of straightforward catechetical and doctrinal instructions, the formation of local clergy tragically resulted in the loss of both the theological nuances presented by the Western academic culture and the intellectual tradition of the East. Instead, the authors and enforcers of the *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên* made sure to procure for the Church in Vietnam a body of Tridentine reformed clergy, unmistakably loyal to the Holy See, who adhered strictly to the official disciplinary teachings and sacramental regulations, and pledged complete obedience to a local bishop of a vicariate. Thus, by the nineteenth century, Vietnamese Catholicism was not only confessional but also dogmatic.

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<sup>83</sup> *CDTX*, 59-67.

<sup>84</sup> *CDTX*, 5, 6, 6, 7, 16, 17, 25, 30, 47, 69, 83, 84.

<sup>85</sup> *CDTX*, 28, 32, 55, 85, 89.

<sup>86</sup> *CDTX*, 85.

<sup>87</sup> “Và lại đừng có bao giờ giảng khi chưa dọn mình, nghĩa là khi chưa xem sách, học hành, nguyện ngắm, để cho được giảng những lời bởi sách thánh, hay là sách khác chắc chắn, nhất là sách Bỏn Rôma mà ra, vì chúng phải giảng những điều Đức Chúa Phiritô sanctô phán truyền, chớ cứ trí khôn riêng mình bày đặt những lễ thế gian mà pha lễ dối lộn vào lễ thật, đừng giảng những lễ trí trá khó hiểu chẳng được ích gì cho ai thêm lòng đạo đức... Đừng đặt vào bài giảng những lời ông Khổng, lời các quân tử và lễ khôn ngoan phần đời cho được làm chứng lễ đạo làm chi,” *CDTX*, 82-83.



## VI. French *Dévo*t Spiritual Purity Found in the 1873 *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*

Spiritual purity is the third of three emphases on purity in the *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*. The prevailing theme of sin and fear dominates the tone throughout the ten chapters. One of the most telling passages about spiritual purity is found in the chapter on the ordination of local clergy.

The emphasis clearly falls more on the spiritual fitness of a candidate rather than on his intellectual readiness. It states:

The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. If we take the mission of saving souls seriously, then we must pray to the owner. Ask him to send out more workers to labor in the fields. It is a noble call to be a teacher in our religion. The highest call is to be a priest to carry on the holy tasks in the vineyard of the Lord. We should not admit a candidate who is unable to embrace a celibate life. Does he have a good and generous heart? He needs to have a disposition of openness to be formed and to follow instructions. Without some sufficient intelligence, we should not admit him.<sup>88</sup>

Neither academic nor humanistic culture was considered a part of the formation; the doctrinal prophetic culture meant everything. For the ongoing intellectual formation of local priests, the Roman Catechism was aggrandized as the most worthy holy manual that clergy were required to read and reread, over any other books. The *CDTX* specifies:

Priests have to put in extra efforts to let people know the grievous sin of receiving Holy Communion when they should not. On the other hand, at the same intensity, teach and urge them to prepare with the utmost care in order to eat the holy food—the nourishment for the soul. How should people prepare themselves? The Roman Catechism gives very clear instruction on this matter. Therefore, priests need to consult this book very often. Its coverage on requirements and explications is better than any other book.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, out of ninety-five pages, the author devoted twenty-seven pages to the sanctity expected of the clergy and an additional twenty-four pages to a disquisition on sins and

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<sup>88</sup> “Lúa chín thì nhiều, mà thợ gặt thì ít, cho nên kẻ nào ái mộ việc cứu linh hồn người ta, thì phải cầu cùng chúa ruộng cho liên, xin người sai đem thợ mà gặt lúa người; song le chức làm thầy trong đạo, nhất là thầy cả Đức Chúa Lời đã định làm vườn nho người là chức rất cao, việc phải làm thì nhiều mà thật là việc thánh đường ấy, cho nên kẻ chẳng có nét na thanh sạch lương thiện, tính khí mềm mại thuần phục dễ bảo, chẳng có trí hiểu vừa đủ,” *CDTX*, 56.

<sup>89</sup> “Thật các thầy cả phải làm hết sức cho người ta lấy sự chịu lễ chẳng nên làm góm ghiếc sợ hãi; nhưng là một trật ấy cũng phải khuyên bảo và giục giã nó dọn mình cho xứng đáng mà ăn của thiêng liêng ấy, là sự sống thật linh hồn ta; mà sự dọn mình chịu lễ nên là làm sao, thì Sách bốn Rôma đã dạy kỹ càng lắm; cho nên các thầy cả phải năng xem sách ấy, vì chung phán quyết thể cùng lễ dạy về thứ ấy, thì sách ấy hơn các sách khác,” *CDTX*, 16.

confession. In other words, the document exhorted its readers to prepare for a nonnegotiable spiritual battle between salvation and damnation. Since the author, the promoter, and the commentator of *1873 Công Đồng Từ Xuyên* edition were members of the Paris Foreign Mission Society (MEP), this document provides clear evidence of a particular French religious sentiment. This sentiment was the puritanical *dévo*t French spirituality of the seventeenth century.

A. The French *Dévo*t shift from politics to spirituality

The *Dévo*t party was a conservative Catholic political faction in the early seventeenth century under the leadership of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) and Michel de Marillac (1563-1632). In the political and military struggles with the Huguenots, the *Dévo*t party openly opposed the powerful Cardinal Armand Jean de Richelieu (1585-1642) and his *politique* camp for their pragmatic political solutions which tended towards compromises with the Protestants. After many political intrigues, the *politique* camp secured control of the French court. The *Dévo*t party withdrew from politics, and many members of the *Dévo*t camp channeled their political energy into the spiritual realm. They separated themselves from the “world” with a religious conviction that their duty was to be a prophetic minority against the compromised political world.<sup>90</sup> And it was from this *Dévo*t tradition that the new group of missionaries, members of high-born lay confraternities, emerged.

The *dévots* managed to stay active by recruiting new young members from Jesuit schools. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, from central Italy to Paris and the Loire Valley of France, Jesuit chaplains of Marian congregations encouraged a select few of their students to form secret societies in order to maintain their religious fervor. The more advanced members of

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<sup>90</sup> Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France 1560-1715*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31-176; Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 74-75; Susan E. Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France: The Early History of the Daughters of Charity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 28.

the inner ring of zealots were permitted into secret sessions and initiated into daily meditation. These “spiritually advanced” members held weekly secret meetings where they practiced self-criticism and performed corporal penances. At these meetings, a chaplain would organize discussions on moral and dogmatic theology. The academic aspect of these meetings, however, was secondary to the promotion of asceticism and mortification. Meditation on the Passion or one’s own death was a preferred theme. Some of the penitents would submit to being hung on a cross with feet and hands tied. Others would choose to lie on the ground to act out their own last hour while listening to their community members chanting the office for the dead.<sup>91</sup>

The secret meetings were hardly able to contain the zeal of the *dévots*. Pious societies of young aristocrats would resort to their connections to assert their personal lifestyle onto the public sphere. As pious students, many of them would attempt to subject the houses of their landlords to their devotional taste, banishing indecent pictures or regulating their dormitory life according to their prayer timetable. After the 1685 revocation of the edict of Nantes by Louis XIV (1638-1715), many such secret societies of the *dévots* organized missions to towns to enforce Catholic morality and traditions. In the households of former Huguenots, the *dévots* asked servants to spy on their masters and mistresses. With concessions from the magistrates of small towns, these young zealots took on the self-appointed role of religious police. For example, they would patrol streets of formerly Protestant neighborhoods on Catholic feast days to ensure that people decorated their house for religious processions.<sup>92</sup> In big cities, they engaged in cultural warfare. The Jansenists and the *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrament* joined forces to publish tracts

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<sup>91</sup> Louis Châtellier, *The Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 73-74.

<sup>92</sup> Louis Châtellier, *The Europe of the Devout*, 168-171.

condemning theatrical performances.<sup>93</sup> In their heyday, the *dévots* preached and acted out puritanical intolerance. The founders and supporters of the influential French missionary order, the *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris* (MEP), came from this *dévots* tradition.

B. *From Société des Bons Amis to Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP)*

In Paris, under the spiritual guidance of the French Jesuit, Jean Bagot (1591-1664), such a group of zealous Parisian aristocrats formed the *Société des Bons Amis*. They voluntarily committed to live an almost monastic life while preparing for the priesthood. Their zeal did not go unnoticed by the Roman Curia. Toward the middle of the seventeenth century, the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* grew frustrated with the lack of progress in establishing a permanent and stable church in the mission territories under the *Patronato* system. The Roman Curia was not very happy with the Jesuits in the Far East, as the Curia thought the Jesuit missions moved too slowly in giving the local Church its native clergy. The *Propaganda* then turned to a group of French nobles who were especially loyal to the papacy—the *Dévo*t party—for a new arrangement.

In 1664, three former members of the *Bons Amis*, François Pallu (1626-1684), Pierre Lambert de la Motte (1624-1679), and Vincent de Meur (1628-1668) obtained approval of the Holy See to be recognized as an institute of apostolic life. They called it the *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris*—MEP.<sup>94</sup> Two of their members, François Pallu and Pierre Lambert de la Motte, were chosen by Rome to become the apostolic vicars for the missions in Vietnam and South China. Before the departure of Pallu for the Far East mission, Innocent XI (1611-1689) instructed them: “We wish to let you know that we should be more pleased to hear that you have

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<sup>93</sup> John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, vol. 2, *The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 335-336.

<sup>94</sup> McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, vol. 2, 181, 570; Louis Châtelier, *The Europe of the Devout*, 70-74.

ordained one single priest than to learn that you have baptized 5,000 pagans. The Jesuits have baptized many, but after all, all their labor has vanished like smoke because they are not ordaining any priests.”<sup>95</sup> These two apostolic vicars appear to have taken heed of this instruction. As soon as they arrived in Siam, they launched into immediate action.

### C. First ordination of Vietnamese clergy in 1668

In 1665, Pallu and de la Motte opened the first seminary in Siam for young men coming from China, Tonkin and Cochinchina. On Easter of 1668, de la Motte ordained the first two Vietnamese catechists, Giuse Trang and Luca Bền;<sup>96</sup> in May 1668, two more catechists were ordained, Gioan Văn Huệ (1624-1671) and Bentô Văn Hiên (1615-1686); in January 1670, on his first pastoral visit to Tonkin, de la Motte ordained seven more Vietnamese priests.<sup>97</sup> At this pace, within two years, de la Motte ordained a total of eleven priests from among the Jesuit-trained catechists. In a short time, spurred by Innocent XI and the cardinals of the Propaganda Fide, then, he had managed to form a local clergy of the Latin rite for the Church in Vietnam. His success demonstrated that it was unnecessary to create a new rite in the Church as the Jesuits in China had been promoting.<sup>98</sup> In the presence of the catechists, de la Motte laid out the principle for his future priests: —that he would not judge them on their intellectual prowess. Instead, he appealed to the apostolic tradition that candidates for priesthood should be recognized

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<sup>95</sup> Albert Chan, S.J. “Towards a Chinese Church: the Contribution of Philippe Couplet, S.J.,” in *Philippe Couplet, S.J. (1623-1693)—The Man Who Brought China to Europe*, ed. Jerome Heyndrickx (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1990), 77.

<sup>96</sup> “De la Motte, Pierre Lambert,” trans. Canon Frank Lomaz, in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 231-232; Phan Phát Huôn, 223-224; Bùi Đức Sinh, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo ở Việt Nam* (The Vietnamese Catholic Church), vol. 1 (Calgary: Privately printed, 2002), 258.

<sup>97</sup> Bùi Đức Sinh, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1, 260.

<sup>98</sup> Nicolas Standaert and John Witek, “Social Organization of the Church: Chinese Clergy,” in *Handbook of Christianity in China, vol. 1: 635-1800*, ed. Nicolas Standaert (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 462-470.

for their virtue, wisdom, sound judgment and maturity. These were the same qualities the apostles had applied to choose their presbyters.<sup>99</sup>

D. Intervention from the Holy See to tone down the rigorous ascetical formation

In practice, the expectations placed on the native clergy were more like the puritanical spirituality of the *dévots* that was enthusiastically adopted by Pallu. Pallu faithfully preached and lived the spirit of the *dévots* who refused to compromise with the world, and with his newly recruited Frenchmen embarked on the mission fired up with self-righteous convictions. Their moral and spiritual certainty echoes in the opening statement of *CDTX*: “There is nothing else in the world better and more needed for salvation than the sacraments that Jesus has established in his Church.”<sup>100</sup> They were determined to be that very instrument of Christ’s Church, both in their vocation as priests and in their self-discipline on the path to sanctity. Given this puritanical approach, Pallu argued that other missionary societies in the Far East had compromised too much with the local pagan cultures.<sup>101</sup> He was convinced that the key to conversion lay not in a negotiation with pagan cultures, but rather in the witness of living the austere lifestyle of the apostolic age. Pallu recommended that all members of the MEP make special promises to meditate daily for three hours, observe a strict fasting regimen, take no medication, and abstain from drinking alcohol except on three special feasts: Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. The Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* was so alarmed by this excess of zeal that it intervened and released the missionaries from their special promises. Rome argued that such an austere life would interfere with and take away from the spiritual and physical energy which was needed to

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<sup>99</sup> Bùi Đức Sinh, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1, 251.

<sup>100</sup> *CDTX*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*, trans. M. N. L. Couve de Murville (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 237-239.

carry out missionary work. Cardinals of the Congregation suggested to the MEP superiors that personal pious practices should be at the discretion of each individual.<sup>102</sup>

E. The influence of French *dévo*t mentality in the missions

After the intervention from the Holy See, de la Motte and Pallu toned down but did not completely abandon their penchant for asceticism, as one can see in their rules for the first indigenous female religious order in Tonkin Đàng Ngoài in 1670. It appears that de la Motte attempted to replicate the prayer practice of his former Parisian days among the members of the *Société des Bons Amis* when he instituted the Lovers of the Holy Cross (*Đòng Mến Thánh Giá—Congrégation des Amantes de la Croix de Jésus-Christ*). He fashioned the devotional piety to the Cross and the suffering Christ into a religious rule for these local consecrated virgins. In his chapter on rules for daily activities, he instructed the nuns to start their day at four in the morning with an hour of meditation on the Passion and Death of Christ and end the meditation with self-flagellation. The rule states:

It is required for nuns to practice self-flagellation in order to remember the tortures that the Son of God has endured. Offer this small mortification to the Lord. Unite your penance with the Lord's intention and purpose when He himself went through his own Passion. It is the Lord himself wanting you to have his mind and heart. If for any reasons you are unable to perform this penance, you can fulfill this obligation by wearing a chain or something similar at the discretion of your confessor.<sup>103</sup>

Though the rule does not mention formal learning, it allows the nuns to have thirty minutes each day to read spiritual books or books on the lives of the saints.<sup>104</sup> One can see clearly the rigorous ascetical spirituality of the French *dévo*t tradition when one compares their practice with the

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<sup>102</sup> Bùi Đức Sinh, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, 240-241.

<sup>103</sup> “Chị em phải đánh tội để nhớ đến những cực hình đau khổ Con Thiên Chúa đã chịu, dâng sự hy sinh nhỏ bé ấy kết hợp với những ý hướng và mục tiêu của Chúa khi người chịu những đau khổ đó. Chính Người cũng muốn rằng chúng ta phải có những tâm tình như Người. Nếu có lý do nào cản trở sự làm việc đền tội chung hay theo cách thức như thế, chị em có thể thanh toán nhiệm vụ này bằng cách mang một thứ giây xích, hay theo ý cha giải tội làm một việc đền tội khác tương đương,” Đỗ Quang Chính, *Đòng Mến Thánh Giá những năm đầu* (Frisco: Antôn & Đuốc Sáng, 2007), 7, 99-100.

<sup>104</sup> Đỗ Quang Chính, *Đòng Mến Thánh Giá những năm đầu*, 99.

daily schedule devised by Alessandro Valignano, S.J. (1538-1606) for Japanese seminarians. According to Valignano's "Distribution of Hours," a day began at four thirty in the morning and ended with prayer at eight in the evening. Personal prayer time, Mass, and communal chores took place for one hour between five and six in the morning. Another short prayer and an examination of conscience were repeated before bedtime at eight. During those fourteen hours in between, five and half hours were spent for the studying of Latin, four of Japanese, one of music, and three and half for meals and recreation. Moreover, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, they had a shorter structured schedule. On Sundays and holy days, they were free for recreation.<sup>105</sup> From this comparison, one may conclude that the MEP determined to turn their mission into a spiritual boot camp preparing their converts for an imminent cosmic battle.

#### F. The clergy of the post-French Revolution era

The Jesuits did not last long enough to carry through the project designed by Alessandro Valignano, S.J., because Pope Clement XIV ordered the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773.<sup>106</sup> Upon the suppression of the Jesuits (1773-1814), the MEP became the dominant force in the Vietnam mission. By the early 1850s, the MEP bishops ministered to about 300,000 Catholics spreading from the west side of the Red River of Tonkin/Đàng Ngoài to the entire Cochinchine/Đàng Trong; the Spanish Dominican bishops controlled about 200,000 Catholics of a smaller but more populated area between the east side of the Red River and the southern border of China.<sup>107</sup> In the twenty years following the 1789 French Revolution, the MEP were able to send only fifteen missionaries to the entire Far East, but they still managed to maintain their

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<sup>105</sup> George Ellison, *Deus Destroyed*, 408-410.

<sup>106</sup> Giulio Cesare Cordara, *On the Suppression of the Society of Jesus*, trans. John Murphy (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999).

<sup>107</sup> Trương Bá Càn, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 183-189; Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam niên giám 2005*, ed. Văn phòng Tổng thư ký Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005), 256-257.



leadership positions as bishops of the missions under their charge.<sup>108</sup> Back in France, from the 1820s, the missionary movement was being revitalized, but the demographic of French clergy, both at home and in the missions, began to change, and was entirely reshaped by the 1830s. A larger percentage of the clergy now came from humble origins, replacing a good portion of the bourgeois and aristocratic stock of the *ancien régime*.<sup>109</sup> That was also increasingly to be the case among the episcopal nominees. During the Restoration (1814-1830), seventy-six out of ninety-six candidates had been members of the nobility. In the next eighteen years of the July Monarchy (1830-1848), only twelve out of seventy-seven posts were from the blue-blood class.<sup>110</sup> Overall, in the post-revolutionary French Church, the puritanism of the aristocratic *dévôt* tradition was perpetuated by the revival of rural French Catholicism in which limited intellectual attainments were now considered a virtue.<sup>111</sup>

#### G. The post-Revolution MEP—a culture of martyrs

The post-revolution missionaries who came to Vietnam were no exception. The *dévôt* French spirituality not only survived the French Revolution but also picked up new momentum thanks to a new group of rural clergy. Because of the missions' urgent needs, their seminary on the MEP's Rue du Bac trained them as quickly as possible and then shipped them off at the expense of further studies. Many of them did not come from the social and cultural environment of the literate elite.<sup>112</sup> Between 1874 and 1903, only one MEP missionary residing in Vietnam was born in the city of Versailles, and the remaining one hundred and four missionaries were all from the northern and southern rural provinces of France. Most of them came from

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<sup>108</sup> J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided*, 33-34.

<sup>109</sup> Châtellier, *The Religion of the Poor*; Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (New York: Routledge), 57-103.

<sup>110</sup> Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 62.

<sup>111</sup> Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914*, 56, 87, 100-101.

<sup>112</sup> Jean Michaud, *'Incidental' Ethnographers: French Catholic Missions on the Tonkin-Yunnan Frontier, 1880-1930* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 68, 71.

*departments*—counties of the Massif Central and Rhône-Alps.<sup>113</sup> Missionary candidates formed at the Rue du Bac maintained a rigorous spiritual regimen. Their daily studies were accompanied by four to five periods of prayer and Mass. Their curriculum strictly followed the topics approved by Rome and books written by the authors not on the *Index*. At the moment these candidates crossed the threshold of the Rue du Bac, they knew their future lay in the missions, without the prospect of ever returning home.<sup>114</sup> For these zealous candidates, the spiritual cosmic battle started before they set foot in some far distant land. It began at the door of their cell in their seminary in Paris. Jean Théophane Vénard (1829-1861) described his feelings in a heart-wrenching letter to his father:

My dearly-loved father, have you understood me? One day God said to Abraham, ‘Take thy only-begotten son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of Vision; and there thou shalt offer him for a holocaust upon one of the mountains which I shall show thee.’ And Abraham obeyed without a moment’s hesitation, and without a murmur; and his obedience was most pleasing to God. Now, my dearest father, do you begin to understand me? Here am I, the child whom you love; I have not borrowed a strange pen to tell you the truth. I come openly, without any subterfuges, unworthy of us both. God calls me; yes, it is His call. Oh, call me likewise; say that you, too, are willing that your Théophane should become a missionary! Poor father! The word is said,—the *Foreign Missions*.<sup>115</sup>

At the Rue du Bac, these future missionaries immersed themselves in the culture of martyrdom. Every Saturday after the evening prayer, they went to the *salle des martyrs* to gaze and meditate upon relics of martyrs and the instruments of their torture. In silence, they kissed a crucifix stained with the blood of one of their confreres, and then retired to their cells.<sup>116</sup> The drama reached its height on the day of departure. A formal prayer service was held, and a special sending ritual was performed:

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<sup>113</sup> Association de la Propagation de la Foi, *Table des Annales de la Propagation de la Foi de 1874 a 1903* (Lyon: Chez M.-P. Rusand, 1904).

<sup>114</sup> Jean Michaud, *‘Incidental’ Ethnographers*, 68-73.

<sup>115</sup> Mary Elizabeth Herbert, *Life of J. Théophane Vénard, Martyr in Tonquin: Or What Love Can Do* (New York: Catholic Publication Society, [1870]), 32-33.

<sup>116</sup> Mary Elizabeth Herbert, *Life of J. Théophane Vénard*, 69-70.

[The missionaries] were brought into the chapel after evening prayers, and knelt on the steps of the altar. Behind them knelt the Directors of the College, and the other students, as well as their friends and relations who came to see them for the last time. . . . After the prayers were over, a short meditation was given, and then the assistants sat down, and the five missionaries alone remained standing on the altar-step, while one of the Directors, who had himself lately returned from the Foreign Missions, made them a short but touching address. Then the five young Apostles went up to the altar, and when close to the tabernacle turned round to their brethren, who, leaving their places, went one by one, and kissed the feet of those who were so soon to be our Lord's heralds.<sup>117</sup>

One has no doubt of the profound impact on the psyche of these missionaries, nor of the religious conviction these men carried. As they stood facing the congregation, the choir intoned the MEP anthem, *Chant pour le départ des missionnaires*. We can imagine how this old hymn resonated in the mind and heart of each of them:

Away, friends, bid adieu to this life,  
Carry the Name of our Lord to far distant lands,  
We will meet again one day in our true home,  
Adieu, brothers, adieu.<sup>118</sup>

The third verse of their departure hymn reminds these young missionaries that there is an immense world bereft of hope and laden with sins. They were sent out to purify the world, and if need be, they would cleanse it with their own blood, *tout le sang de vos veines*:

Quicken your steps to the vast crowds awaiting,  
They are sinking deep in the world of cold dark night,  
Bereft of truth, God, and hopes;  
Oh, misery! The gate of Hell swallows them,  
Soldiers of Christ, subdue the world;  
May all the earth hear your voice,  
Ablaze the world with the Divine light,  
Be everyplace on this earth under the standard of the Cross.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Mary Elizabeth Herbert, *Life of J. Théophane Vénard*, 75.

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“Partez, amis, adieu pour cette vie,  
Portez au loin, le nome de notre Dieu,  
Nous nous retrouverons un jour dans la patrie,  
Adieu, frères, adieu.”

Mary Elizabeth Herbert, *Life of J. Théophane Vénard* . . . , 208.

<sup>119</sup>

“Hâtez vos pas vers ces peuples immenses;  
Ils sont plongés dans une froide nuit,

Nevertheless, we may wonder how much information and preparation these men had for their particular missions. From the *dévo*t spiritual tradition of the MEP, perhaps to study a foreign culture was not a foremost priority because outside of the heavenly home, “*la patrie*,” the earthly life contained neither truth nor hope. The biography of Jean Théophane Vénard offers compelling evidence to substantiate the suggestion of their lack of preparation in knowing a local culture. Within a month before the date of his departure, Vénard was still in the dark as to where his assignment would be. He only knew that one of his classmates was destined for India, another for Vietnam.<sup>120</sup> Besides these two countries, the MEP superior might send Vénard to eight other places in Asia.<sup>121</sup> Thus, one would suspect that when these young missionaries arrived at their missions, they possessed only rudimentary knowledge of the history and culture of that locale.

#### H. Vietnamese clergy of the French *dévo*t tradition

*Adieu pour cette vie*—to bid good bye to this life in a definitive way was the experience of these Frenchmen once they left France; to break off completely from this sinful world was also the expectation for the indigenous clergy, as shown in the *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên*. This prophetic stance resonates firmly and vividly in the text and tone of the *CĐTX*. The author was obsessed with spiritual purity. As we have already seen, he devoted over a quarter of the ninety-five page document to a discussion of sins and confession. And, the theme of sin and fear is not

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Sans vérité, sans Dieu, sans espérances;  
Infortunés! L'enfer les engloutit.  
Soldats du Christ! Soumettez-lui la terre,  
Que tous les lieux entendent votre voix,  
Portez partout la divine lumière,  
Partout l'étendard de la croix,”

Mary Elizabeth Herbert, *Life of J. Théophane Vénard...*, 207.

<sup>120</sup> Mary Elizabeth Herbert, *Life of J. Théophane Vénard...*, 73.

<sup>121</sup> The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, *The Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Catholic Missions: 1822-1900* (Baltimore: Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1902), 35.

limited to that chapter but permeates the entire text. On the first page of the *CDTX*, the apostolic vicar and his synod members explicitly expressed the two central themes: sacraments and the spiritual life of a local priest. This document bespeaks a spiritual battle between two opposite paths: the path to sanctity and the path to perdition. This *dévot* spirituality leaves no room for compromise.<sup>122</sup> The wrath of the divine judgment directed at God's chosen ones, his priests, who may have gone astray, is even more severe than for the rest of the flock. Thus, to ward off this divine vengeance, the *CDTX* stresses, priests need be constantly tested and purified.<sup>123</sup>

In contrast to the demand for a rigorous spiritual toughness, we now know that expectations for academic ability were considerably lower.<sup>124</sup> The missionary Joseph Theurel (1829-1868) expressed pride in the solely religious-based curriculum:

You ask me what level of education the best pupils attain. Well, first and foremost they have a perfect knowledge of their religion.... As you may imagine, we do not tell them about those charming myths the study of which occupies a good part of the educational years of Europe's youth. No, they know nothing about Jupiter or the chaste Diana, nothing about the adventures of Mars and Venus. But they know more about Jesus Christ and St. Luke and St. Paul than many of your graduates. They are taught geography, elementary mathematics and a little astronomy, a science for which orientals always have a great liking. Suffice it to say that the ramifications of the Classics, which cause so much ink to flow on the banks of the Seine, are absolutely unknown on the banks of the Sông-Ca.<sup>125</sup>

Furthermore, Eastern philosophies were not an option, as clearly stated in the *CDTX*: "Do not put in your preaching any sayings of Confucius, ancient sages, or wisdom of this world, lest the message of the Cross is compromised."<sup>126</sup> Intellectual curiosity was strongly discouraged. For example, without the imprimatur of his local bishop, even spiritual books already approved by

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<sup>122</sup> *CDTX*, 3.

<sup>123</sup> *CDTX*, 56-57.

<sup>124</sup> *CDTX*, 58.

<sup>125</sup> Armand Olichon, *Father Six: Parish Priest and Viceroy*, trans. Barbara Wall (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1954), 11.

<sup>126</sup> "Kéo mắt sức Câu rút Đức Chúa Jêsu; đừng đặt vào bài giảng những lời ông Khổng, lời các quân tử và lễ khôn ngoan phần đời," *CDTX*, 83.

other bishops are still not allowed. To publish one's own book was not permissible if it has not passed the doctrinal censorship of the bishop.<sup>127</sup>

In hindsight, this French *dévo*t spirituality and its anti-intellectual tendency are crucial for understanding how the prophetic style of Vietnamese Catholicism. In comparison with the Iberian influence and the post-Tridentine tradition, the long and continuous presence of the French missionaries left the largest impact than the other two. Moreover, the French colonial period further reinforced and often misled people to associate Catholicism in Vietnam solely with French Catholicism despite its longer history and more global web of connections.

## VII. Conclusion to Chapter One

The *Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên 1873* edition is more than just a sacramental and spiritual manual for Vietnamese local clergy in the late nineteenth-century. A close analysis of the *CDTX* demonstrates a convergence of historical forces originating from various political and religious aspects of early modern Europe. The first of these trends to deeply infuse Catholicism was an intense concern for cultural purity. It began with the anti-Semitism of the fifteenth-century Iberian society and evolved into full-blown cultural discrimination as the Spanish and Portuguese set sail to conquer the world. The second was attention to doctrinal purity. When the seeds of Christianity were about to germinate in the various regions of Asia, the rigidity of the post-Tridentine era crippled the ability of the Roman Church to appreciate and incorporate non-European cultural elements into its system of beliefs and values. Third was spiritual purity. When the Holy See condemned the Jesuits' accommodational approach to local cultures and yet

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<sup>127</sup> “Các ông đừng dám lấy ý riêng mình mà in hay là phát sách nào khi chưa được phép bề trên; dù phải sách nào bề trên nơi khác đã lấy làm phải mặc lòng cũng vậy, cùng đừng dám in và phát cho người ta những sách nhỏ mọn, bài giảng, hay là kinh nọ kinh kia mình đã chép ra khi đang bề trên chưa phê cùng cho phép đã; vì chúng Đức thánh Phapha Clémentê XIV đã cấm chỉ sự ấy, mà kẻ nào chẳng cứ thì phải vạ mất hết các phép tức thì, dù những phép riêng bề trên đã ban hay là những phép chung cho được làm phúc cũng mất hết cả,” *CDTX*, 84-85.

pushed for the immediate creation of a body of local clergy, the MEP coincidentally came on the scene and carried with them their particular version of French *dévot* spirituality. As a result, the complex intersection of external historical forces and cultures that were later introduced to Vietnam produced a puritanical and prophetic post-Tridentine Church organized in the name of cultural purity, doctrinal purity, and spiritual purity.

Ironically, the large rectangular pool in front of the Phát-Diệm cathedral complex reflects the eye-catching bell tower Phương-Đình as well as it mirrors the history and the reality of Vietnamese Catholicism. The pool collects and keeps the rainwater, but it is also a body of stagnant water. It incidentally symbolizes the long puritanical traditions of the local Church, and also represents the limitation of the prophetic culture which stood apart from the mainstream. On the one hand, the simple and clear prophetic stance empowered the converts, who mostly consisted of people of lower social strata, with a sense of moral certainty and superiority against periodic waves of persecutions by the local authorities. On the other hand, cultural purity prevented Catholics from fully incorporating the larger local philosophical traditions into their theological language. Doctrinal purity blocked the Catholic community from engaging with the intellectual trends in the modern world. Spiritual purity caused them to distrust the political world and secular institutions. This inherent tension was exacerbated when the prophetic culture made contact with local variance. The next four chapters will go in depth the conflict generated from the encounter between this confrontational style of Catholicism and the rise of the Nguyễn dynasty in the nineteenth century.

## Chapter 2: Nguyễn-Catholic Alliance in the Late Eighteenth Century

Father Phêrô Trần Lục, the architect of Phát-Diệm, celebrated the completion of his building project with the christening of the three-story bell tower Phương-Đình, around Easter and just about three months before his death in July of 1899. From a distance, one cannot help but notice a large cross on the rooftop unmistakably identifying this bell tower as a Christian edifice; otherwise, it seems simply a clever superimposition of a ceremonial gate on a watchtower of a traditional imperial citadel.<sup>1</sup> From the liturgical point of view, Phương-Đình is a typical church bell tower but in an Asian style. However, from the context of the nineteenth-century Vietnam, it is a monument to commemorate a shared-but-often-stormy Nguyễn-Catholic history.

When visitors arrive at its base, they are likely amazed how artisans graced its façade not with Castilian roses to symbolize the Virgin Mary but with the more familiar East Asian peach blossom motif. Furthermore, giving a touch of regal solemnity, engraved dynastic reign marks are conspicuously displayed at various prominent positions throughout the structure. On the front lintel of the tower's southern entrance, a stone bas-relief bears four large characters, which read: "Throne of the Holy Body" (聖躬寶座—*Thánh Cung Bảo Tà*); on the northern side facing the inner courtyard, a Latin inscription spells: "Chapel of the Lord's Supper" (*Capella in Coena Domini*). Next to the name of the building, a smaller script commemorates the date of its dedication—on the Holy Thursday in the tenth year of the reigning Thành Thái emperor (r.1889-

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 6-7.



1907).<sup>2</sup> The third floor houses a two-metric ton bronze bell with the engravings to honor the devotees who contributed to its casting “In the year 1890 since the birth of our Lord” as well as “in the year Canh-Dần of the reigning Thành Thái



Fig. 2. The Phuong Dinh Bell Tower, 2005. Photo by Lân Ngô, S.J.

emperor.”<sup>3</sup> Finally, on the large wooden beam of the same top floor with the bell, crimson paint carefully applied on the engraved characters marks the completion of the tower in the winter of the tenth year of Thành Thái emperor. In the context of the turbulent history between the Nguyễn

<sup>2</sup> Tòa Giám Mục Phát Diệm, *Nhà Thờ Lớn Phát Diệm* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Hà Nội, 1999), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Tòa Giám Mục Phát Diệm, *Nhà Thờ Lớn Phát Diệm*, 13-14.

dynasty and Catholicism in the nineteenth century, the ubiquitously and excessively referential display of imperial reign marks is no accident. They are political statements: the pledge of unwavering loyalty of Catholics to the Nguyễn dynasty and the claim on the intimately intertwined Catholic-Nguyễn history. The investigation in this chapter thus aims to broaden the understanding of the role of native converts in the national politics of Vietnam during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

### **I. Eurocentric Perspective in Nguyễn-Catholic Histories**

Political symbiosis is the most accurate portrayal of the relationship between the southern ruling circle and the Catholics during the founding period of the Nguyễn dynasty. High politics became increasingly Catholic in this period. The historiography about the Catholic-Nguyễn relationship, nonetheless, has assumed that Catholic influence in the Nguyễn court rapidly diminished after Pierre Pigneau [Pigneau] de Béhaine's (1741-1799) death, and effectively ended with Crown Prince Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh's (1780-1801).<sup>4</sup> Because of this commonly held assumption, the Catholic-Nguyễn history often revolves around the 1783 event when the young lord, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh (1762-1820), entrusted his oldest son, the future crown prince, to the French bishop for safekeeping of the royal bloodline. The bishop later accompanied Prince Cảnh on his diplomatic mission to the Court of Versailles. When he returned to Đàng Trong from France, the bishop continued to serve as a mentor for the prince until the missionary's death from dysentery at Phú-Yên.<sup>5</sup> This politically symbiotic relationship, nevertheless, permeated beyond

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 17; John White, *A Voyage to Cochín China* (London: Longman, 1824), 262-275.

<sup>5</sup> Trần Mỹ Vân, *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan: Prince Cường Để (1882-1951)* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12-16; C. Michele Thompson, "Jean Marie Despiau: Unjustly Maligned Physician in the Medical Service of the Nguyễn," in *Vietnam and the West*, ed. Wynn Wilcox (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2010), 41-70.

the immediate royal family and continued to survive within the larger *Đàng Trong* ruling class even at the height of religious persecution during the reign of Tự Đức (1848-1883).<sup>6</sup>

However, this historiography somehow misses the clandestine but continuous Catholic-Nguyễn relationship among the ruling elites even after the death of de Béhaine in 1799, and then Crown Prince Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh's in 1801. The 1857 public execution of a Catholic intendant of the imperial treasury (*thái bộc tự khanh*), Micae Hồ Đình Hy (1808-1857), points to this enduring alliance within the Catholic-Nguyễn upper class.<sup>7</sup> This case occurred quite late in the twenty-four-year long Nguyễn campaign to eradicate Catholicism from the country. The fact that this Catholic mandarin was able to hide his religious identity while serving inside the palace for thirty years suggests the existence of a larger protective network of Catholics and Catholic sympathizers inside the Nguyễn court. Furthermore, the ability of missionaries to procure not only public edicts but also secret imperial orders against Christianity implies the presence of a secret but active Catholic group within the inner ruling circle. Therefore, the inquiry directs particular attention to those converts being left out of the ecclesiastical martyrology as well as purged from the dynastic chronicles and discarded by a modern historiography that privileges narrowly nationalistic interpretations.

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<sup>6</sup> Nguyễn Quang Hưng, *Công Giáo Việt Nam Thời Kỳ Triều Nguyễn (1802-1883)* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2007), 204.

<sup>7</sup> *Châu Bản Triều Tự Đức (1848-1883)*, ed. Vũ Thanh Hằng (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Học, 2003), 49; *Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên* (hereafter *ĐNTLCB*) (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục/Viện Sử Học, 2006), 7/Q. xv, 472; Alexis Hồ Đình Đóa, *The Great Mandarin and the Two Emperors* (Huntington Beach: Southeast Asian Culture & Education Foundation, 2009), 163-164.

## II. From the Fall of the Phú Xuân Court to the Rise of the Gia Định Regime (1788-1802)

The period under study is from the fall of Nguyễn seigneurial rule in the 1770s to the establishment of the Nguyễn's Gia Định regime (1788-1802).<sup>8</sup> During these three decades, both Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài saw a proliferation of political intrigues over successions, rebellions, and state breakdown. At times, Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài were divided among five different claimants. The Lê-Trịnh loyalists controlled the top northern provinces near China; the three Tây-Son brothers partitioned the former territories of the Trịnh and Nguyễn into three separate fiefdoms: Phú Xuân, Quy Nhơn, and Gia Định; and the Nguyễn remnants remained in Hà Tiên, the southern edge of Đàng Trong.<sup>9</sup>

Between 1771 and 1774, due to the Tây-Son uprising from within and then the military campaign of the Trịnh from the north, the southern establishment collapsed under political and social upheaval.<sup>10</sup> The Nguyễn ruling class suddenly found itself literally and politically on the fringes of the kingdom.<sup>11</sup> In 1774, the Nguyễn lord, Duệ Tông Nguyễn Phúc Thuần (1765-1777) and his courtiers abandoned their Phú-Xuân capital [Huế].<sup>12</sup> In the fall of 1777, the Tây-Son troops captured and slaughtered almost the entire entourage of the Nguyễn lord on the run, save the future founder of the Nguyễn dynasty, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh (1762-1802). After four months of hiding in Sa-Đéc, the Nguyễn loyalists regrouped around the fifteen-year-old nephew of the last

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<sup>8</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004), 19-43.

<sup>9</sup> Keith Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 365-397.

<sup>10</sup> George Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 18-46.

<sup>11</sup> John Barrow, *A Voyage to CochinChina in the Year 1792 and 1793* (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806), 250-260.

<sup>12</sup> *DNTLCB*, 1/Q. xi, 181.

Nguyễn lord, and successfully won back Saigon at the end of that same year.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, in 1780, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh took the title “Nguyễn King” (*Nguyễn Vương*) announcing himself as the legitimate successor to the Nguyễn throne.<sup>14</sup> Saigon and its southern region, however, were under the Nguyễn for a total of only four years until the Tây-Son recaptured it in 1782.<sup>15</sup> Neither the Nguyễn nor the Tây-Son had full control of southern Đàng-Trong between 1777 and 1788. During these eleven years, the southern loyalists made four different attempts to recapture Saigon (in 1777, 1783, 1784 and 1788).<sup>16</sup> Each of the first three attempts ended with a further diminution of the Nguyễn force. In the winter of 1784, despite the coalition of the Nguyễn and 20,000 Siamese soldiers with the naval support of 300 warships, the Nguyễn suffered a catastrophic defeat by the Tây Sơn under the leadership of Nguyễn Huệ (1753-1792). Nguyễn Phúc Ánh narrowly escaped with his three generals and ten remaining soldiers.<sup>17</sup> Nguyễn Huệ, on the other hand, advanced his troops to Hanoi, defeated the Qing invasion, but then petitioned the court of Beijing to recognize him as the legitimate successor of the Lê.<sup>18</sup> Nguyễn Huệ took the reign name of Quang Trung (r.1788-1792), and became the founder of the Tây Sơn dynasty (1788-1802). While the Tây Sơn were concentrating their attention on the northern front, the Nguyễn regained Saigon in 1788. Effective administration of the Gia Định regime, not the military brilliance of the Tây Sơn, was the deciding factor in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Vietnamese politics.<sup>19</sup> The Nguyễn secured their foothold in Saigon and

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<sup>13</sup> *ĐNTLCB*, *I/Q*. xii, 191; *ĐNTLCB*, *I/Q*. i, 204-205; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược*, vol. 2 ([Sài-Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 106-7.

<sup>14</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*. i, 208; Cao Xuân Dục. ed., *Quốc Triều Chánh Biên Toát Yếu*, [database online: Nhóm Nghiên Cứu Sử Địa Việt Nam, 2001], 6; Trần Mỹ Vân, *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan: Prince Cường Để (1882-1951)* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12, 234.

<sup>15</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*. i, 211-212.

<sup>16</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*. i, 204-205, 211-212; *ĐNTLCB I/Q*. ii, 216; *ĐNTLCB I/Q*. iii, 234.

<sup>17</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*. ii, 223.

<sup>18</sup> Trương Bửu Lâm, “Intervention versus Tribute in Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1788-1790,” in *The Chinese World Order*, ed. John Fairbank (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 165-179.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 380.

eventually united Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài into the present form of Vietnam in 1802.<sup>20</sup>

During this transitional period from Tây Sơn to Nguyễn, many Catholic converts gained greater access to the inner circle of the Gia Định ruling class.

### III. Dynastic Records of the Nguyễn-Catholic Encounter and Its Lacunae

Neither primary nor secondary sources agree on the year that Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and Bishop de Béhaine first met. Nguyễn Quang Hưng, a scholar of Nguyễn-Catholic history, suggests 1776.<sup>21</sup> Trần Mỹ Vân, an expert in Nguyễn-French colonial history, moves this rendezvous to 1782.<sup>22</sup> A local Catholic history written by a local priest, Đặng Đức Tuấn (1806-1874), and the Nguyễn dynastic record say 1783.<sup>23</sup> A letter of Bishop de Béhaine mentions the two encounters between the author and the Nguyễn prince on the run in January and February of 1784.<sup>24</sup> However, as this chapter launches into the investigation to resolve the discrepancy, what may appear as trivial differences lead to the discovery of hitherto unidentified Catholics among the founders of the Nguyễn dynasty.

According to the official history *Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên* (ĐNTLCB), 1783 was the defining year in the history of the Nguyễn and Vietnamese Catholicism. After his defeat in the 1783 naval battle at Cần-Giờ, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh fled to the Gulf of Thailand and made contact with de Béhaine. He asked the bishop to take his four-year-old son, Prince Cảnh, to

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<sup>20</sup> ĐNTLCB I/Q. iii, 234; ĐNTLCB I/Q. xxiii, 588.

<sup>21</sup> Nguyễn Quang Hưng, *Công Giáo Việt nam thời kỳ triều Nguyễn (1802-1883)*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Trần Mỹ Vân, *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan: Prince Cường Để (1882-1951)*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Lam Giang and Võ Ngọc Nhà, *Đặng Đức Tuấn: Tinh hoa Công giáo ái quốc Việt Nam* (Saigon: Tân Văn Ấn Quán, 1970), 52; ĐNTLCB I/Q. ii, 218.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, “Extrait d’une lettre de monseigneur l’évêque d’Adran, vicaire apostolique de Cochinchine, aux directeurs du séminaire des Missions Étrangères, écrite de Pondichéry, le 20 mars 1785,” *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses concernant l’Asie, l’Afrique et l’Amérique, avec quelques relations Nouvelles des missions, et des notes géographiques et historiques* [hereafter LEC], vol. 4 (Paris: Société du Panthéon Littéraire, 1843), 617-624.

France to lobby the court of Louis XVI (1754-1793) for military assistance.<sup>25</sup> Yet this was not the first such encounter between Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and this French missionary as frequently cited in the historiography of modern Vietnam. One can find in the dynastic record a hint of an earlier and more influential involvement of de Béhaine in the southern court. In the official account of the naval battle against the Tây-Son in the late spring of 1782, *ĐNTLCB* praises a certain Frenchman, Emmanuel, who single-handedly directed his ship to block the Tây-Son fleet even at the cost of his own life in order for the Nguyễn to retreat to safety. The court history elaborates on the identity of the French man: “At the recommendation of Pigneau de Béhaine (*Bá Đa Lộc*), the king had promoted him [Emmanuel] to the rank of imperial commander (*khâm sai cai cơ*) of the *Trung Không* combatant unit.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, since Nguyễn Phúc Ánh recruited Emmanuel on the advice of the bishop, this historical detail suggests that the future emperor of the Nguyễn and de Béhaine knew or at least were in communication with one another even before 1782. Beyond this fleeting mention of de Béhaine, *ĐNTLCB* does not supply any other information on the earlier engagement of the bishop with the Nguyễn. However, the Nguyễn biographies of meritorious officials, *Đại Nam liệt truyện* (hereafter *ĐNLT*), moves the

<sup>25</sup> “Vua nghe tin Bá Đa Lộc ở Chan Bôn (đất Xiêm), sai người đến mời. Bá Đa Lộc là người Phú Lãng Sa, thường qua lại khoảng Chân Lạp và Gia Định, nhân đến yết kiến vua và xin giúp sức. Vua lấy lễ khách mà đãi. Đến đây vua mời đến, dụ rằng: ‘Hiện nay giặc Tây Sơn chưa dẹp được, bốn mặt kinh đô còn nhiều đồn lũy mà đảo Thổ Châu và đảo Phú Quốc không chỗ nào ở yên được, vận nước ta gặp bước gian truân, khanh đã rõ rồi. Khanh có thể vì ta đi sứ sang Đại Tây, nhờ đem quân sang giúp ta được không?’ Bá Đa Lộc xin đi. Hỏi lấy gì làm tin. Vua nói: ‘Đời xưa các nước giao ước cùng nhau, lấy con làm tin. Ta lấy con là Cảnh làm tin. Cảnh 4 tuổi, mới lìa lòng mẹ, ta đem ủy thác cho khanh, mong khanh khéo bảo hộ. Non sông cách trở, đường sá gian nan, nếu có biến cố thì khanh nên giữ Cảnh mà tránh.’ Bá Đa Lộc lạy xin vâng mệnh. Vua và phi cầm nước mắt đưa con. Sai bọn Phó vệ úy Phạm Văn Nhân và Cai cơ Nguyễn Văn Liêm cùng đi,” *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. ii*, 218; Jean Felix Onésime, *Lettres a Mgr l’Évêque de Langres, sur la Congrégation des Missions Étrangères* (Paris: Gaume Frères, 1842), 358-384.

<sup>26</sup> “Quân Tây Sơn đến cửa biển Cần Giờ. Vua sai Tổng Phước Thiêm điều bát trận thủy binh ở Ngã bảy [Thất kỳ giang]. Giặc nhân gió mạnh xông thẳng tới. Quân ta phải lùi. Một mình Cai cơ là Mãn Hòe đi tàu tây cố sức đánh rất lâu. Giặc đổ quân bao vây bốn mặt, ném hỏa khí đốt tàu, Mãn Hòe bị chết. (Mãn Hòe là người Phú Lãng Sa, Bá Đa Lộc giới thiệu là người dùng được, vua trao cho chức Khâm sai cai cơ, coi đội Trung Khuông, sau được tặng là Hiệu nghĩa công thần phụ quốc thượng tướng quân),” *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. i*, 211-212.

timeline further back to 1780.<sup>27</sup> The biographical account of Trần Văn Học (d. 1821) reveals that he and the French bishop came to see Nguyễn Phúc Ánh in Gia-Định. The document begins: “Trần Văn Học was a man from Bình Dương prefecture of Gia-Định province. At first, he was with Pigneau de Béhaine. The emperor granted them an audience in the year of Nhâm Dần [1780].”<sup>28</sup> This certain Trần Văn Học remained steadfastly loyal to the Nguyễn and actively participated in different pivotal events during the early years of the Nguyễn dynasty. He fled with the royal family to Cambodia, offered his technical skill to improve Nguyễn firearms, was one of the original members of the diplomatic mission to France, and served as an official cartographer at the end of his life.<sup>29</sup>

These lacunae and discrepancies in the dynastic history call for a more satisfactory explanation, one that researchers have frequently overlooked.<sup>30</sup> It seems plausible that the historical redaction of information on earlier interactions with de Béhaine, especially from *DNTLCB*, must have reflected an uncomfortable reality: The Nguyễn chroniclers of the later anti-Christian era could not bear to admit the earlier Nguyễn-Catholic alliance. However, this censorship could not scrub all traces of Catholic agency from the history of early modern Vietnam.

These findings do not simply fill in the narrative gap in Catholic involvement in the founding years of the Nguyễn dynasty and does not merely endorse the repeated claims of missionaries about their staunch loyalty to the Nguyễn rulers. Rather, they bring out the role of local converts and document the vital contribution of a small but influential local community,

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<sup>27</sup> Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam liệt truyện* (hereafter *DNLT*), 4 vols. (Huế: Nhà Xuất Bản Thuận Hoá, Viện Sử Học, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> “Trần Văn Học: Người huyện Bình Dương thành Gia Định, lúc đầu theo Bá Đa Lộc đến yết kiến Thế Tổ Cao Hoàng Đế ở Gia Định, năm Nhâm Dần,” *DNLT 2/Q. xii*, 311.

<sup>29</sup> *DNLT 2/Q. xii*, 311-313.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander B. Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 17.



bonded by religious identity rather than by ethnic background, to the revival of the Nguyễn (*trung hưng*).<sup>31</sup> The critical analysis of both official and unofficial documents shows that the southern ruling class had already forged a close bond with local Catholics and missionaries for almost a decade before Bishop de Béhaine and Prince Cảnh's embassy to France in 1783. On the part of the Nguyễn power holders, their alliance with the Đàng Trong Catholic network paid off handsomely and eventually allowed them to regain a foothold in the southern part of their former fiefdom.

#### **IV. Convergence of the Two Groups on the Fringe**

After the fall of Phú-Xuân in 1774, the Nguyễn leaders chanced upon a network of Catholic communities who willingly demonstrated their loyalty to their former ruling house of Đàng Trong. These scattered religious communities proved to be an indispensable lifeline for the embattled Nguyễn leaders.

##### **A. The Đàng Trong Catholic network as the indispensable lifeline for the Nguyễn army**

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, there were frequent outbreaks of famines and wars that devastated Đàng Trong and its neighboring regions.<sup>32</sup> According to missionary reports, southern Catholics alone suffered a reduction from 100,000 to 60,000.<sup>33</sup> These environmental and political pressures forced people to migrate and thus created enclaves of various ethnic and religious colonies throughout Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup> By the 1780s, only one third of southern

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<sup>31</sup> Nola Cooke and Li Tana eds., *Water Frontier: Commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750-1880* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004); Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC*, vol. 4, 617; Louis-Eugène Louvet, *Mgr D'Adran: Missionnaire et Patriote* (Paris: Librairie Delhomme et Briguët, 1900), 255.

<sup>33</sup> Louis-Eugène Louvet, *Mgr D'Adran*, 255.

<sup>34</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841)*, 38-42; *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. i*, 212; *SKĐNVQT*, 41.

Catholics lived in the five southern provinces of Đàng Trong.<sup>35</sup> Being caught in the maelstrom of the political disintegration of the Nguyễn authorities, many of them fled to Chantobon [Chanthaburi] in Siam; others sailed up the Mekong into Cambodia.<sup>36</sup> These pockets of Đàng Trong populations soon proved to be well-situated hideouts for the Nguyễn on the run.

According to a Catholic local history—*Sử ký Đại Nam Việt quốc triều* (hereafter *SKĐNVQT*) and *ĐNLT*, when the Tây Sơn launched the second attack on Saigon in 1782, Pigneau de Béhaine and Trần Văn Học brought Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's immediate family, a wife and a son, to live among these Catholic enclaves in Cambodia.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, hiding among the Catholics provided only a brief respite because the Cambodian authorities were about to arrest and turn the exiled royal family over to the Tây Sơn. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh had to send a special envoy to rescue his family while he himself suffered an utter defeat at Cần Giò in 1783.<sup>38</sup> The Nguyễn lord managed to safeguard his family but not his army; he was left with less than seven hundred soldiers. They fled and moved from island to island in the Gulf of Thailand. In this dire situation, eighty Đàng-Trong Catholics arrived from Cambodia to cast their lot with the Nguyễn. The new reinforcements were not large in number and far from enough to help Nguyễn Phúc Ánh reclaim his lordship, but it was a significant symbolic pledge of loyalty from the Đàng Trong Catholics to the Nguyễn.<sup>39</sup> In desperation, the southern military authorities wasted no time but incorporated these expatriate Catholic communities into their strategic safety net of last resort.

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<sup>35</sup> Louis-Eugène Louvet, *Mgr D'Adran*, 258.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC*, vol. 4, 620.

<sup>37</sup> *ĐNLT 2/Q. xxviii*, 311; *Sử ký Đại Nam Việt quốc triều* (hereafter *SKĐNVQT*), 2d ed. (Saigon: Tân Định, 1885), 37.

<sup>38</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 37-38; *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. i*, 213; *ĐNLT 2/Q. xxviii*, 311.

<sup>39</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. ii*, 216-218; Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC*, vol. 4 (1843), 617.

## B. The Đàng Trong Catholic network as the Nguyễn vital offensive strategy

The importance of the Catholics lay not in their numbers but in their connection with colonies of European adventurers and mercenaries. In particular, the alliance with Catholics also offered the Nguyễn a vital offensive advantage against the Tây-Son in terms of procuring modern weaponry from Europe. Technical knowledge in European military science was a game-changer in the 1777 battle. Two short sentences from *ĐNTLCB* fail to capture the significance of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's first victory. "In the eleventh lunar month, we launched a surprise attack on Long Hồ province; in the twelfth month, Saigon was under our control," wrote court chroniclers.<sup>40</sup> *SKĐNVQS* elaborates on the strategic contribution of a certain French man, *Ông Gioang* [Jean], to this naval battle. He taught the Nguyễn how to produce and use a new, more destructive artillery shell (*ống phun lửa*). One could surmise the new weaponry to be still in its crude form because the French soldier had been introduced to Nguyễn Phúc Ánh only in the late fall and the battle took place in the early winter of that same year. Nevertheless, the newly acquired explosive weaponry, irrespective of how unrefined it was, caused considerable confusion among the Tây Sơn in that battle.

The report in *SKĐNVQS* adds a helpful observation from that evening: "Not many were actually killed by the swords or by the artillery shells. Drowning was the real factor because the explosions spread a complete panic among the Tây Sơn. Many of them jumped into the river and landed on top of each other. It was an utter chaos; as a result, the Tây Sơn suffered a heavy loss."<sup>41</sup> The spectacular success of Long-Hồ battle bolstered the confidence among Nguyễn

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<sup>40</sup> "Tháng 11, đánh úp điều khiển giặc là Hòa ở dinh Long Hồ (tức tỉnh Vĩnh Long ngày nay) cả phá được. Tháng 12, tiến đánh được Sài Gòn," *ĐNTLCB 1/Q i*, 205.

<sup>41</sup> "Khi ấy ông Gioang chỉ đốt và bắn trái phá, nên quân Tây-Son bất thành linh nghe tiếng trái phá và thấy nhiều người chết, thì sợ hãi lắm vì chưa từng biết sự làm vậy, cùng chưa thấy trái phá bao giờ; nên bỏ tàu mà nhảy xuống sông. Những kẻ phải chết chém hay là bị trái phá thì chẳng bao nhiêu; song kẻ chết đuối vì sợ mà vội nhảy xuống sông đè lộn nhau, thì không biết là ngần nào," *SKĐNVQT*, 19.

loyalists in the sixteen-year-old prince who until then had not possessed the necessary credentials to be the head of the Nguyễn ruling clan. As a result of this dramatic first-round victory, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh took the title of Generalissimo (*Đại nguyên soái*). Then three years later, in 1780, he officially assumed the Nguyễn throne as the sole rightful lord of Đàng Trong.<sup>42</sup> That same Ông Gioang [Jean], who was chiefly responsible for the Long-Hồ victory, was given the task of arming the Nguyễn troops and building warships according to the European style.<sup>43</sup>

The Nguyễn continued to invest in and improve their newly acquired European artillery, which soon became their distinctive military signature in Southeast Asia as demonstrated by the Nguyễn's participation in the Siam-Burma regional conflict.<sup>44</sup> In 1786, the Court of Bangkok granted the Nguyễn refugees permission to stay in Siam in exchange for their service against the Burmese. The Nguyễn left their host with a favorable impression by their deft deployment of *ống phun lửa*. Their mastery of this military technology went on to earn for the Nguyễn not only a permit to stay but also a powerful ally over the next thirty years.<sup>45</sup> The 1777 Long Hồ battle marked the turning point for both the Nguyễn and the Catholics. The former maintained their status as a leading military player in the region; the latter obtained a rare access to the elite core of the southern ruling class.

### C. Admission of Bishop de Béhaine into the Nguyễn inner ruling circle after 1777

The *SKĐNVQT*'s account of the 1777 Long Hồ battle provides a more reliable historical context than the dynastic records regarding how Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and de Béhaine met. It is likely that, after this Nguyễn victory over the Tây-Sơn, the young lord grew in confidence and admitted the French bishop into his inner circle of trusted advisors. Nor did the bishop shy away

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<sup>42</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q i*, 205, 208.

<sup>43</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q vi*, 296; *DNTLCB 1/Q vii*, 308; L. Cardière, "Les Français au service de Gia-Long..." *BAVH*, vol. 13 (1926): 483-4; *DNLT 2/Q. xv*, 312.

<sup>45</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q ii*, 225; *DNLT 2/Q. xv*, 312.

from exercising his newly gained political leverage. On the recommendation of Pigneau de Béhaine, more European men, such as *Ông Gioang* and *Màn Hoè* [Ma-no-e or Emmanuel], came to seek employment opportunities under the Nguyễn.<sup>46</sup> The bishop and Nguyễn Phúc Ánh appeared to be on amicable terms as evidenced by the proximity of their official residences. The Gò-Mít seminary and the royal compound were within walking distance of each other. Taking advantage of his close vicinity to the royal residence, de Béhaine paid frequent visits to Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and the self-declared regent, *Đỗ Thành Nhân* (d.1781).<sup>47</sup> The accusations of other missionaries about their colleague meddling with local politics might not be without cause, given de Béhaine's growing familiarity with the Nguyễn inner circle.<sup>48</sup> The bishop indeed became more entangled with court intrigue for just simply being a confidant of the young lord in training. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh trusted the bishop enough that the young lord even confided to the missionary his plot to eliminate his overbearing regent.<sup>49</sup> In brief, after the Long-Hồ victory in 1777, the Nguyễn elites showed considerable confidence in the *Đàng Trong* Catholics and missionaries.

#### D. De Béhaine as the royal regent of Prince Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh

The Nguyễn-Catholic alliance arrived at its pivotal point in 1783 when the Tây-Son launched a second attack against Saigon.<sup>50</sup> As mentioned above, the Nguyễn suffered a total defeat at the mouth of Cần-Giờ River. Dynastic records note that Nguyễn Phúc Ánh made a remarkable escape by swimming across a river infested with alligators.<sup>51</sup> He, his family, Pigneau

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<sup>46</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 21, 33-34; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2008), 314; Stanilas Lefebvre, "Lettre III," *BAVH*, vol. 13 (1926): 366; Stanilas Lefebvre, "Lettre IV," *BAVH*, vol. 13 (1926): 368.

<sup>47</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Adrien Launay, *Histoire générale de la Société des Missions-Étrangères*, tome 2 (Paris: Téqui, Libraire-Editeur, 1894), 137-139.

<sup>49</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 22-25; *ĐNTLCB 1/Q i*, 209.

<sup>50</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q ii*, 216-218.

<sup>51</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q ii*, 217.

de Béhaine and his seminarians regrouped in Hà-Tiên before sailing to Phú-Quốc Island.<sup>52</sup>

*SKĐNVQT* describes the situation:

The king had not yet had a chance to re-arm because he was constantly fleeing from one place to another. Bishop Pierre returned to Chi-nhân Village to gather his seminarians and to bring them to Hà-Tiên. The next day, the king soon arrived with his family and their servants. After a day or two, all of them had to decamp and move to Phú-Quốc Island. It was a remote island without any inhabitants, so it was a safe place to hide from the rebels. The king settled in Bãi-bà-tích, and the bishop set his house at Rạch Trần in order to be close to the king. The bishop had with him a large supply of rice to feed his students. On the contrary, the king ran out of food, therefore, the bishop shared his provisions with the king. The people in the king's entourage and the bishop's household harmoniously lived together as one family.<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, this destitute but idyllic congenial atmosphere could not last very long. The Tây-Son soon tracked down and stormed the Nguyễn's hideout in Phú-Quốc. The fugitives once again dispersed into other islets in the Gulf of Thailand. The bishop and his group managed to escape to Chanthaburi but lost contact with Nguyễn Phúc Ánh. These two groups reconnected when a certain "Mr. Churchwarden Nam" (*ông trùm Nam*), ran into the hide-out of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his group in Hòn-dừa. *SKĐNVQT* claims that "Mr. Churchwarden Nam" offered the rest of his provisions to the entourage then went to inform the missionaries of where the Nguyễn lord was located.<sup>54</sup> Pigneau de Béhaine immediately sailed out with additional supplies to meet the royal refugees. In his letter to the director of the seminary in Paris, the bishop described the abject misery in which the Nguyễn remnants lived on Hòn Dừa Island: "I immediately went

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<sup>52</sup> *DNTLCB I/Q ii*, 217.

<sup>53</sup> "Bấy giờ vua chưa kịp dọn tàu hay là khí giải cho đặng ngũ giặc, thì lại phải trốn đi đàng nọ qua đàng kia. Đức Thầy Vê-rô về làng Chi-Nhân mà đăm học trò sang Hà-tiên. Ngày hôm sau, vua cũng đến nơi ấy cùng vợ con và những kẻ nội thị. Qua một hai ngày lại phải xuống tàu mà sang gò kia, gọi là Phú-quốc. Cõi ấy ở xa cùng chẳng có mấy người ở trong ấy, nên chẳng sợ quân giặc. Đến sau, vua lập nhà trong Bãi-bà-tích, mà Đức Thầy Vê-rô làm nhà trong rạch Trần cho gần vua. Đức Thầy Vê-rô ra sức tích nhiều gạo thóc cho đặng nuôi học trò; mà vua đã hết lương thực, nên Đức Thầy cũng phải giúp vua về sự ăn uống. Những người thuộc về vua và những người thuộc về Đức Thầy, thì là như con một nhà ở chung với nhau," *SKĐNVQT*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> "Đức Thầy Vê-rô chẳng biết vua Gia-long ẩn lại chỗ nào, nên dặn thuyền ông Ly-ốt phải sai kẻ tìm trong cõi xung quanh cho biết người ở đâu. Ông Ly-ốt đã vung lờì Đức Thầy mà sai thuyền đi tìm nhiều nơi lắm, mà chẳng gặp nơi nào. Đến sau có người bôn đạo, ở thành Chăn-ta-bun, có tên là ông trùm Nam, người có ý đi tìm lim trầm mà bán, khi tình cờ vào cõi Hòn-dừa, thì gặp vua Gia-long túng cực mọi đàng, chẳng có của gì ăn sót. Vậy ông trùm Nam có bao nhiêu gạo thì dùng cho vua hết; đoạn trở về thành Chăn-ta-bun mà tin cho ông Ly-ốt đặng biết vua ở đâu, và phải gian nan thiếu thốn thế nào," *SKĐNVQT*, 41-42.

there and found this poor prince in the most pitiful state. He had with him no more than six or seven hundred men crowded in a ship and fifteen or so smaller boats. It nevertheless was too many since he had nothing to feed them. The soldiers were already eating roots. I was obliged to offer him a part of my provisions.”<sup>55</sup> Driven to desperation by the lack of bare necessities and faced with the ever-present threat of being hunted down by the Tây-Son, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh entrusted his four-year-old son, Prince Cảnh, to the care of the bishop.<sup>56</sup> He also gave de Béhaine plenary powers to negotiate with the Court of Versailles for military assistance.<sup>57</sup> *ĐNTLCB* links up this climatic moment with another dramatic scene of separation between Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his wife:

His Majesty and Her Imperial Consort held back their tears and sent their son off. They designated Lieutenant-colonel (*Phó vệ úy*) Phạm Văn Nhân and Captain (*Cai cơ*) Nguyễn Văn Liêm to accompany the bishop and their son. When the crown prince had just left, the king took out a gold bar of twenty taels, cut it in two, and gave one part to his imperial consort. He said to her: “Our son has left. I soon will be on my way. Please stay and take care of the queen mother. I know not where and when we will meet again. Keep half of this gold bar as the token of identification for whenever we see each other again.”<sup>58</sup>

Court historians memorialized this event to demonstrate the resilience of the founders of the Nguyễn dynasty in the face of adversity.

This emotionally charged episode also attracted commentators of the post-colonial era, who regrettably depend solely on the official records about this incident, to mark 1783 as the beginning of the French colonial history in Vietnam. The proponents of this approach have

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<sup>55</sup> “Je m’y rendis aussitôt, et y trouvai ce pauvre prince dans le plus pitoyable état: il n’avoit plus avec lui que six ou sept cents homes, un vaisseau et une quinzaine de bateaux; mais c’ étoit encore beaucoup trop, puisqu’il n’avoit pas de quoi les nourrir, et que les soldats mangeoient déjà des raciness. Je fus obligé de lui offrir une partie de mes provisions,” Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC*, vol. 4 (1843), 621.

<sup>56</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*, ii, 218.

<sup>57</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*, ii, 218.

<sup>58</sup> “Vua và phi cầm nước mắt đưa con. Sai bọn Phó vệ úy Phạm Văn Nhân và Cai cơ Nguyễn Văn Liêm cùng đi. Cảnh đi rồi, vua bỏ ra một thoi vàng (vàng mười tuổi, 20 lạng) chặt đôi trao cho phi một nửa dặn rằng: ‘Con ta đi rồi, ta cũng đi đây. Phi ở lại phụng thờ quốc mẫu, chưa biết sau này gặp nhau ở nơi nào, ngày nào, hãy lấy vàng này làm tin,’” *ĐNTLCB I/Q* ii, 218; Jean Bonet, *Dictionnaire Annamite-Français*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1899), 51, 107, 399; Jean Bonet, *Dictionnaire Annamite-Français*, vol. 2, 426.

overlooked the context leading to this moment because they search for national culprits. In contrast to these two traditions of interpretation, my analysis of the *DNTLCB*, in conjunction with the local Catholic history and missionary correspondence, highlights three important points. It fills the gap regarding the circumstances surrounding the better known association between de Béhaine and his young protégé, Prince Cảnh. My investigation further establishes the turning point as the 1777 Long-Hồ battle rather than 1783 mission of de Béhaine and Prince Cảnh to France. Finally, my study places a heavier emphasis on the local and regional context instead of the often-assumed but anachronistic designation of this episode as the advent of French colonization of Vietnam. My approach, however, underscores the compelling need to pursue further the role of the larger local Catholic community rather than simply investigate relations between missionaries and royal members.

## **V. The Military Advantage of the Nguyễn-Catholic Alliance**

In order to carry out this study of local Catholic society, which, so far, consisted mainly of converts while not excluding missionaries, it is necessary to bring in another new source, a collection of fourteen letters or *Documents* written by Nguyễn Phúc Ánh between 1783 and 1791. This is because an analysis of these letters corroborates how the Nguyễn benefited militarily from having cultivated a close relationship with the larger community of Đàng Trong Catholics.<sup>59</sup> That allowed Nguyễn leaders to take advantage of the regional Catholic network for three important material and nonmaterial assets: to obtain provisions and weapons, to collect intelligence, and even to seek moral support.

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<sup>59</sup> Léopold Michel Cardière, “Les Français au service de Gia-Long: Nguyễn-Ánh et la mission, documents inédits,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926): 1-50; Tạ Chí Đại Trùng, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam từ 1771 đến 1802* (Sài Gòn: Việt Hương, 1973), 360-382.



A. The Đàng Trong Catholic network as the Nguyễn commissariat and ordnance center

The first military advantage involved the securing of provisions and weapons for the Nguyễn. The most telling sample in this collection that supports this assertion was *Document I* composed on 13 December 1783 by the Nguyễn lord while he was taking shelter on Thổ Châu Island.<sup>60</sup> He wrote to the superior of the Chanthaburi seminary, Jacques Liot (1751-1811):

With this letter, we would like to tell you that we have just met one of your coreligionists—*bồn đạo*—whom you sent to carry a secret message and to give us details. We now know perfectly everything. Moreover, about the situation here, officers and soldiers who follow us are many, but the provisions are enough only for twelve more days. This is why we sent *Sung-Đức Hầu*, our personal attaché, as well as the commandant of the troops, to bring to you two letters and seven tael of high-grade silver. Please immediately send forth a trusted person to accompany *Sung-Đức Hầu* to find *Thượng Sư* [de Béhaine] and to keep him abreast of the latest developments. As for the silver, we seek assistance from you and your coreligionists, use them to make necessary purchases for us. Buy as much as you can. When all the necessary purchases are complete, please kindly take on the extra burden to transport the provisions to us in a way that we can distribute them. Here is the letter.<sup>61</sup>

This letter shows that the lord-on-the-run knew about the network of Catholic traders in the region and recognized its strategic importance.

In another letter, written five years later, to Liot, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh appealed again to this Catholic group to assist him in feeding the troops. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh gave high praise to a certain ship owner, *Huấn Đức Hầu*, as “an attaché of ours, a devoted and conscientious servant, who also has a significant business operation in the region. I ask him to bring this letter to

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<sup>60</sup> *DNTLCB I/Q. ii*, 219-220.

<sup>61</sup> “Tờ vu Thầy cai trưởng, ngộ hay nay vừa tiếp thấy người trong bồn đạo thầy cho đem mật tín cùng các lý mới tường để sự. Lại như trên này quan quân theo thậm nhiều nhưng mà lương hưởng còn mười hai ngày nữa, vậy nên sai Thuộc nội Cai đội Sung Đức Hầu lãnh tờ nhị phong cùng thập liêm bảy lương theo người bồn đạo đem xuống. Kíp sai người tâm phúc đem Sung Đức Hầu cùng tờ xuống trình qua Thượng Sư ngộ tường cơ sự, còn thập liêm thời sở cậy Thầy cùng bồn đạo lấy vật ấy mà biện mãi lương mẽ trợ khi nguy cấp, bằng mua được bao nhiêu, đa đa ích thiện càng tốt. Như mua rồi phiền cậy bồn đạo trang tải lương ấy điều hồi giao nạp, tiện ư cấp phát. Nay tờ,” L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long...,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926): 15-19, plate I-II; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 366.

you.”<sup>62</sup> The letter continues with a cautionary reminder that only trusted members should be given the task of carrying this communication. “Sir, please send *Đội Thụ* [Sergeant Major Thụ] to bring me a letter from you. I am anxiously waiting your response. Do not ask anybody else to take on this responsibility,” writes Nguyễn Phúc Ánh.<sup>63</sup>

These two letters of 1783 and 1788 do not identify the religion of the military commander *Sung Đức Hầu*, the merchant *Huân Đức Hầu*, or Sergeant Major Thụ (*Đội Thụ*), but the given information implies that at least these three persons had frequent interactions with the Catholics, if they were not Catholics themselves. They acted as the trusted go-betweens for the Nguyễn leaders and missionaries. *Sung Đức Hầu* was among the first to make contact and ask the Catholics for help. *Huân Đức Hầu* operated a large trading network in the region and appeared well acquainted with the staff of the Chanthaburi seminary. As for the sergeant major, *Đội Thụ*, he seemed not to live with his military unit but took up his residence either near or even at the home of the French missionary, Liot. The Nguyễn authorities expanded this network by recruiting French adventurers to procure and supply rice for the Nguyễn army and navy as they advanced into the northern territories in the late 1790s.<sup>64</sup> In other words, between the 1780s to the early 1800s, the trusted followers of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and the Catholics bonded together to create a close-knit team providing material support for the Nguyễn army.

Besides the Nguyễn’s reliance on the diaspora of Đàng Trong Catholics to keep the troops supplied with food, the Nguyễn military leaders also depended on the Chanthaburi seminary as if it was their ordnance center. They frequently asked the superior of the seminary to

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<sup>62</sup> “Nay có nội viện thuyền chủ Huân Đức Hầu là tôi tâm trường và lại gia tư xứ ấy lai khứ tiện thông mới sai đệ tờ trình chiếu,” L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long...,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926): 43, plate XIX; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 378.

<sup>63</sup> “Lại như tờ ấy thì sai Đội Thụ đệ tỵ bẩm văn cho tường đệ sự, vật sai tha nhân liệu sự bất thành. Trí ý. Nay tờ,” L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926): 43, plate XIX; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 378.

<sup>64</sup> Victor Olivier de Puymanel, “Lettre V,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1926): 370; Jean-Baptiste Chaigneau, “Lettre VII,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1926): 373.

make contact with European colonies in the region in order to acquire the latest European weaponry. As further revealed in the letters of early summer of 1788, the Nguyễn force knew that their permanent hold on the southern province was far from certain because they had won, then again almost immediately lost control of Saigon. They had experienced this pattern of victory followed by defeat three times already between 1777 and 1784. This fourth time, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh turned to the Catholic network to secure his victory. He requested that Liot urgently make contacts with European mercenaries and send reinforcements immediately to Saigon. He also gave Liot authority to make concessions with traders, so the Nguyễn could buy more weapons. “When the new troops arrive at Siam, we will ask Father Superior to urge them to come here as soon as possible. Even if they have not arrived yet, we need that information as well.... Moreover, when trading ships come from Europe, please direct them to sail to us immediately. We will buy their weapons at a price that we mutually agree upon. We are much in need of new supply of weapons. We will exempt them from all taxes,” writes Nguyễn Phúc Ánh.<sup>65</sup> In other words, the correspondence between Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and the superior of the seminary demonstrates that the Nguyễn force capitalized on the Đàng Trong Catholic network in the region and turned it into their military commissariat and ordnance supplier.

#### B. The Đàng Trong Catholic network as the Nguyễn intelligence center

As suggested in *Document I*, another contribution of the Catholic network was to provide the Nguyễn with intelligence. In this letter, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh wrote to thank Jacques Liot for sending a report about the situation in the territory controlled by the Tây-Son. The Nguyễn did not rely solely on the Catholics to monitor the internal affairs of Đàng Trong, because the

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<sup>65</sup> “Nhu binh giúp có ra đến đó thì Cai Trường dục ra cho kíp, bằng chưa ra thì tin tức làm sao... Lại như thương tàu phương Tây có qua thì Cai Trường dục ra ngoài này đặng Ta y giá biện mãi binh khí tiện dụng binh vụ mà Ta đều tha thuế hạng,” L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long...,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926), 45-46, plate XXI-XXII; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 379.

constant flow of the Nguyễn loyalists who left the Tây-Sơn to join their Nguyễn lord likely also brought intelligence.<sup>66</sup> But Catholics played a larger role in the regional diplomacy. These pockets of Catholic communities in Thailand and the Chanthaburi seminary operated as diplomatic missions to advance Nguyễn interests. In the letter written in January of 1785 to the same missionary, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh mentioned a certain member of the seminary, Father Minh or Master Minh (*thầy cả Minh*), as an intelligence liaison between the seminary in Thailand and the Nguyễn. Significantly, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh mistakenly applied the title “father” (*thầy cả*) to this person. In fact, missionary records attest that during this time there were only three indigenous priests: Phaolô Hồ Văn Nghị, André Tôn, and Jean Nhứt.<sup>67</sup> The letter, nevertheless, suggests that this Master Minh made himself available at the disposal of the exiled lord rather than spending his time in the seminary. Perhaps because of his language ability, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh assigned Master Minh to assist in negotiations with the Siamese court. The letter states:

We send a chief-assistant mandarin to carry a letter to the viceroy informing him about the course of events. We also send *thầy cả* Minh to help in this affair. He will bring a note to you. Whatever may happen, when *thầy cả* Minh arrives, you should evaluate and decide the best action to respond to the situation. When there is an available boat, please send *thầy cả* Minh back here to report to us. We want to know what the real attitude of the Siamese was. Please handle these matters with your utmost discretion.<sup>68</sup>

It is important to note that the Nguyễn frequently relied on the Catholic network as their backup diplomatic channel for gathering intelligence. For instance, four years after the account of Master Minh, in 1789, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh sent an official envoy to bring gifts to the Siamese king and

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<sup>66</sup> ĐNTLCB 1/Q, iii, 227.

<sup>67</sup> Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1, 358-359; “Nous étions alors réunis au nombre de sept: trios prêtres du pays, deux Pères franciscains, M. Liot et moi. Il fut décidé que M. Jean, l’un des trois prêtres du pays, se retireroit au-dessus de la cour dans un endroit que les chrétiens lui avoient déjà préparé; que M. André se cacheroit au-dessous, sur les confins du Camboge, et que M. Paul, qui n’etoit pas encore bien rétabli d’une maladie grave, fueroit avec nous,” Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC*, vol. 4 (1843), 619.

<sup>68</sup> “Vậy sai quan tham tướng đệ tờ trình tâu Nhị vương sự cố, lại có sai thầy cả Minh tâu sự vào đó, phải đạt phiên tờ ngõ tường âm tín. Như cơ thường, biển đường nào thì thầy Minh tâu đó sự cơ hiệp liệu cùng theo. Bằng có ghe, phiên tu đưa thầy Minh trở về khai tâu ngõ tường hư thiệt cơ yếu Xiêm tình. Trí ý,” L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long...,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926), 21, plate V; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 368.

his viceroy. When he had heard nothing from his officials, he once again resorted to the Catholics:

In the eighth lunar month, we engaged in a battle with the Tây-Son rebels. We successfully took back Saigon from the rebels and pacified the area. Immediately thereafter, we sent an ambassador to thank the Buddha King and his viceroy for their assistance. These are only humble gifts, but they express our heartfelt gratitude. Has our envoy arrived? Have they delivered the presents? We do not know why we have not yet received any news from our ambassador.<sup>69</sup>

From this excerpt, we can surmise that by the end of the 1780s, apart from being a source of intelligence, many Đàng Trong Catholics offered their service as agents in unofficial diplomatic channels in support of the Nguyễn interests in Southeast Asia.

### C. Missionaries as confidants for the inner ruling elites

Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's fourteen letters also hint at the third vital contribution of Catholics to the survival and the revival of the Nguyễn: they boosted the morale of the inner elite circle. In *Document I*, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh did not hide his military vulnerability or that of his followers, who had enough provisions for only twelve more days.<sup>70</sup> The Nguyễn ruling class trust in the missionaries can be seen in other letters as well. They openly divulged their doubts and their regrets to these confidants, as encapsulated by *Document III* and *Document V*. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh wrote these two letters to Liot and Pigneau de Béhaine after a catastrophic defeat in his third attempt to retake Saigon in the winter of 1784. In this campaign, the Nguyễn faced not only another military loss, but their political credentials suffered an irreversible damage. The Tây-Son

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<sup>69</sup> “Và tháng 8 ta đánh Tây tặc vừa yên, về ở Sài-Gòn, có dạy sứ đem lễ vật vào tạ đức Phật Vương cùng Nhị Vương, tuy là bạc lễ, dùng thảo tấm lòng. Như sứ ta đã vào đến nơi mà dung lễ ấy, hay là chưa vào đến nơi, có sao chẳng thấy tiêu tức tín hồi,” L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long...,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926), 48, plate XXIV-XXVI; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 381.

<sup>70</sup> L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long...,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926), 17; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 366.

once again destroyed the Nguyễn force and an army of 20,000 Siamese along with their fleet of 300 warships.<sup>71</sup> Nguyễn Phúc Ánh wrote to Liot to rue his miscalculation:

The Siamese soldiers indulged their passion for all kinds of hideous crimes. They pillaged. They violated women and girls. They robbed from the people. They killed indiscriminately the young and the old indiscriminately. Thus, the rebels increased their power day after day while the Siamese army progressively diminished. Because of this, on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, we suffered a defeat.<sup>72</sup>

According to the dynastic account, after the Tây Sơn captured and executed one of the leading Nguyễn generals, Chu Văn Tiếp (1738-1784), the whole Nguyễn-Siamese enterprise crumbled. This general had been a vital link in the chain of command between the Nguyễn force and the Siamese army. Without his presence, the communication within the coalition broke down. The Nguyễn commanders could no longer impose their authority over the Siamese soldiers. Echoing the same sentiment of regret revealed in Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's letter, the *ĐNTLCB* elaborates:

The king saw how ruthless the Siamese army was. They sacked wherever they went. Our people hated them. The king said to his generals: "To have a country is to win the hearts of the people. Since the death of Chu Văn Tiếp, no one else could exert any discipline on the Siamese troops. We cannot bring ourselves to have Gia-Định but lose the support of the people. Let us withdraw our force rather than cause this havoc on the people."<sup>73</sup>

Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his loyal followers once again fled to the kingdom of Siam. *Document V* shows that, after the fiasco of the Nguyễn-Siamese campaign, mutual distrust arose between the Nguyễn leaders and the Siamese court.<sup>74</sup> Nguyễn Phúc Ánh resolved to escape the political clutches of the Siamese court. Immersed in this precarious situation, the Nguyễn lord found missionaries a safe soundingboard for his fears. In his letters between 1786 and 1788, he

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<sup>71</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. ii*, 221-223.

<sup>72</sup> "Nay thời Xiêm binh đại tứ lỗ lược, dân nhơn phụ nữ, lược nhơn tài vật, túng sát bất dung lão thiếu. Vậy nên Tây tặc binh thể nhứt thanh, Xiêm binh thể nhứt suy, cố ấy qua tháng chạp ngày mùng 8 vừa thất lợi, các giai hội tán," L. Cadière, "Les français au service de Gia-Long...", *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926), 20, plate V; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 367-368.

<sup>73</sup> "Vua thấy quân Xiêm tàn bạo, đến đâu là cướp bóc đày, nhân dân ta oán rất nhiều, bảo các tướng rằng: 'Muốn được nước phải được lòng dân. Nay Chu Văn Tiếp đã mất, quân Xiêm không ai chế ngự được. Nếu được Gia Định mà mất lòng dân thì ta cũng không nở làm. Thà hãy lui quân để đừng làm khổ nhân dân,'" *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. ii*, 222.

<sup>74</sup> L. Cadière, "Les français au service de Gia-Long...", *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926), 30-31, plate IX-X; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 369-372.

disclosed, “At first glance, we could believe that all was lost; eventually, however, we recognized that the foundation of our state is still solid and that the Nguyễn family is appointed to receive the great blessing.”<sup>75</sup> His message conveyed a cautious optimism about the prospect of re-establishment of Nguyễn rule. On four different occasions, he expressed his resignation to fate, (“Man proposes, but Heaven disposes,”) when he faced a bleak future, even up to the early spring of 1788.<sup>76</sup> *Document IX* best captures the atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding between the two groups: “Although we and Father Superior are citizens of different kingdoms, we share the common feelings as if we come from the same hometown. We met, and we have known each other for a long time. We know each other’s deep heartfelt sentiments.”<sup>77</sup> The intense emotion captured in these letters indicates the unprecedented level of rapport that missionaries established within the core of the Nguyễn ruling circle.

Unlike the conventional acceptance of 1783 as the turning point in the Nguyễn-Catholic history, this chapter’s analysis and cross-reference of various sources show that the alliance began with the 1777 Long-Hồ battle. This chronological revision not only shifts the emphasis from the Eurocentric to the regional context, but also brings to the surface the larger role of the Đàng Trong Catholic minority group in the history of early modern Vietnam. While the Nguyễn ruling class faced a bleak future, they strategically cultivated the alliance with the Đàng Trong Catholics who in turn appeared particularly eager to demonstrate their loyalty to the Nguyễn.

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<sup>75</sup> “Nga văn nhược thất, thủy tri quốc tộ do tồn. Nguyễn gia hồng phúc lại tôn sư cửu đánh văn hồi,” L. Cadière, “Les Français au service de Gia-Long: Nguyễn Ánh et la Mission, documents inédits,” *BAVH* 13, no. 1 (1926), 25; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 370-371.

<sup>76</sup> “Thùy tri nhơn nguyện như thử, thiên ý vị nhiên,” Cadière, “Les Français au service...,” *BAVH* 13, no. 1 (1926), 27. “Chẳng ngờ nhơn nguyện như thử, thiên ý vị nhiên,” Cadière, “Les Français au service...,” *BAVH* 13, no. 1 (1926), 36. “Thùy tri thiên lý vị nhiên bất như kỳ nguyện!” Cadière, “Les Français au service...,” *BAVH* 13, no. 1 (1926), 38. “Gẫm biết nhơn sự đa quai, thiên tâm nan tín,” Cadière, “Les Français au service...,” *BAVH* 13, no. 1 (1926), 40; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 371-372, 373, 375, 376.

<sup>77</sup> “Và ta cùng thầy Cai trưởng nhơn tuy biệt quốc nghĩa tợ đồng hương, tri ngô mấy lâu tâm tình đà tỏ biết,” L. Cadière, “Les français au service de Gia-Long...,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926), 40; Tạ Chí Đại Trường, *Lịch Sử Nội Chiến ở Việt Nam*, 376.

This Nguyễn-Catholic alliance directly contributed to the survival and eventually the revival of the Nguyễn. First, the local Catholic sea-trade network operated as the commissariat for the Nguyễn. Second, Đàng Trong converts put themselves at the Nguyễn's disposal, from collecting intelligence to serving as its ad hoc ordnance supplier as well as advancing Nguyễn diplomatic interests in the region. Third, when the situation deteriorated, missionaries engendered an atmosphere of trust for a group of downtrodden Nguyễn leaders who accepted those missionaries as their confidants. During these last three decades of the eighteenth century, Catholicism made significant inroads into the Nguyễn inner ruling circle by gaining their sympathetic tolerance and in some cases even winning some conversions among certain prominent members of the ruling clan and high profile military leaders. The next section identifies and verifies some of these Đàng Trong Catholic personages.

## **VI. Prominent Đàng Trong Catholic Personages**

The task of restoring Catholic identity to some prominent members in the Nguyễn ruling class is as yet far from complete, and the conclusions that may be drawn from available information about given individuals falls within the realm of probability rather than certainty because the Nguyễn's hostile policy toward Catholicism later drove many of these converts and sympathizers underground. Dynastic records rarely mention and even suppress the Catholic identity of these prominent members in their official registries. Further, missionaries rarely offered the full name of their converts, but rather just the names of the baptismal patron saint and the convert's given name. Moreover, according to the traditional etiquette of showing respect to people in high positions, Christian local history often refers to these individuals only by their sobriquets such as some truncated versions of their official titles. However, three notable and



identifiable persons who we know professed Catholicism were an indigenous priest, Paul Hồ Văn Nghị (ordained 1775-d.1810), Phạm Văn Nhân (1744-1815), and Tống Phước Đạm (?-d.1799).

A. Phaolô Hồ Văn Nghị (ordained 1775-d.1810)<sup>78</sup>

As reported in the dynastic history, a certain messenger, Hồ Văn Nghị, who received just one passing remark, turns out to be an important link between the Nguyễn ruling elites and the local Catholic community. From the entry in the sixth lunar month of 1787, the official history, *DNTLCB*, reports: “When Pigneau de Béhaine traveled with the prince Cảnh to France, Phạm Văn Nhân and Nguyễn Văn Liêm ordered Hồ Văn Nghị to bring this news to his majesty in Bangkok. He [Hồ Văn Nghị] remained there to serve his majesty.”<sup>79</sup> In contrast to this brief and solitary mention of Hồ Văn Nghị in the official records, the local Catholic history, *SKĐNVQT*, identifies Hồ as the local priest who rescued, hid, and fed Nguyễn Phúc Ánh for three months in the fall of 1777. As the Tây-son intensified their search for the fugitive prince, Hồ Văn Nghị then had to turn to his bishop, who had recently fled to Cambodia, for further assistance. According to *SKĐNVQT*, if there had been no Hồ Văn Nghị, the young fugitive prince would not have had a chance to reclaim his ancestral throne as the lord of Đàng Trong. This native priest played a key role in the 1777 Long-Hồ victory by introducing not only the bishop but also “*Gioang*,” a French expert in artillery science. Through Hồ Văn Nghị, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh enlisted that French soldier.<sup>80</sup> A letter written in 1780 by a contemporary missionary, Julien Faulet (1741-1783),

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<sup>78</sup> Trương Bá Càn, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1, 297; *SKĐNVQT*, 135-136.

<sup>79</sup> “Bá Đa Lộc đem hoàng cả Cảnh sang nước Đại Tây, Phạm Văn Nhân và Nguyễn Văn Liêm cho Hồ Văn Nghị phụng biểu về hành tại ở Vọng Các báo tin, rồi ở lại hầu vua,” *DNTLCB 1/Q. ii*, 226.

<sup>80</sup> “Áy vậy tông tộc nhà Nguyễn đã gần tuyệt, còn lại một ông Nguyễn-anh cùng ba anh em mà thôi. Chẳng khỏi bao lâu thì ba anh em áy lại phải sự khốn khó mà chết hết. Vậy còn một ông Nguyễn-anh mới nên mười bốn hay là mười lăm tuổi mà thôi.

Ông áy tuy khỏi chết, song đã phải túng cực lắm vì chẳng còn của gì, chẳng còn ai giúp cùng chẳng biết tin ai nữa. May còn một đứa nhà trò có lòng trung tính, ban đêm đã kiếm đặng một chiếc thuyền nhỏ, thì hai thầy tớ liền đem nhau vào rừng lau mà trốn. Tình cờ lại gặp thuyền ông Phao-lô là thầy cả bản-quốc, cũng đang chạy giặc. Bấy

corroborates the existence of this historical figure in *SKĐNVQT*. The letter mentions a certain indigenous priest—a close collaborator with the bishop: “It is Father Paul who nourished and hid the young king in his small boat, who taught him about the Monsignor and our Holy Religion.”<sup>81</sup> On another occasion, when Pigneau de Béhaine had to defend himself against criticisms from other missionaries for what was said to be meddling in local politics and thus bringing negative consequences on the entire mission, the bishop claimed that his role in this affair was only minimal. He was simply engaged in courtesy visits with the king and mandarins. The bishop firmly argued that it was the king—not the bishop—who wanted to protect the Christians in return for the good deeds that a priest and the local Christians had done for the king. In this letter, the bishop did not explicitly name Hồ Văn Nghị as Faulet had; nevertheless, the bishop made a tribute to “*un missionnaire cochinchinois*” by whom “the king was first saved... and then was fed for more than a month by the Christians.”<sup>82</sup> The contribution of Hồ Văn Nghị at this historical juncture is crucial because the bishop’s letter refers to an indigenous priest with the

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giờ ông Nguyễn-anh tuy chưa quen biết thầy Phao-lô, song đã biết là thầy đạo, thì xưng mình là người họ người kia và xin thầy Phao-lô cứu. Thầy Phao-lô liền chịu và đem qua giấu trong thuyền mình và chèo thẳng về Hà-Tiên giao người cho Đức-Thầy Vê-rô. Khi ấy Đức-Thầy đã sang bên Cao-mên, cho nên thầy cả Phao-lô vội vàng gửi tin cho người biết sự ấy cho kịp.

Ông Phao-lô có ý giấu ông Nguyễn-anh trong nhà Đức-Thầy Vê-rô cho kỹ; nên chẳng cho ai biết. Song cũng khó lắm, vì quân Tây-Son đã biết tỏ ông ấy đã trốn sang Hà-Tiên, nên đã truyền tìm bắt người mà nộp. Vậy qua một tháng, thì chẳng còn lẽ nào mà giấu trong nhà nữa, nên ông Phao-lô phải đưa ông Nguyễn-anh lên trên rừng nơi vắng vẻ. Đoạn hoặc ông Phao-lô hoặc thầy giảng kia, tên là ông Toán, thỉnh thoảng lên bới cho mà ăn mà thôi. Vậy ông Phao-lô chịu khó mà liệu cách khôn ngoan thể ấy đặng hai ba tháng, thì có công với ông Nguyễn-anh cả thể lắm. Vì chừng nếu chẳng có thầy cả ấy thì ông Nguyễn-anh chẳng khỏi phải bắt.

Khi ấy quan phủ kia, tên là Nhất-trình, nghe tin ông Nguyễn-anh hãy còn, thì lấy một ít quân mạnh bạo đi tìm mà giết. Quân Tây-Son canh giữ đồn kia áp xứ Đông-nai và Cao-mên, những ra sức tìm cho đặng ông Nguyễn-anh. Dần dần thì nó biết đặng ông ấy còn ẩn mình trong thuyền ông Phao-lô trong Rạch-Giá. Cũng một khi ấy Đức-Thầy Vê-rô ở Cao-mên mà về tìm được ông Nguyễn-anh; người lại đem một người pha-lang-sa, tên là Gioang, có nghề vò cùng bạo gan đâm và có tài đánh giặc lắm” *SKĐNVQT*, 17-18.

<sup>81</sup> “C’est le père Paul qui a nourri et cache le jeune roy dans son petit bateau, qui a fait connoître Mgr et la sainteté de notre religion,” Catherin Marin, *Le Role des Missionnaires Francais en Cochinchine aux XVII et XVIII siècles* (Paris: Églises d’Asie, 1999), 131.

<sup>82</sup> “L’évêque d’Adran se defend aussi de ces accusations en notant ‘que l’union qu’ils (les missionnaires et lui-même) ont avec les mandarins ne peut faire ombre à qui que ce soit, qu’il ne visite le Roi par bienséance que 10 ou 12 fois l’année parce que ce Roi sauvé par un missionnaire cochinchinois qui ne le connoissoit pas et nourri plus d’un mois par les chrétiens conserve la mémoire de ce bienfait et les protégé,’” Marin, *Le Role des Missionnaires Francaise en Cochinchine*, 132.

term “*missionnaire*,” this is very rare, compared to designations more commonly used for local clergy in missionary reports, such as “*un prêtre du pays*” or “*un prêtre indigène*.” In other words, the bishop considered Hồ as his equal partner in this enterprise.<sup>83</sup> Like the bishop, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh also held this priest in high regard not only for saving him but also for convincing the Catholics in the region to throw their lot in with the Nguyễn right after the Long-Hồ victory. Soon after his first recapture of Saigon in 1778, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh designated Hồ Văn Nghị his royal representative to accompany his military generals to recruit these Catholic refugees in Cambodia.<sup>84</sup> The direct association between this Hồ Văn Nghị and Hồ Đình Hy, the intendant of the imperial treasury under the Tự Đức reign, cannot be established, but a logical surmise of some family connections between them appears within the realm of reasonable possibility. The juxtaposition of the local Catholic history, *SKĐNVQT*, with the Nguyễn records and letters from missionaries thus reveals important new details of the political activities of the old Đàng Trong Catholics, both in the case of Hồ Văn Nghị, as well as for the new converts among the Nguyễn military leaders.

#### B. Phạm Văn Nhơn/Nhân (1744-1815)

Phạm Văn Nhân was one of the two Nguyễn mandarins to whom Nguyễn Phúc Ánh gave the task of accompanying Prince Cảnh and Bishop de Béhaine to France.<sup>85</sup> Because of his association with this diplomatic mission (1786-1789), he is plausibly one of the Nguyễn Catholic elites. However, the Nguyễn official history, *DNTLCB*, gives other accounts about Phạm Văn Nhơn’s military involvements in Đàng Trong while he was supposedly on the three-year diplomatic mission to Europe.<sup>86</sup> An examination of *DNTLCB*, the *Imperial Biographies* (*Đại*

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<sup>83</sup> Marin, *Le Role des Missionnaires Francais*, 133; Louis-Eugène Louvet, *Mgr D’Adran*, 73.

<sup>84</sup> Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1, 316.

<sup>85</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. ii*, 218, 226; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1, 330.

<sup>86</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. iii*, 228, 232, 238; *DNTLCB 1/Q. iv*, 244.

*Nam Liệt Truyện* [ĐNLT]), missionary correspondence, French official reports, and the local Catholic history shows that Phạm Văn Nhân did not complete the voyage. He and other original members of the delegation, including Nguyễn Văn Liêm, Hồ Văn Nghi, and Trần Văn Học, only shuttled back and forth between Bangkok and Pondicherry for three years but never went to France.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, a closer study of these sources reveals that while they were preparing and waiting for the journey, Bishop de Béhaine successfully persuaded Phạm Văn Nhân and all non-Catholic members of the delegation, except Prince Cảnh, to convert to Catholicism.<sup>88</sup> This discovery shows that Nguyễn high politics were becoming increasingly Catholic between the time of the Bangkok exile and the early years of the Gia Định regime.

The family of Phạm Văn Nhân had served the Đàng Trong lords for many generations. His ancestors came from the same Tống-Son prefecture in Thanh-Hoá as Nguyễn Hoàng (1525-1613), the founder of the Nguyễn seigneurial clan.<sup>89</sup> Phạm Văn Nhân was already in the service of the Nguyễn before the rise of the Tây Sơn; he then followed Nguyễn Phúc Ánh into exile in Bangkok.<sup>90</sup> This act of loyalty later gained him admittance to a club for the privileged few within the Nguyễn administration, “Bangkok meritorious ministers” (*Vọng Các Công Thần*).<sup>91</sup> In 1783, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh entrusted Prince Cảnh to the care of Pigneau de Béhaine. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh asked Phạm Văn Nhân, who was the lieutenant colonel (*phó vệ úy*) of the imperial guard, and another mandarin, Nguyễn Văn Liêm, to escort his son on this diplomatic mission.<sup>92</sup> Because of this official history account, the missionary history and subsequent historians of Catholic history

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<sup>87</sup> ĐNTLCB 1/Q. ii, 226; ĐNLT 2/Q. xii, 312.

<sup>88</sup> SKĐNVQT, 44, 86, 135.

<sup>89</sup> ĐNTLCB 1/Q. li, 907.

<sup>90</sup> ĐNLT 2/Q. vii, 138.

<sup>91</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 219.

<sup>92</sup> ĐNTLCB 1/Q. ii, 218, 223; L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche et de droite au culte du The Miêu,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 136.

assume that these two mandarins accompanied the bishop and the prince for the rest of the trip to France, but that is not true.<sup>93</sup>

The *Imperial Biographies* (*Đại Nam Liệt Truyện [ĐNLT]*) resolves the ambiguity caused by *ĐNTLCB*. Regarding Phạm Văn Nhân, *ĐNLT* not only confirms that he did not go to France, but also explains why his trip was cancelled: “In the winter of year 1785 (Át Ty), upon arrival at Pondicherry, India (*Tiểu Tây*), the delegation received the news that France was experiencing a state of domestic turmoil. After staying there for a while, Nhân boarded a ship to go back to Bangkok.”<sup>94</sup> The four other entries in *ĐNTLCB* further support the thesis that he did not go to France. First, in the seventh lunar month of 1787, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh assigned Phạm Văn Nhân the task of guarding and serving the queen mother.<sup>95</sup> Second, in the third lunar month of 1788, he was appointed commander of the Long-Xuyên front.<sup>96</sup> Third, in the eighth lunar month of 1788, he was in Saigon as a navy officer.<sup>97</sup> Finally, in the third lunar month of 1789, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh promoted him into the rank of commander of the Left Banner (*Ban Trục Tả*).<sup>98</sup>

The case is strengthened when this information is cross-checked with the reports from the French government. A complaint against de Béhaine’s proposal from the governor of Pondicherry, David Charpentier de Cossigny (1740-1801), and the reluctant words of welcome to the envoy to France by Marshal Charles de Castries (1743-1801) clarify that the two recently baptized mandarins did not in fact travel from India to France with the bishop, Prince Cảnh, Tống Phước Súc, and the three retainers who did disembark in Paris. In the letter where

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<sup>93</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 136-137; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, Tập I, 330.

<sup>94</sup> “Mùa đông năm Ất Ty, vừa đến Tiểu Tây gặp nước Đại Tây có biến, nên ở lại đấy. Nhân sau đi thuyền biển về Vọng Các,” *ĐNLT 2/Q. vii*, 139; *ĐNLT 2/Q. xv*, 312.

<sup>95</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. iii*, 228.

<sup>96</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. iii*, 232.

<sup>97</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. iii*, 238.

<sup>98</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. iv*, 244.

Cossigny described the reason for his uneasiness and his sense of moral obligation to finance the trip for the whole group to his superiors:

I could not refuse the request from the bishop to receive the royal funding to pay for his voyage on the *Malaban* of Captain Pignatel. He will travel with a group comprising a child who is a son of a deposed king of Đàng Trong, a member of a royal family, and two or three Đàng Trong servants.... The bishop asked if there would be any help from the government. I replied that the report from Mr. Coutenceau to Your Excellency appeared to be unhelpful for his proposal. Thus, His Grace decided to present the case by himself directly to Your Excellency.<sup>99</sup>

When Marshal de Castries heard about the arrival of the Đàng Trong embassy at Lorient in February 1787, de Castries did not hide his frustration in his letter to de Béhaine at the futility of the whole enterprise. De Castries' letter, however, attests that, besides the Đàng Trong prince, only one other high profile member also went to France:

Sir, I received your letters. I am honored to have you writing to me on 8 July 1785 from Pondichery, on 8 September 1786 from Île de France, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of this month from Lorient where you arrived with a son of the Đàng Trong king, one of the royal members, and three other men in the retinue. It was much desired that you not take on the responsibility to help them until the intention of the king be ascertained. But, in the situation where things are right now, you may bring them to Paris. I inform the superior of the *Séminaire des Mission-Étrangères* about this. You need to work out with him any questions about their lodgings.<sup>100</sup>

The evidence from these letters not only confirms that neither Phạm Văn Nhân nor Nguyễn Văn Liêm could join the overseas mission, but it also explains that the French governor in Pondichery placed a limit on how much he was willing to pay for this enterprise from the royal purse.

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<sup>99</sup> “Monseigneur, je n’ai pas cru devoir refuser à Mgr l’évêque d’Adran la demande qu’il m’a faite de lui accorder passage, aux frais du roi, sur le bâtiment de commerce le Malabar, capitaine Pignatel. Mgr l’évêque part avec un enfant d’un roi de Cochinchine déthroné, un autre prince de ses parents et deux ou trois serviteurs cochinchinois... Interpellé par Mgr l’évêque d’Adran sur ce qu’il avait à espérer du gouvernement, je me suis fait un devoir de l’instruire que le compte qui vous avait été rendu par M. Coutenceau n’était pas à l’avantage de son project, ce qui l’a déterminé à aller lui-même vous le présenter,” Louis-Eugène Louvet, *Monseigneur d’Adran: Missionnaire et patriote* (Paris: Librairie Delhomme & Briguet, 1900), 117-118.

<sup>100</sup> “J’ai reçu, Monsieur, les lettres que vous m’avez fait l’honneur de m’écrire de Pondichéry, le 8 juillet 1785, de l’île France, le 8 septembre 1786 et le 5 de ce mois de Lorient où vous êtes arrive, avec le fils du roi de la Cochinchine, un de ses parents et trois gens de leur suite. Il eût été à desirer que vous n’eussiez pas pris le parti de les amener, avant d’être informé des intentions du roi, mais dans l’état où en sont les choses, vous pouvez vous rendre avec eux à Paris. J’en préviens le supérieur du Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères avec lesquels il est nécessaire que vous vous entendiez pour les logements,” Adrien Launay, *Histoire générale de la Société des Missions-Étrangères*, vol. 2 (Paris: Téqui, 1894), 236.

Therefore, the bishop had to reduce the original number in the delegation from ten, including himself, down to six. They were Prince Cảnh, Tổng Phước Sóc—the prince’s maternal uncle, three servants, and de Béhaine.<sup>101</sup> The emissaries returned from France to India in 1788 and finally arrived at Saigon in the early summer of 1789.<sup>102</sup> A comparison between Phạm Văn Nhân’s activities from 1787 to 1789 and the Versailles mission from 1786 to 1789 clearly shows that Phạm Văn Nhân did not join the delegation to France.

Nevertheless, the inability of this lieutenant to join the diplomatic mission did not lessen his role in the Nguyễn ruling circle. He was still one of those most trusted officials and had direct access to royalty since the Nguyễn Lord chose him to protect the queen mother while she was taking shelter on Phú-Quốc Island.<sup>103</sup> Unlike many of his *Võng Các Công Thần* companions, who did not survive the Nguyễn post-reunification political purge, Phạm Văn Nhân continued to enjoy the high esteem of his ruler until his death at age seventy-one.<sup>104</sup> Gia-Long granted him a state funeral and ordered his court to shut down to observe four days of mourning.<sup>105</sup> Successors of Gia-Long listed him along with seventeen other non-imperial members as “Meritorious Ministers” (*Công-Thần*) and enshrined his spirit tablet (*bài vị*) in the imperial pantheon *Thế-Miếu*.<sup>106</sup>

This investigation as to whether Phạm Văn Nhân went to France or not might at first appear inconsequential; nevertheless it opens a new window into the founding years of the Nguyễn dynasty by paying more attention to players other than Prince Cảnh and de Béhaine than does the conventional historiography. Minor players, such as Phạm Văn Nhân, not only outlived

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<sup>101</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. i*, 208.

<sup>102</sup> Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1, 336; *DNTLCB 1/Q. iv*, 248.

<sup>103</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137.

<sup>104</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137; *DNLT 1/Q. li*, 907.

<sup>105</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. li*, 907.

<sup>106</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137; *DNTLCB 2/Q. xxvii*, 354.

the prince and the bishop, but also retained their political and social status within the Nguyễn bureaucracy. In 1808, one of his three sons, Phạm Văn Trí (d.1844), married the second oldest daughter of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh (*Bình Hưng trưởng công chúa Ngọc Quỳnh* [d. 1849]).<sup>107</sup>

The question whether Phạm Văn Nhân was a Catholic, however, remains open. Neither the evidence at the *Thế Miếu* imperial shrine for *Công-Thần* or the official records yield any information on the religious affiliation of Phạm Văn Nhân. But new supplementary information arises from a letter written on 20 March 1785, by Pigneau de Béhaine as well as additional details from *SKĐNVQT*. From India, the bishop wrote to his superior and confreres requesting special funding to educate the young Đàng Trong prince who was now under his care. The bishop ends the letter with a hopeful note: “I arrived at Pondichery in the end of February of 1784.... Two official wardens and six escorting soldiers of this child are already well instructed [in the faith] and will be baptized in the eve of Pentecost.”<sup>108</sup> *SKĐNVQT* elaborates further about the identities of the envoys:

In the early months of 1786, His Excellency was preparing to travel to France with the oldest son of the Annamese king. This was in the forty-fifth reigning year of Cảnh-hung or Bình Ngô. At that time, the Crown Prince was about six or seven years old. The king also had four Annamese retainers to accompany the prince. One of these four retainers was the younger brother of the queen. Sóc was his name. In addition to these four, the king appointed two high-ranking mandarins as fulltime instructors for his son. They were not yet believers of our religion, but their hearts were open to be converted. Thus, Bishop Vê-rô baptized them. He carefully instructed them to recite our prayers in order to increase their zeal for our religion.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *ĐNTL 2/Q. vii*, 143; *ĐNTL 2/Q. iii*, 76.

<sup>108</sup> “J’arrivai ici, à Pondichéry, vers la fin de février 1784... Les deux mandarins gouverneurs de cet enfant, et six autres soldats qui sont pour sa garde, sont déjà bien instruits et seront baptisés la veille de la Pentecôte,” Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC*, vol. 4 (1843): 623.

<sup>109</sup> “Đầu năm 1786, là Cảnh-hung tứ thập ngũ niên, cùng là năm Bình-Ngo, thì người dọn mình đi sang Tây làm cùng con đầu lòng vua An-nam. Khi ấy ông Đông-cung mới sáu bảy tuổi. Vua cũng cho bốn người An-nam khác theo giúp con, mà trong bốn người An-nam ấy thì có em bà Hoàng-hậu, tên là Sóc. Lại có hai quan lớn vua sai làm thầy dạy con. Bây giờ người ấy chưa có đạo; nhưng mà bởi đã sẵn lòng trở lại, thì Đức Thầy Vê-rô làm phép rửa tội cho, cùng ra sức dạy dỗ cho thuộc kinh mà sinh nên lòng mộ sự đạo,” *SKĐNVQT*, 44.



This local Catholic history not only confirms Phạm Văn Nhân's conversion to Catholicism but also gives the names of two other new converts, Nguyễn Văn Liêm and Tống Phước Súc, who otherwise remain nameless in dynastic records and in missionary reports.

In sum, Pigneau de Béhaine personally took care of Prince Cảnh for six years when Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his wife entrusted the young prince to the bishop in the seventh lunar month of 1783. After the failed attempt to retake Saigon in the winter of 1784, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh finally approved the Đàng Trong mission to France led by Pigneau de Béhaine and a retinue of ten members including Phạm Văn Nhân. They then sailed to India in November 1784. They had to wait in Pondichery for another year and half because the French governor of Pondichery was not convinced of any French prospects in this mission. In the early summer of 1786, the remaining delegation of six left for France and arrived at Lorient in February 1787. Meanwhile, Phạm Văn Nhân returned from India to Đàng Trong to join Nguyễn Phúc Ánh. According to the *DNTLCB*, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh continued to count on Phạm Văn Nhân to liaise with the pro-Catholic camp. When the Nguyễn force was making its way to reconquer the territory from the Tây-Son, Phạm Văn Nhân, Prince Cảnh, and Pigneau de Béhaine often worked together as a team.<sup>110</sup> Phạm's conversion to Catholicism occurred without much fanfare. He appeared to be able keep the practice of his new religion without attracting much attention or denigration from his colleagues at the Nguyễn court. That would not be the case with his superior, Tống Phước Dạm.

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<sup>110</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 292, 302-303.

C. Tổng Phước Đạm (d.1794)<sup>111</sup>

The conversion of Phạm Văn Nhân to Catholicism did not generate as much political shock among the Nguyễn ruling elites as did Tổng Phước Đạm's. The local Catholic history, *SKĐVQT*, never mentions Phạm Văn Nhân but has many stories about a certain inspector general (*Ông Giám*). *SKĐNVQT* compounds the riddle of the identity of this "*Ông Giám*" further by referring to similar events in the same corpus but under another sobriquet, His Excellency of Central Banner (*Ông Dinh-Trung*). Both of these names refer to Tổng Phước Đạm.

To identify the Tổng Phước Đạm mentioned in the official history and *Ông Giám* and *Ông Dinh-Trung* listed in a local Catholic history as the same person demands methodical detective work. *SKĐNVQT* first introduces him: "There was a very important mandarin, *Ông Giám*, who at first was severely critical of our religion. His aversion toward us had led him to many debates with the bishop. As a result of these open discussions, the mandarin decided to receive baptism. From that point on, he zealously observed our way of living. His conversion gave grounds for other mandarins to heighten their suspicion and distaste for the bishop."<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, this event had to have happened before 1799 because Bishop de Béhaine died in October of that year. Fortunately, another missionary source also mentions the conversion of this high-ranking mandarin. The superior of the Chanthaburi seminary, Jacques Liot, gave a brief biography of a recently deceased Catholic mandarin, *Ông Giám*, in his June 1795 letter. This letter speaks deferentially about a certain *Ông Giám* as "the leading judge..., the king's confidant, and one of the most learned men in the kingdom."<sup>113</sup> As a customary practice of

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<sup>111</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. vii*, 314; *ĐNLT 2/Q. viii*, 178-181.

<sup>112</sup> "Khi ấy có quan lớn kia, tên là ông Giám, thuở đầu thì ghét đạo, mà bởi đã nói lẽ đạo với Đức-Thầy nhiều lần, thì quyết trở lại chịu đạo. Từ ấy về sau người ra ngoan đạo; nên các quan khác một ngày một thêm ghét Đức-Thầy," *SKĐNVQT*, 86.

<sup>113</sup> "Le premier juge, nommé *Ong Giam*, confidant du Roi et un des plus letters du royaume..." Jacques Liot, *LEC* (1797), 162.

respect for a notable personage, this local history does not give a full name to this Catholic mandarin, but only the sobriquet, *Ông Giám*.<sup>114</sup> There are two possible candidates with this name. The *Ông Giám* may refer to either Phạm Văn Nhân or Tổng Phước Đạm because the Nguyễn rulers awarded both of them the rank of *giám-quân* (inspector general).

This *Ông Giám* may have been the same Phạm Văn Nhân of the earlier discussion. The Nguyễn authorities bestowed two different posthumous titles on Phạm Văn Nhân: Inspector of Thần Sách Army—Chief Commander of Five Battalions (*Thần Sách Quân Giám Quân, Chương Cơ, Tướng Sĩ, Kiêm Ngũ Dinh Quân Sĩ*) and Exceptional Meritorious Minister, Brave Warrior, Marshal Commander of the Right Banner, Imperial Councilor (*Tá Vận, Công Thần, Đặc Tấn Tráng Võ, Thượng Tướng Quân, Hữu Quân Đô Thống Phủ Chương Phủ Sự, Thái Phó*).<sup>115</sup> And, the first title included the rank of a *giám-quân*. As for Tổng Phước Đạm, when he served under Lord Nguyễn Phúc Khoát (1714-1765), he had already attained the rank of commander of the Central Battalion—*Trung Dinh Giám Quân*.<sup>116</sup> In other words, Phạm Văn Nhân was awarded the rank of inspector general or the *giám-quân* only after his death in 1815; Tổng Phước Đạm during his active service. Therefore, the *Ông Giám* in Jacques Liot’s June 1795 letter and in the account of *SKĐNVQT* refers to Tổng Phước Đạm and not Phạm Văn Nhân.

Cross-references between *ĐNTLCB* and *SKĐNVQT* as well as missionary letters further establish that Tổng Phước Đạm rather than Phạm Văn Nhân was *Ông Giám*. First, in the chapters telling the story of the conversion of *Ông Giám*, *SKĐNVQT* mentions that Prince Cảnh was about thirteen or fourteen years old.<sup>117</sup> Since Prince Cảnh was born in 1780, the conversion of

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<sup>114</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochinchina* (London: Longman, 1824), 280.

<sup>115</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137.

<sup>116</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137.

<sup>117</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 86-87.

this mandarin must have occurred either in 1793 or early in 1794.<sup>118</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, however, adds another name, “*Ông Dinh Trung*,” into the puzzle when it recounts a conflict between Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his Catholic general, under the heading, “The King forces *Ông Dinh-Trung* to kowtow to the Imperial Altar.”<sup>119</sup> According to *DNTLCB*, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh rebuilt his ancestral shrine in Saigon in the second lunar month of 1794 after many years of neglect under the Tây-Son rule.<sup>120</sup> The two accounts in *SKĐNVQT*, one about *Ông Giám* and another about *Ông Dinh Trung*, and the reconstruction of the imperial shrine bracket these events between 1793 and 1794.

Finally, the two last entries from *DNTLCB* in the eleventh lunar month of 1793 and the eleventh lunar month of 1794, contain essential information to unlock this riddle. Court historians wrote, “According to the royal order, the crown prince was given a post to defend Diên-Khánh citadel. With permission from the king, Pigneau de Béhaine and the royal instructors accompanied the crown prince to his new assignment. His Majesty also directed the Assistant General of the Left Banner (*Phó tướng Tả quân*) Phạm Văn Nhân, the Commander of the Central Banner (*Giám quân Trung dinh*) Tống Phước Đạm... to be at the disposal of the crown prince.”<sup>121</sup> Then in the eleventh lunar month of 1794, *DNTLCB* mentions both his name, Tống Phước Đạm, and his title, *Giám quân Trung dinh*, together when it reports on his death.<sup>122</sup> The complete official title, *Giám quân Trung dinh*, indicates that *Ông Dinh-Trung* and *Ông Giám* of *SKĐNVQT* were the same person, namely Tống Phước Đạm, and not Phạm Văn Nhân because Phạm’s official rank at this time was still the assistant general (*phó tướng tả quân*).

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<sup>118</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. i*, 208.

<sup>119</sup> “Vua muốn ép ông Dinh-Trung lạy tổ tiên vua,” *SKĐNVQT*, 91.

<sup>120</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q.vii*, 306.

<sup>121</sup> “Sai Đông cung nguyên soái Cảnh quận công trấn thành Diên Khánh, cho Bá Đa Lộc và bọn thị học đi theo. Khiến Phó tướng Tả quân Phạm Văn Nhân, Giám quân Trung dinh Tống Phước Đạm... cùng các tướng sĩ đi theo để điều bát,” *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 302.

<sup>122</sup> “Giám quân Trung dinh là Khâm sai cai đội Tống Phước Đạm chết. Đạm là người trầm tĩnh nhiều mưu lược. Việc từ Vọng Các hồi loạn do Đạm hết sức đề nghị. Vua rất quý trọng. Mùa đông năm ngoái, theo giúp Đông cung trấn thành Diên Khánh, hiệu lệnh nghiêm minh, không nề người thân quý. Mùa thu này Đông cung trở về, Đạm vì có bệnh ở lại, đến đây chết, đưa quan tài về Gia Định, làm lễ hậu táng,” *DNTLCB 1/Q. vii*, 314.

This discovery of another politically prominent convert, Tống Phước Đạm, among the eighteen “meritorious founders” (*công thần*) of the Nguyễn dynasty demonstrates the increasing presence of indigenous Catholics in national politics in the late eighteenth century.<sup>123</sup> Tống Phước Đạm already occupied a position of great influence high in the Nguyễn bureaucracy when the Tây-Son first appeared in the political sphere of Đàng Trong. In 1774, he served as a military advisor for the last two Nguyễn lords, Nguyễn Phúc Khoát (1714-1765) and Nguyễn Phúc Thuần (1754-1777).<sup>124</sup> A year later when the Tây-Son troops were pushing up north and the Trịnh were moving down south to Huế, the Nguyễn court had to flee to Saigon. Lord Duệ-Tông promoted Tống Phước Đạm from military advisor to the rank of commander, *Trung dinh Giám quân*.<sup>125</sup> When Nguyễn Phúc Ánh succeeded Duệ-Tông as the lord of Đàng Trong, the young lord recruited Tống Phước Đạm as his military strategist.<sup>126</sup> Tống’s importance in the early Nguyễn administration can be deduced both from the special exemption granted from conscripted hard labor to the soldiers of his banner by Nguyễn Phúc Ánh in 1788 and from the posthumous titles that the Minh-Mạng emperor granted to Tống in 1824 and then in 1831.<sup>127</sup> According to the nine-tier ranking system, his latest title, “*Tá Vận, Công Thần, Vinh-Lộc Đại Phu, Hiệp Biện Đại Học Sĩ, Thiếu Sư, Thái Tử Thái Sư,*” placed him in the first tier of the mandarin system. Furthermore, the Nguyễn dynasty recognized him as the possessor of both the first *Thái Tử Thái Sư* and second *Thiếu Sư* positions within the ten subcategories of this senior tier. In other words, this posthumous title suggests that in life he attained the status of the imperial minister par excellence of the third-in-command after Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and Crown Prince Cảnh.<sup>128</sup> When

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<sup>123</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137-138.

<sup>124</sup> *ĐNTLTB Q. xi*, 181; L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137.

<sup>125</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 137; *ĐNTLTB Q. xii*, 189.

<sup>126</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q. iii*, 227; L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914) : 137.

<sup>127</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q. iii*, 233; *ĐNTLCB I/Q. xxvii*, 353-355; L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 138.

<sup>128</sup> L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche...,” *BAVH*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1914): 128.

Nguyễn Phúc Ánh finally took full and permanent control of the southern provinces of Đàng Trong in 1788, he put these provinces under martial law and appointed Tổng Phước Đạm to oversee the daily operation of the new administration.<sup>129</sup> Since this military commander was assigned to be the public face of the Nguyễn, his personage must have been widely known. Unsurprisingly, *SKĐNVQT* uses a popularized version of his soubriquet, “Ông Giám” or “Ông Dinh-Trung,” to refer to him without any further qualification.

During this period, Tổng Phước Đạm and Pigneau de Béhaine had frequent contacts with each other which led to Tổng Phước Đạm’s conversion to Catholicism. According to the letters from Jacques Liot and from Pigneau de Behaine in 1795, the attitude of the late Commander Tổng changed from extreme opposition to ardent belief in Catholicism when he was on the military campaign in Nha-Trang and Phú-Yên in the winter of 1793.<sup>130</sup> Unlike Phạm Văn Nhân, Tổng Phước Đạm did not shy away from professing his new faith, although that led him into direct conflict with other Nguyễn elites, including Nguyễn Phúc Ánh.<sup>131</sup> Because of his political stature, his acceptance of baptism and his zealous expression of his new faith deeply upset the more traditional camp in the Nguyễn’s Gia Định administration. They claimed that the missionary’s casuistry had beguiled their military commander. To prevent further damage, nineteen mandarins submitted a petition to Nguyễn Phúc Ánh to remove Prince Cảnh from the presence of Pigneau de Béhaine about the time Prince Cảnh that was elevated to the status of crown prince.<sup>132</sup> The crisis lasted for seven months until the Nguyễn faced a new wave of attacks from the Tây Sơn.<sup>133</sup> In dire need to restock their arsenal, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh asked French mercenaries under his command to go to Goa and Malacca to buy more weapons, as mentioned

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<sup>129</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. iii*, 234, 236.

<sup>130</sup> Jacques Liot, *LEC* (1797), 162; Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC* (1797), 184-185; *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 302-303.

<sup>131</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 91-93.

<sup>132</sup> *SKĐNVQT*, 86; Liot, *LEC* (1797), 163; *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 291.

<sup>133</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 300.

above.<sup>134</sup> He also reinstated de Béhaine as the advisor for the crown prince.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance, nevertheless, began to splinter as more Catholics appeared in high politics. The political ramification of this brief demotion of de Béhaine will be explored more in details in the next chapter when we look into Minh Mạng's personal sentiment behind his anti-Catholic policy.

## **VII. Beginning of the Conflict**

The opposition of traditional mandarins to Catholicism grew quickly as the Nguyễn authorities increased their efforts to secure their position in the southern provinces of Đàng Trong. Learning from previous failures the importance of holding Saigon, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh also understood the necessity of gaining a permanent foothold in Đàng Trong where he could gain broader popular support and win acceptance from the local elites. Rigid Catholic liturgical demands and theological interpretations regarding local customary practices suddenly flared up as a political sore point for the authorities trying to incorporate various factions in the realm into a single religio-political framework. The Nguyễn ruling class saw Catholicism as an unwelcome and unnecessary obstacle to consolidating their political authority.

By the late 1780s, the Nguyễn authorities grappled with three major unresolved problems lingering since the Nguyễn leaders fled Huế in 1777: to establish the legitimacy of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh as claimant of the Nguyễn seigneurial throne, to win over the Đông Sơn party, and to restore public confidence after the fiasco of the Nguyễn-Siamese coalition.

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<sup>134</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi, 302.*

<sup>135</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi, 302-303.*

### A. Efforts to secure the Nguyễn seigneurial throne

At the time of the fourth recapture of Saigon, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh was still a young lord in his late twenties. Historians of the Nguyễn often portray him as the sole Nguyễn survivor from the Tây Sơn uprising, but in *DNTLCB*, between the fall of Huế in 1774 and the rise of Emperor Gia-Long Nguyễn Phúc Ánh in 1802, eighteen other surviving members of the Nguyễn seigneurial clan were mentioned.<sup>136</sup> Among these potential claimants to the Nguyễn throne, a younger brother of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's father, Nguyễn Phúc Thăng [Tôn Thất Thăng] (1761-1819), was a potential formidable challenger. While Nguyễn Phúc Ánh was trying to consolidate his power in Đàng Trong, the sudden arrival of his uncle at Saigon in the sixth lunar month of 1793 might have triggered a concern.<sup>137</sup> According to the bloodline, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh was not a direct offspring of either of the last two lords, Nguyễn Phúc Thuận and Nguyễn Phúc Dương.<sup>138</sup> Thus, the presence of any other claimants on the political scene probably amounted to some slightly personal threat to Nguyễn Phúc Ánh.

The young Nguyễn lord also needed to regain the trust and the support of the Đông Sơn militia which had formerly supported him for four years after the first capture of Saigon in 1777. However, in 1781, this alliance came to a fatal end when Nguyễn Phúc Ánh orchestrated a coup to eliminate the leader of the Đông Sơn party, Đỗ Thành Nhân, who had made himself the regent.<sup>139</sup> Eight years later, one of the first acts of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh after arriving at Đàng Trong was to negotiate a truce with the Đông Sơn militia through the marriage of his sister, Princess Ngọc Du, and the current Đông Sơn leader, Võ Tánh.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Catherine Marin, *Le rôle des missionnaires français en Cochinchine aux XVIII siècles* (Paris: Églises d'Asie série histoire, 1999), 126; John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China* (London: Longman, 1824), 87; *DNTLCB I*, 1057-1058.

<sup>137</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q*, vi, 294.

<sup>138</sup> *DNTLTB*, 188-191; *DNTLCB 1/Q*, i, 204-205.

<sup>139</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q*, i, 209-210; *SKĐNVQT*, 21-25.

<sup>140</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q*, iii, 232.



Nguyễn Phúc Ánh could not make reparations for the harm that fell on the Đàng Trong population when he made an alliance with the Siamese force in 1784. Unfettered access to Siam, however, made this alliance indispensable and a time-proven strategy of last resort underlying the remarkable ability of the Nguyễn to come back after a string of failures. As late as 1793, the new leaders of Đàng Trong remained far from confident of securing the south, for they still relied on the Siamese navy in Hà Tiên and 50,000 foot soldiers waiting in Cambodia as their backup. Since the 1784 fiasco, the Nguyễn learned to contain the Siamese force on the other side of the border. They managed to appease the Siamese generals with gifts in order to keep them from crossing over into the Đàng Trong territory while still being ready to enter at a moment's notice.<sup>141</sup> Because of these three mounting tasks in the political climate of uncertainty, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh was in dire need of a like-minded inner circle who could publicly display an undivided loyalty and a complete ideological support for Nguyễn authority and legitimacy.

#### B. Construction of political legitimacy on the myth of ancestral legacy

In the effort to reassert the Nguyễn rule, to justify their failures, and to garner the acceptance of the local elites, the Nguyễn ruling elite began constructing a myth of their ancestral legacy.<sup>142</sup> They re-dotted the landscape of Đàng Trong with a state-sponsored renovation of ancestral shrines to commemorate the Nguyễn family and those who had suffered for their sake.<sup>143</sup> The letter of appointment of Prince Cảnh as the crown prince in 1793 encapsulates this ancestral myth-building project:

A father having a son is similar to the heaven containing a pure spirit. When the pure spirit expands, the Way of Heaven manifests. A clan has branches; a river has creeks. Deep and extended creeks produce a long river. For this reason, sage emperors and

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<sup>141</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q*, vi, 298, 301; L. Barisy, "Lettre XII," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1926): 416.

<sup>142</sup> Nola Cooke, "The Myth of the Restoration: Dang-Trong Influences in the Spiritual Life of the Early Nguyen Dynasty (1802-47)," in *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*, ed. Anthony Reid (London: Macmillan, 1997), 269-295.

<sup>143</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q*, v, 277-280; *DNTLCB 1/Q*, vii, 306.

illustrious kings always contemplate naming their crown princes even during peacetime. While we are now in the midst of pacifying the rebels in the east and in the west, how can we dare to neglect the task of selecting a successor to the throne? Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh, you are my oldest son and the future ruler of the kingdom. As for your schooling in classics, ancient rites, and ritual music, you study with the most learned. As for your endeavor in cultivating a mind, a heart, and principles of ancient sages, you continue to rely on the royal councils. Because of your youth, your future is unknown like that of everybody else. Because of your life experiences, the Mandate of Heaven surely rests on you. Thus, We grant you the title Crown Prince Cảnh Duke of East Palace (*Đông cung Cảnh quận công*). This appointment is done according to the will of the people and the advice of the council. It is your duty to obtain a shining virtuous heart like the morning star. It is your responsibility to create an ocean of benevolence to those in heaven and on earth. Transmit your talents to future generations. Your work will be like the rays of the sun and the moon. Gather blessings and secure prosperity. Ensure that the line of succession will be written forever in the Jade Book. You are promoted to the rank Generalissimo of the Left Banner (*nguyên súy lĩnh dinh Tả quân*). Your residence is now bestowed with all the dignity of a palace for a generalissimo (*súy phủ*). Your correspondence now bears an official authority as royal instruction (*giáo*).<sup>144</sup>

This letter of appointment touches on three major concerns of the day: the effort to claim the past legacy, the assessment of the current turbulent situation, and the goal to secure the future. Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh first assessed the current political situation. He admitted that the prospect of peace in the realm and stability for the Nguyễn regime had not yet been achieved. Constant rebellions were still a palpable present reality. Second, he responded to this threat with a political ideological program that searched and laid claim on their ancestral branches and roots as the proof of their legitimacy to rule. Third, by appointing Prince Cảnh as the crown prince, he hoped to quell infighting and plots within the seignorial clan as well as to present a symbol of stability and continuity to the public. In this overarching religio-political structure, the Nguyễn

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<sup>144</sup> “Cha có con như trời có nguyên khí. Nguyên khí lớn lên, thì đạo trời mới thịnh. Họ có ngành như sông có nhánh, nhánh trên mà sâu, thì dòng sông càng xa. Cho nên thánh đế minh vương, đương lúc thái bình, còn nghĩ lập ngôi thái tử; huống nay đánh đông đánh tây, đương lúc dẹp loạn, há quên dựng người nối ngôi! Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh là con cả của nhà, là vua sau của nước. Học thì lo cầu văn chương lễ nhạc, gần theo những bức hiền lương; đạo thì lo tìm tâm pháp thánh hiền, nhờ cậy các quan sư phó. Tuy trạc tuổi hãy còn non trẻ, việc nên chẳng chẳng khác mọi người; nhưng gian hiểm đã từng trải qua, lịch số trời tất ở con đó. Nay lập làm Đông cung Cảnh quận công, để thống nhất lòng dân, hợp lời nghị luận. Phải làm cho tâm đức xứng ánh sáng của Tiên tinh; khiến cho người đời thâm on sâu của Tiểu hải. Mưu hay để cho con cháu, hoa vàng rõ như nhật nguyệt sáng thêm; điềm lành vun đắp cơ đồ, lịch ngọc dài như càn khôn muôn thuở. Cho làm nguyên súy lĩnh dinh Tả quân; chỗ ở gọi là Súy phủ; văn thư trao xuống cho gọi là giáo,” *DNTLCB I/Q. vi, 291*.

promotion of the public veneration of the dead was correlated with the disintegration of a recent bond between them and the Catholics. A papal decree issued about a half century earlier was the reason. *Ex quo singulari* of 1742 roundly condemned any forms of ancestor worship and technically disallowed any further official discussions on the issue.<sup>145</sup> Catholics, therefore, rapidly found themselves *personae non gratae* in the Nguyễn administration.

### C. Tension between Catholic religious rites and Nguyễn religio-political rituals

It is, nevertheless, important to sound a note of caution: not all Catholics or missionaries fully endorsed the papal proscription of ancestral worship; nor did the local secular authorities enthusiastically embrace all aspects of popular religious sentiment. Missionaries had observed an obsessively intense religious atmosphere among the Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài people.<sup>146</sup> Their popular religiosity often found expression in festivals and funerals where villagers ritually paid honor and respect to a loosely undefined amalgamation of deities ranging from either historical or mythical common ancestors to a large spectrum of spirits. Behind these ritual practices, kinship bonds and local hierarchy were established. Recognizing the social importance of these elements, seasoned missionaries had made efforts to find a common ground amidst the local religious sentiments. Pigneau de Béhaine was one of these missionaries. He resisted pressure from the more ardently camp within the Catholic community, especially from the younger and newly-arrived missionaries, to ask the Nguyễn authorities to issue an ordinance to exempt the Catholics from participating in and contributing to these local festivals. Jacques Liot wrote a letter on 20 June 1795, defending the decision of his bishop against the accusations of younger missionaries. Liot praised the bishop for acting prudently because a request for such religious

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<sup>145</sup> Reginald E. Reimer, Beverly J. Butcher, Thomas C. P. Yu, and TH. Kobong, "Ancestor Worship," in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott Sunquist (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 20-21.

<sup>146</sup> Peter Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (New York: Orbis Book, 1998), 24-28.

exemption would directly run against the Nguyễn religio-political ideology and would do more harm than good.<sup>147</sup> If missionaries deemed toleration of these ritual expressions to be necessary, then secular authorities were also compelled to incorporate these religious ritual celebrations into the official rites of the new Nguyễn state. At these events, local notables often asked their co-villagers to contribute money to cover the expenses for the ritual celebrations. Unfortunately, contribution frequently turned into extortion. The abuse must have been a vexing and widespread problem since political authorities had to codify their prohibitions of such extortion into both the Lê Code and then the Gia-Long Code.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, the efforts by seasoned missionaries and Nguyễn officials to find a common ground seemed to be the exception rather than the rule.

D. Religious zealots among new converts and new missionaries

While Bishop de Béhaine showed ambivalence in enforcing the Roman order, the new convert, Tống Phước Đạm, unequivocally expressed his commitment to the ritual practices of his new religion. Therefore, his enthusiasm made him an acute embarrassment to the court for many reasons. He was not only the highest-ranking mandarin but also a senior member of the pre-Tây-sơn generation. In other words, Tống Phước Đạm had become a potent symbol of continuity between the earlier seigneurial legacy and Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's fledgling administration. The presence of Tống's presence at the court bolstered the new young lord's political legitimacy, most concretely among the Đàng-Trung old guard. Tống's sudden change of attitude and behavior shocked the innermost core of the Nguyễn ruling elite. He vehemently refused to kowtow in front of the imperial altar and would not compromise even after Nguyễn Phúc Ánh

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<sup>147</sup> "M. l'Evêque d'Adran pressé depuis longtems par les nouveaux missionnaires de demander à sa majesté un écrit qui exemptât les Chrétiens de contribuer aux superstitions, s'y étoit toujours refuse, parce qu'il regardoit cette demarche comme imprudente et pouvant avoir de mauvaises suites." Jacques Liot, *LEC* (1797), 166; *SKĐNVQT*, 94.

<sup>148</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, Tạ Văn Tài, and Trần Văn Liêm, *The Lê Code—Law in Traditional Vietnam: A Comparative Sino-Vietnamese Legal Study with Historical-Juridical Analysis and Annotations*, vol. 2 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987, 118-119); Nguyễn Văn Thành, Vũ Trinh, and Trần Hựu, *Hoàng Việt Luật Lệ (Luật Gia Long)* [hereafter *HVLL*], vol. 3 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 1994, 405-416); *ĐNTLCB 4/Q*. cxxix, 234.

attempted repeatedly to reason with him. The incident came about when the court wanted to ascertain the truth behind a rumor about Tống Phước Đạm's baptism. *SKĐNVQT* details:

On the anniversary of the death of the previous king, His Majesty instructed two mandarins to bring in the Catholic mandarin, his excellency Dinh-Trung, to serve as an official attendant in the ancestral rites ceremony. The Catholic mandarin stood his ground and refused to participate. The next day was the birthday of the Crown Prince; all the mandarins, in their official attire, came to pay their respects to the prince. His excellency Dinh-trung went along with other officials to attend this event. His colleagues took this opportunity to force him to go to the royal compound. They told him: "The king does not make you worship any gods or spirits. He just wants you to pay respect to his royal ancestor. There is nothing against the practice of your religion. You need to obey the imperial wish." He again refused. Other officials seized his arms and forced his head down in front of the imperial altar. The Catholic mandarin protested loudly: "I only worship the Trinitarian God."

The mandarins dragged him to the king. They denounced him: "Lord Dinh-trung performed his kowtow not to the imperial ancestral altar but to his God." The king replied to the accusers: "Just count that act as the fulfillment of his official duty." The king then turned to the Catholic official to excoriate him: "We have generously bestowed privileges on you for all these years, then why do you return to Us with such ingratitude? We neither force you to commit apostasy nor to worship Buddha. We only ask you to perform the kowtow ritual to Our ancestors. Why should that be considered as an act of transgression against the practice of your religion?"

His excellency Dinh-trung responded: "Your Highness, I am always willing to kneel and show my utmost expression of loyalty to Your Highness. How could you say that I held the ancestors of Your Highness in contempt? Your ancestors, however, had passed away, thus I believe that they had no power to protect anybody. They could not appear to consume the offerings in the imperial shrine. Since the ancestors of Your Highness are not present here, I have no obligation to kowtow. My religion forbids such an empty deceiving act."

The king then asked, "You venerate your saints, don't you? Then, tell me what the difference is between Our ancestors and your saints. Your saints also died. They have not appeared again. Yet, you worship them but not Our ancestors. We know that Our ancestors are not here. For sure, they no longer eat or drink, but We observe these rituals to show Our filial piety. The honorable master, Bishop Vê-rô, also assures Us that there is no harm in participating in the ancestral rites."

His excellency Dinh-trung answered: "My religion clearly forbids us from participating in any form of ancestral rites. How could any bishops advise to the contrary?" "We will clarify with the bishop," challenged the king. "As for you, We will send you to the Siamese court. The Siamese king will make an example of you. He will teach you how to kowtow," mocked the king. The Catholic mandarin did not give up: "The Siamese king can do whatever he wants. I will not kowtow." The king retorted: "As you rightly say, since the Siamese king orders his subjects to worship Buddha, you may disobey. As for Us, We expect you to pay respect to Our ancestors as when they were still alive. So, when We die, would you not kowtow to Us?" His excellency Dinh-trung

did not respond. The other court officials chimed in: “He tells us that when Your Highness has reached the end of your longevity, he will not kowtow to Your Highness. He has said to us in many different occasions that he performs kowtow only to the living but not to the dead.” The king abruptly switched the conversation with an acerbic ending remark: “What a disloyal servant (*ngịch thần*) he is!”<sup>149</sup>

The loud protest of *Ông Dinh-Trung*, “I only worship the Trinitarian God,” may sound strange and awkward in the narrative, but it provides two important elements: the historical accuracy of *SKĐNVQT* and a window into the daily life of the local Catholics. This howl of protest reflects remarkably well the requirement that the Roman Catholic Church was imposing on converts of that era. A few years prior to this incident, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith instructed the *Đàng Ngoài* Catholics to make just such a public protest when they were asked to participate in quasi-religious civic events. The directive given on 5 April 1785 said:

Letter of Propaganda to the same missionary on whether Christians who work outside of their village may pay the traditional tribute money or wine for goods or services of the village when the funds (or wine) are often used for a common village feast where the

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<sup>149</sup> “Có một lần, nhằm ngày kị vua, thì vua dạy hai quan đại thần kia ép quan lớn có đạo, tên là Dinh-trung, bỏ vào trong hoàng-cung mà giúp việc tế lễ và bái tổ tiên. Ông ấy vững lòng chẳng chịu làm việc ấy. Ngày hôm sau, là lễ khánh đản ông Đông-cung, thì các quan phải mặc áo châu mà đi mừng ông ấy. Vậy ông Dinh-trung mặc áo mà đi làm một với các quan lạy ông Đông-cung, đoạn có ý về. Song các quan kéo người vào trong hoàng-cung và ép lạy tổ tiên vua mà rằng: ‘Vua chẳng ép bái bụt thần đâu, một ép lạy vua đời trước, thì ông chẳng có tội gì; cho nên phải vâng phép vua.’ Ông Dinh-trung chẳng chịu mà cãi lâu; đoạn các quan cầm tay ông ấy bắt cúi đầu xuống mà lạy. Bấy giờ ông phân phó rằng: ‘Tôi lạy một Đức Chúa Trời ba ngôi mà thôi.’

Bởi đó các quan điệu ông ấy đến trước mặt vua mà tâu rằng: ‘Ông Dinh-trung đã lạy; song chẳng chịu lạy tổ tiên vua, một Đức Chúa Trời ba ngôi mà thôi.’ Vua bảo rằng: ‘Đã lạy thì thôi.’ Đoạn vua quát rằng: ‘Trẫm nuôi mày đã bấy lâu nay; cũng ban chức cao trọng cho mày, mà mày vô ơn bội nghĩa chẳng chịu lạy tổ tiên trẫm làm sao? Trẫm chẳng ép mày bỏ đạo hay là lạy bụt thần, một ép mày lạy tổ tiên trẫm, thì nào có tội gì?’

Ông Dinh-trung rằng: ‘Lạy Đức Bè-trên, tôi sẵn lòng lạy Đức Bè-trên, thì lẽ nào tôi khinh dể tổ tiên Đức Bè-trên làm sao được? Nhưng mà các đấng ấy đã qua đời rồi, thì tôi tin thật chẳng có sức mà vung hộ cho ai đặng, cùng chẳng hiện xuống trong hoàng-cung mà hưởng những của tế ấy. Vậy tổ tiên Đức Bè-trên chẳng có mặt đây, thì tôi chẳng lạy; phép đạo cấm sự ấy, vì là đều dối trá.’

Vua rằng: ‘Chớ thì mày chẳng quen kính thờ các thánh nam nữ sao? Ấy vậy tổ tiên trẫm, và các thánh có khác nhau đều gì? Các thánh ấy cũng đã chết rồi mà chẳng hiện ra nữa. Vì vậy mày lạy các thánh, mà chẳng chịu lạy tổ tiên trẫm hay sao? Trẫm cũng đã biết tổ tiên chẳng có mặt đây, cùng chẳng ăn uống của gì; nhưng mà trẫm lạy tổ tiên mà báo hiếu. Thầy Giám-mục Vê-rô cũng nói với trẫm rằng: lạy tổ tiên thế ấy thì chẳng tội gì.’

Ông Dinh-trung rằng: phép đạo cấm sự ấy, mà Giám-mục nói chẳng có tội sao được?’ Vua rằng: trẫm hỏi lại Thầy Giám-mục; còn về phần mày thì trẫm sẽ gởi cho vua Xiêm, cho vua ấy bắt mày lạy.’ Ông Dinh-trung rằng: ‘Vua Xiêm nói làm sao, thì mặc vua ấy, tôi không lạy.’ Vua rằng: ‘Mày nói làm vậy thì phải, vì chung vua Xiêm bắt người ta lạy bụt; còn trẫm thì có ý ép mày lạy tổ tiên trẫm, cũng như khi còn sống vậy thôi. Vậy bao giờ trẫm băng rồi, thì mày cũng không lạy trẫm sao?’ Ông Dinh-trung làm thỉnh lặng, thì các quan tâu rằng: “Sau, khi Đức Bè-trên đã đặng trăm tuổi đoạn, thì ông ấy chẳng lạy, vì đã nói với chúng tôi nhiều lần rằng: mình lạy kẻ sống mà thôi; còn kẻ chết rồi thì chẳng lạy làm chi.’ Vua rằng: “Thằng này là nghịch thần.’ --Đoạn thì vua nói qua đềm khác,” *SKĐNVQT*, 91-93.

games and songs are dedicated to the local god/spirit and the wine, before they drink it, is placed on the altar of the same titular god. The Propaganda responds that *it is allowed so long as they do so under protest* and do not participate in the games, songs or any other superstitious rituals in honor of the local god.<sup>150</sup>

Ông Dinh-Trung was therefore closely observing the Church ritual regulation. His refusal to recognize the ancestral veneration, even as a civic gesture, however, alarmed the Nguyễn authorities. In the context of the religio-political atmosphere of the day, his non-compromising stand amounted to utter contempt for Nguyễn rule. The conversion of Tống Phước Đạm to Catholicism marked the rising presence of a significant religious minority group in the history of Vietnam. Tống's refusal to perform the ancestral rituals proved a harbinger of worse things to come between the Nguyễn and Catholics. The increasing visibility of the Catholics in the Nguyễn high political class, however, was a two-edged sword. On the one hand, Catholics enjoyed easier access to the members of the upper class in order to win their sympathy or even their conversion. On the other hand, Catholics' close proximity to the inner ruling circle shifted their internal dissensions from personal level to the national level, and this eventually led to the Nguyễn discriminatory policy against Catholicism in the later years.

### **VIII. Conclusion to Chapter Two**

The public execution of the intendant of the imperial treasury Micae Hồ Đình Hy in 1857 has triggered historical investigation into whether he was a part of a secret Catholic party inside the Nguyễn court. Unfortunately, comparing and contrasting the Nguyễn official history with a local Catholic history, the collection of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's letters, and missionary correspondence cannot confirm the existence of a "secret party." Rather, it reveals in detail the discrepancy in the dynastic history regarding where, when, and how the founder of the Nguyễn

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<sup>150</sup> Ray R. Noll, ed., *100 Roman Documents Relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy (1645-1941)*, trans. Donald F. St. Sure (San Francisco: The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1992), 69.

dynasty met Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine. The investigation into the 1783 Chanthaburi meeting reveals an informal but crucial Nguyễn-Catholic alliance that historians of early modern Vietnam have missed. Through force of circumstances in Đàng Trong between the fall of Nguyễn seigneurial rule in Phú Xuân and the rise of the Nguyễn dynasty in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, the southern ruling elites and the Catholics—local converts and missionaries—came into frequent contact earlier than 1783.

Not in 1783 but as early as 1777, Nguyễn military leaders learned to capitalize on the strategic importance that the small group of Đàng Trong Catholics could bring to their survival and revival. The Nguyễn strategists incorporated the Catholic regional trading network to serve as their own commissariat and source of ordnance. Besides being the suppliers of provisions and weapons, the missionary hub in Pondicherry (India) and the colony of Đàng Trong Catholics in Chanthaburi (Siam) functioned as unofficial diplomatic missions for the Nguyễn in the region. Converts and missionaries actively lobbied Southeast Asian powerhouses to support the Nguyễn cause. They also tirelessly recruited European mercenaries to side with the Nguyễn force. European military science, which these Europeans brought, gave the Nguyễn a crucial edge over the Tây-Son. Because of the vital roles the Catholics played during these critical years, a few influential members of the ruling class showed a greater sympathy toward and even converted to Catholicism. This Nguyễn-Catholic partnership did not last very long. In their close proximity of each other, both sides discovered their utterly irreconcilable differences. The Nguyễn religio-political ideology clashed with the post-Tridentine Catholic interpretation of local ancestral rites. The bitter wrangling within the inner ruling circle left such painful memories that subsequent Nguyễn rulers systematically played down their earlier association with Christianity. Historians of early modern Vietnam have missed this important juncture because their predecessors, the



Nguyễn official chroniclers, expunged from their records details indicating the earlier dependence and association between the Đàng Trong ruling elites and the Catholics. This chapter not only provides a missing link but also a more active presentation of how local Catholics constructed their own history and contributed to the birth of present Vietnam.

If the later Nguyễn authorities tried to silence the voice of their former ally and to black out the role of the Catholics with their brush strokes in the official narratives, the makers of Phương-Đình bell tower at Phát-Diêm reasserted their place by chiseling that on stone. The strange and overly emphatic display of the marks of the Nguyễn reign throughout the bell tower did not happen purely by chance, but was a conscious effort of the Catholics to underscore their loyalty and their contribution to the Nguyễn clan. The investigation of the founding decades of the Nguyễn dynasty in this chapter has shown a significant presence of Catholics in the Nguyễn's Gia Định regime. In the following century, the state-church dynamics would become increasingly political. The tensions in the Nguyễn-Catholic relationship escalated into an outbreak of violence that eventually gave France a justification to invade. The next chapter will study the process of how the Nguyễn-Catholic tension broke out of the inner circle of the Đàng Trong ruling elites and emerged as a conflict on the national stage.

### **Chapter 3: Tension during the Early Years of the Nguyễn Dynasty**

After visitors walk past the majestic Phuong-Dinh bell tower, they next enter the main entrance of the church flanked by bas-reliefs representing the battle between good and evil. The panel on the left side appears strikingly violent for a house of worship. The gaze of Archangel Michael is calm and stoic, but the rest of his body speaks a different language. He holds a lance in his right arm above his head poised to plunge downward into the demon; and with his left hand, he directs the spearpoint into the head of the fallen enemy. His foot tramples on the twisted back of a naked figure with a long coiling snake tail. The entire scene is composed as if the angel wants to push the devil further into the eternal flames of hell. In contrast to the calm angelic expression of the Archangel, the twisted figure turns an angry face with fierce eyes upward. The stonemason elongates the eyebrows of this angry but defeated figure into long curving horns. The devil wields a pincer-like weapon in a final effort to counterattack the archangel.

This violent bas-relief offers a glimpse into the long history of anti-Catholic persecution by the Nguyễn dynasty especially during the two long reigns of Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840) and Tự Đức (r.1847-1883). The previous chapter demonstrated the growth of the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance in the late eighteenth century especially by identifying those Catholics holding prestigious posts in the government. As time went on, however, Catholics became less welcome. This chapter covers the roughly four decades from the end of the Gia Định regime (1788-1802)



Fig. 3. The bas-relief depicting the battle between Archangel Michael and the Devil on the left side of Phát-Diệm Cathedral's main entrance, 2005. Photo by Lân Ngô, S.J.

to Minh Mạng's 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict.<sup>1</sup> My analysis of the documents from this era demonstrates that the Nguyễn-Catholic conflict originally derived from a web of political intrigues within the upper echelon of the ruling elites rather than from the single factor—despotic oriental rulers—that has dominated the confessional historiography of this period.

## I. The Confessional Interpretation and Its Influence on Nguyễn-Catholic Histories

During the transitional period from the Gia Định regime to the imperial court of Huế, the Nguyễn government dramatically changed their attitude toward Catholicism from reluctant tolerance to violent antipathy bent on annihilating the Catholic faith. Confessional histories by missionaries have simply blamed the anti-Catholic policy on Minh Mạng. They often described Minh Mạng as the Nero of the East because he initiated and oversaw the most comprehensive program to irradicate Catholicism from the Nguyễn domain.<sup>2</sup> They challenged Minh Mạng on the grounds of filial piety for not honoring his father's deathbed instruction on religious toleration, especially of Catholics.<sup>3</sup> Travel accounts by European and American adventurers reinforce the missionaries' perspective. These writers often contrasted the atmosphere of openness under Gia Long (r.1802-1820) to the restrictive policy of Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840).<sup>4</sup> Subsequent historiography of this confessional tradition perpetuated this comparison such as

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<sup>1</sup> Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam thực lục chính biên* (hereafter *ĐNTLCB*) 3/Q. lxxxvi (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, Viện Sử Học, 2007), 415-416.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Labartette, "Notice sur Mgr. Labartette, évêque de Vèren, vicaire apostolique de Cochinchine," *Annales de l'Association de la propagation de la foi* (hereafter *APF*), vol. 1, no. 6 (1827): 45-46.

<sup>3</sup> Guillaume Clément Masson, "Lettre de monsieur Masson, missionnaire apostolique au Tong-King, à M. Mansuy, supérieur du séminaire de Verdun," *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 312.

<sup>4</sup> John Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina in the Year 1792 and 1793* (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806); John White, *A Voyage to Cochinchina* (London: Longman, 1824), 266-267, 364; Michel Đức Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Huế* (Paris: L'Imprimerie Impériale, 1876); Philippe Vannier, "Lettre XX," *Bulletin des amis du vieux Huế* (hereafter *BAVH*), vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 426; Jean Baptiste Chaigneau, "Lettre XXIII," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 432-433; Jean Baptiste Chaigneau, "Lettre XXV," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 436.

John Rutherford Shorland in the 1870s to Father Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn in the 2000s.<sup>5</sup> Cold War histories and Communist state-sponsored historians add an additional layer of interpretation to this indictment. According to these post-colonial historians, on the one hand, the Nguyễn's violent persecution destroyed the national unity and consequently had weakened the will of the people to fight the French invasion. On the other hand, the Nguyễn dynasty was praised by these same historians for correctly seeing Catholicism as a tool of European expansionism.<sup>6</sup>

However, the stark contrast between Gia Long and Minh Mạng, which missionaries and their European contemporaries projected, has to be revisited. With the 1804 religious ordinance, Gia Long already showed some hostility to Catholicism early in his reign. He placed restrictions on repairing old churches and forbade building new ones.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the Nguyễn enmity toward the Catholics already existed during the reign of Gia Long and then intensified after his death. However, up until the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict, the Nguyễn antipathy toward Catholicism remained a personal imperial aversion, not an official policy.

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<sup>5</sup> John Rutherford Shorland, *The Persecutions of Annam: A History of Christianity in Cochín China and Tonkin* (London: Burns and Oates, 1875); Léopold Cadière, "Les Français au service de Gia Long," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Janv.-Mars 1926): 1-15; Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six: Curé de Phat-Diem vice-roi en Annam* (Paris: Librairie Bloud & Gay, [1931]), 16; Phan Phát Huôn, *Việt Nam giáo sử* (Long Beach: Cứu Thế Tùng Thư, 1997), 364-365; Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Lược sử giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam (1533-2004)," in Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam: Niên giám 2005* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005), 192.

<sup>6</sup> Nguyễn Quang Hưng, *Công giáo Việt Nam thời kỳ triều Nguyễn (1802-1883)* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2007), 358-362; Nguyễn Văn Kiêm, *Góp phần tìm hiểu một số vấn đề lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 2003), 82-87; Đỗ Quang Hưng, *Công giáo trong mắt tôi* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2012), 31, 40.

<sup>7</sup> *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* (hereafter *KĐĐNHĐSL*) VI/Q. 186 (Huế: Nhà Xuất Bản Thuận Hoá, Viện Sử Học, 2006), 239.

## II. From the Gia Định Regime (1788-1802) to the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict

The Nguyễn's aversion to Catholicism actually began from the late 1780s. In the summer of 1789, Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine and Prince Cảnh returned from their four year diplomatic mission to the Court of Versailles.<sup>8</sup> Two years later, in 1791, Prince Đảm—the future Minh Mạng emperor—was born.<sup>9</sup> Around this time, the bad feeling between the Nguyễn and Catholics was first recorded. Sometime after the return of Prince Cảnh from Europe, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his imperial household found to their dismay that the nine-year-old Prince Cảnh refused to bow at the ancestral altar.<sup>10</sup> Under pressure from other court officials, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh kept the French bishop away from his son.<sup>11</sup> The effort to separate them, however, did not last very long. In the winter of 1793, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh reinstated the bishop as regent for his son who had recently been designated the crown prince.<sup>12</sup> Six years later, in 1799, Pigneau de Béhaine died just as the Nguyễn forces were on their way to recapture Huế from the Tây Sơn.<sup>13</sup> Smallpox claimed the life of the crown prince in 1801, just a year before the Nguyễn annexed Đàng Ngoài.<sup>14</sup> In 1802, Nguyễn Phước Ánh assumed the imperial title Gia Long.<sup>15</sup> In 1804, the Nguyễn authorities officially named the newly unified Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài as “Vietnam.”<sup>16</sup> In an effort to assert Nguyễn political legitimacy in the new empire, Gia Long issued the Nguyễn legal code in 1813.<sup>17</sup> Minh Mạng succeeded Gia Long in 1820.<sup>18</sup> In 1832,

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<sup>8</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. iv*, 248.

<sup>9</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. v*, 273-274.

<sup>10</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q. cxvii*, 401-402.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, “Lettre de M. l’Evêque d’Adran, Vicaire Apostolique de Cochinchine, à M. Boive,” *Lettres édifiantes—Nouvelles des Missions Orientales* (1797): 184-185.

<sup>12</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 302-303.

<sup>13</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. xi*, 397.

<sup>14</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. xiii*, 433.

<sup>15</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. xvii*, 491.

<sup>16</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. xxiii*, 588.

<sup>17</sup> Nguyễn Văn Thành, Vũ Trinh, and Trần Hựu, *Hoàng Việt luật lệ (Luật Gia Long)*, 5 vols. (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> *DNTLCB 2/Q. i*, 31.

Minh Mạng issued a decree to eradicate Catholicism from his empire.<sup>19</sup> In brief, for about forty years, from the founding of the Nguyễn dynasty to the first twelve years of Minh Mạng reign, Catholics and missionaries not only harbored high hopes of religious tolerance but also entertained the possibility of converting a king. However, by the early 1830s, religious persecution was no longer a threat but a reality.

### III. The 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict

According to the dynastic history *DNTLCB*, there was no official persecution of Catholicism until the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict; therefore, it is logical to select this document as the starting point of the investigation into the circumstances of the Nguyễn enmity toward Christianity. According to this edict, though never forgetting the religion's foreign origins, the Nguyễn court perceived Catholicism as a cultural religious threat from within rather than as a fifth column representing the interest of European forces. The proscription states:

For many years, men from the West have come to preach the religion of Jesus and to deceive the common people. They delude our people who then know not how to return to the right way of living. We ask you to stop and think about the absurdity of the teaching on a place of supreme happiness. Where is the proof? It is a pure fable. Neither have they any respect for gods nor for ancestors. This is quite a heterodox belief. Moreover, they have built many worship places where they collect a large crowd without distinction but mingle men with women. For in such a gathering place, there is no other purpose but to seduce women. They tear out the eyes of the sick. Their practice blatantly contravenes the rules of morality and corrupts our civilized customs. Their religious observation is also unlawful. This religion is a more superstitious than all the others. Thus, our laws strictly forbid such a religion. Last year, we punished two villages, Mông Phụ and Dương Sơn, for embracing this wicked religion. Our swift action nipped it in the bud. Our intention was to make all understand our will so that they should turn away from this crime and return to the right way. We granted an amnesty for people of Quảng Trị who had come to their senses and converted to orthodoxy. We thus direct: although many people follow this wrong way and drift far from the true path, they still have common sense to recognize what is proper and what is not. There should be a campaign to enlighten people and guide them to be honest. First, teach; second, chastise. We command governors-

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<sup>19</sup> *DNTLCB* 3/Q. lxxxvi, 415-416.

general and provincial governors to promulgate our intention to mandarins of all ranks, soldiers, and people:

If any of you mistakenly follow this religion, then now rouse your conscience, learn to fear, and show repentance. Present yourselves to the local authorities and publicly renounce your former religion. We direct all mandarins, in order to ascertain the sincerity of the pledge, make these people trample on the cross. You then compile and submit to us the list of these people. We shall then grant them pardon. As for worship houses and meeting halls, raze them to the ground. We will no longer hold their past errors against former worshippers of this religion. Should anyone henceforth refuse to reform their erroneous ways, continue to gather together, and break the laws, we will show no leniency. In addition, military and civil yamen runners, you have no permission to harrass the people. Violators of our order will be severely penalized.<sup>20</sup>

Despite allusion to its European origin, the author of the edict evidently and almost exclusively regarded Catholicism as a domestic affair and condemned it in traditional fashion as a “heterodox religion.” In other words, Minh Mạng and his government saw Catholicism as evil in many ways, but not as espionage or a military threat from Europe. Second, the Nguyễn court was aware of the extensive spread of this religion to all different social classes. In the first sentence, the edict judges that only the uneducated poor (*dân ngu*) were gullible enough to adhere to the teaching of this new religion. Nonetheless, in the middle of the edict, it uncomfortably reveals that converts also were present among its military personnel and

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<sup>20</sup> “Đạo Gia Tô nguyên từ người Tây dương đem vào truyền bá đã lâu, dân ngu phần nhiều bị mê hoặc mà không biết hỏi. Thử nghĩ: cái thuyết thiên đường, tóm lại chỉ đều là chuyện hoang đường, không có bằng chứng. Hơn nữa không kính thần minh, chẳng thờ tiên tổ, rất trái với chính đạo. Thậm chí lập riêng nhà giảng tụ tập nhiều người, cảm dỗ dâm ô phụ nữ, lừa gạt lấy mất người ốm. Những việc trái luân lý, hại phong hoá, điều ấy kể ra còn nhiều, thực đã phạm đến pháp luật. Đạo ấy lại quy là tà thuật hơn đạo nào hết. Trong luật đã có điều cấm rõ ràng rồi. Trước kia, những xã Mông Phụ ở Sơn Tây và xã Dương Sơn ở Thừa Thiên tập nhiễm đạo ấy, vừa mới nhóm lên, tức thì nghiêm trị. Đó là muốn cho mắt thấy tai nghe, đôi theo đường lành tránh xa tội lỗi. Nay dân hạt Quảng Trị, đã biết hỏi tâm nghĩ lại, theo về đường thiện, phải nên, ta đã xuống chỉ gia ơn miễn tội rồi. Nhân nghĩ: các hạt còn có những kẻ cố chấp mê man, trôi giạt quên đường về. Song, tính giữ đạo thường, người người đều có nếu biết tinh ngộ liền có thể trở thành lương thiện. Phải nên một phen khuyên bảo khiến họ biết đường đôi mới, để tỏ cái ý trước hãy giáo dục, sau mới dùng đến hình phạt. Vậy truyền dụ Tổng đốc, Tuần phủ các tỉnh bá cáo khắp quan, quân, dân, thứ trong hạt. Có ai trước đã trót theo đạo Gia tô, nay nếu cảm phát lương tâm, biết sợ, biết hỏi, thì cho phép được đến bày tỏ với quan sở tại, tình nguyện bỏ đạo. Quan địa phương xét quả thành thực thì sai làm ngay tại chỗ: bước qua cây thập tự. Rồi làm tập tâu lên vua, sẽ được chuẩn cho miễn tội. Còn những nhà thờ, nhà giảng, thì ra lệnh cho huỷ triệt đi. Bao nhiêu việc mê tín sai lầm trước đó đều không xét nữa. Sau phen răn bảo thiết tha này, nếu kẻ nào không chừa thói cũ còn dám lên lút tụ tập nhau, cam tâm vi phạm lệnh cấm, một khi bị phát giác ra thì liền trị tội nặng. Lại nghiêm cấm lũ võ biên, lại dịch và các tổng lý không được tạ sự mà nô nạt, hống hách, bắt cần nhiều dân. Kẻ nào vi phạm sẽ phải tội,” *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxvi*, 415-416; Pierre André Retord, “Lettre de M. Retord, missionnaire apostolique au Tong-King, à M. \*\*\*,” *APF*, vol. 7, 409-411.



mandarinate (*quan, quân, dân, thứ*). Finally, the edict specifically names Mông Phụ, Dương Sơn, and Quảng Trị as the three catalytic events that led to the religious purge throughout the Nguyễn empire. These names provide valuable pointers for further research into four decades of religious toleration until Minh Mạng fully secured his political position in the early 1830s.

#### IV. The Beginning of Prickly Relations under Gia Long

Contrary to conventional contrasts of attitudes toward Catholicism between Gia Long and Minh Mạng as represented in missionary reports,<sup>21</sup> foreign travel accounts of European adventurers,<sup>22</sup> and hagiographies from the late nineteenth century,<sup>23</sup> harbingers of persecution had already appeared in the founding years of the Gia Định regime. The early signs of the Nguyễn hostility against Catholicism appeared as early as when Nguyễn Phúc Ánh had just achieved a permanent conquest of Saigon in 1788. The previous chapter ends with the conflict between a Catholic mandarin Tống Phước Đạm and Nguyễn Phúc Ánh in 1794 as a sign that marks the end of the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance. Under closer examination, the political pressure had already run high within the inner ruling circle and directly involved Nguyễn Phúc Ánh, Crown Prince Cảnh, and Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine. Conflicts within this elite core began over matters deeper than religio-political rituals.

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<sup>21</sup> Guillaume Clément Masson, “Lettre de monsieur Masson, missionnaire apostolique au Tong-King, à M. Mansuy, supérieur du séminaire de Verdun,” *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 312; Jean Labartette, “Notice sur Mgr. Labartette, évêque de Vèren, vicaire apostolique de Cochinchine,” *APF*, vol. 1, no. 6 (1827): 45-46.

<sup>22</sup> John Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina in the Year 1792 and 1793* (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806); John White, *A Voyage to Cochinchina*, 266-267, 364; Michel Đức Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Hué* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Impériale, 1876); Philippe Vannier, “Lettre XX,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 426; Jean Baptiste Chaigneau, “Lettre XXIII,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 432-433; Jean Baptiste Chaigneau, “Lettre XXV,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 436.

<sup>23</sup> Léopold Cadière, “Les Français au service de Gia Long,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Janv.-Mars 1926): 1-15; Phan Phát Huôn, *Việt Nam giáo sử* (Long Beach: Cứu Thế Tùng Thư, 1997), 364-365; Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược sử giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam (1533-2004),” in Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam: Niên giám 2005* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005), 192.

### A. Ambivalence toward de Béhaine

The increasingly visible presence of Catholics in high politics, especially the close association between the Crown Prince Cảnh and Bishop Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, posed a threat to the Nguyễn authorities. The French bishop seemed to present himself as a regent (*quốc phó*). Nevertheless, the role of the regent had always been a necessary evil in the political regime which had not figured out an effective succession strategy. Dynastic chroniclers often attributed the fall of a ruling house to intrigues and jealousy during the period of joint rule of a weak young ruler and a regent.<sup>24</sup> To be clear, the Nguyễn authorities had never granted Pigneau de Béhaine the status of a regent or any formal mandarin post except posthumously with an honorary title, “Grand Tutor of the Heir-Apparent” (*thái tử thái phó*).<sup>25</sup> When other contemporary missionaries denounced de Béhaine to their superiors in Paris for meddling in local politics to their superiors in Paris, the bishop adamantly denied any attributions of significant political role in the Nguyễn court.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, adventurers visiting Đàng Trong commented on how, under Bishop de Béhaine’s advisory role in the court of Gia Định, the southern region quickly transformed itself from an agricultural outpost to a modern commercial hub.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, though holding no official rank, this French bishop wielded immense political power in the early Gia Định regime. His close and active involvement with the Nguyễn ruling circle matched quite closely the profile of a regent. The role attracted more attacks upon the French bishop than admiration for him and it brought trouble to the larger local Catholic communities.

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<sup>24</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q.i*, 170, 173, 287; Ngô Gia Văn Phái, *Hoàng Lê nhất thống chí* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Học, 2005), 81, 390-39; Hoàng Quang, *Hoài nam khúc*, lines 75-86, 96-107, 168-186, 360-365.

<sup>25</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q. vi*, 303; *ĐNTLCB I/Q. xi*, 397; Võ Hương An, *Từ điển nhà Nguyễn*, vol. 1 (Irvine: Nam Việt, 2015), 107.

<sup>26</sup> Catherin Marin, *Le rôle des missionnaires française en Cochinchine aux XVII et XVIII siècles* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 1999), 132; Adrien Launay, *Historie générale de la Société des Missions-Étrangères*, tome 2 (Paris: Téqui, Libraire-Editeur, 1894), 137-139.

<sup>27</sup> John Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina in the Year 1792 and 1793* (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806), 273-274; John White, *A Voyage to Cochinchina*, 95, 232-247, 265, 273-275.

## B. Sensibilities of Đàng Trong political culture

The prominent presence of Bishop de Béhaine at court touched upon particular sensibilities of Đàng Trong political culture. In the envious eyes of the court officials, the bishop undoubtedly assumed supervisory responsibilities as the regent to Prince Cảnh when Nguyễn Phúc Ánh entrusted his oldest son to the bishop in 1783. This was a strategic move by Nguyễn Phúc Ánh to secure the royal line when the Nguyễn was under siege from the Tây Sơn. His action nevertheless was by no means unprecedented, but rather a fairly common practice among the uppermost echelon of the Đàng Trong ruling family. A French adventurer and entrepreneur, Pierre Poivre (1719-1786), who frequented the great houses of the Nguyễn court during the pre-Tây Sơn era, observed the custom of the Đàng Trong rulers to entrust the upbringing of their sons to different high-ranking mandarins.<sup>28</sup>

The reasons behind this custom are three in number. First, because of the religious sensibilities and the high rate of infant mortality, the Đàng Trong people superstitiously believed that evil spirits would be tricked by this practice should they seek to harm these royal children. Second, since 1600 the seigneurial houses of Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài constantly lived under military threat from each other; proliferation and concealment of royal members would ensure the survival of the lineage. Third, this system of adoption also created an alliance between a ruler and his vassals. In this political prince-regent arrangement, there was a peculiar twist in regard to the custom of receiving inheritance. A prince and not the biological children of the regent would inherit the regent's property. The officials strangely enough did not try to wriggle out of this role but rather vied with each other to be chosen as regents for these young princes, for this was a

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<sup>28</sup> Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam: From Tu Duc to Bao Dai* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 2-3.

sure sign of imperial favor and trust. In theory, the mandarin suffered the loss of his property to his imposed adopted son; in practice, he would know how to manipulate the system for his own ends. Regents financially and politically maximized this opportunity to secure further wealth and prestige as an adopted father of an imperial prince. Before their death, they would have managed to apportion much of their wealth to their own children.<sup>29</sup>

In this political and cultural context, de Béhaine was a member par excellence of this prestigious club of regents as a result of being the crown prince's de facto *quốc phó*. The bishop had taken an irreversible step, stirring up a hornets' nest of court intrigue and jealousy. He and his converts surrounding the crown prince seemed like the bishop was competing with other court officials.

### C. Nguyễn recent memories of past overbearing regents

Nguyễn Phúc Ánh was cautiously keeping court officials at arms length as he also did with Pigneau de Béhaine and his Catholic circle. The claimant to the Nguyễn seigneurial throne did not need court chroniclers to remind him of the danger of having a *quốc phó*, because his own father had been a victim of *quốc phó* Trương Phúc Loan.<sup>30</sup> Nguyễn Phúc Ánh himself masterminded the plot to assassinate his own *quốc phó* Đỗ Thành Nhân.<sup>31</sup> The ambivalent attitude of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh toward the bishop is reflected in the equivocal title he used for de Béhaine. In his letters written between 1783 and 1788, he addressed the bishop as *Thượng Sư*.<sup>32</sup> This title does not fit into any classes and grades of the formal mandarin ranking system, but at the same time it has the ring of the first two classes of ten within the first grade mandarin: *Thái*

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<sup>29</sup> Léopold Michel Cadière, "Quelques figures de cour de Vo-Vuong," *BAVH*, vol. 5, no 4 (1918): 289-290.

<sup>30</sup> *DNTLCB I/Q.xi*, 169; Hoàng Quang, *Hoài Nam Khúc*, lines 75-86, 96-107, 168-186, 360-365, 492-494; Ngô Gia Văn Phái, *Hoàng Lê Nhất Thống Chí*, 81.

<sup>31</sup> *DNTLCB I/Q. i*, 209-210; *Sử Ký Đại Nam Việt Quốc Triều* (hereafter *SKĐNVQT*), 2d ed. (Saigon: Tân Định, 1885); Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1840): Central Policies and Local Responses* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004), 25-26.

<sup>32</sup> Léopold Michel Cadière, "Le Français au service de Gia Long: Nguyễn Ánh et la mission, documents inédits," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1926):1-50.

*Sur* and *Thiếu Sur*.<sup>33</sup> This deliberate ambiguity comes up again in *DNTLCB* when he instructed Prince Cảnh to give the bishop due honor and respect as if the bishop were holding the rank of a *Sur Phó* [the Grand Tutor], which vaguely falls within the first four classes of the first grade mandarin: *Thái Sur*, *Thiếu Sur*, *Thái Phó*, and *Thiếu Phó*. The dynastic record quotes Nguyễn Phúc Ánh: “Whenever there is a break between your military campaigns, go and sit at the feet of *sur phó* in order to keep up with your learning and cultivation.”<sup>34</sup> Nguyễn Phúc Ánh did not clearly announce de Béhaine’s official rank until after the bishop’s death in 1799. Now, as the Gia Long emperor, he posthumously conferred upon de Béhaine the rank of duke and the third class of the first grade mandarin, *thái phó*:

Bá Đa Lộc [Pigneau de Béhaine], a man from France, passed away. Đa Lộc had been with us and assisted us in military matters. He participated in our council. When he went with the crown prince to the West, he put all his heart in the task of guiding the crown prince. The emperor instructed the crown prince to give [Đa Lộc] due honor and respect of *sur phó*. Now at his death, we have posthumously inducted him into the rank of duke with the title, *thái tử thái phó Bi Nhu quận công*, and granted him a state funeral.<sup>35</sup>

Since the political culture of suspicion against the regent system remained strong among the ruling circle, a regent-like aura around de Béhaine had been generating a loud and angry buzz of animosity toward him and his Catholic cohorts.

#### D. Polygamy as a form of political alliance between ruler and local magnates

Yet such suspicion against an alleged bishop-turned-regent alone does not sufficiently explain the emergence of the Nguyễn official policy to eradicate Catholicism. It was the Catholic ethics of monogamy that agitated long-standing court rivalries and especially unraveled the very

<sup>33</sup> These ten classes of the first grade mandarin are: *Thái Sur*, *Thiếu Sur*, *Thái Phó*, *Thiếu Phó*, *Thái Bảo*, *Thiếu Bảo*, *Cần Chánh Điện Đại Học Sĩ*, *Văn Minh Điện Đại Học Sĩ*, *Võ Hiến Đại Học Sĩ*, and *Đông Các Đại Học Sĩ*. See L. Sogny, “Les associés de gauche et de droite au culte du Thê Miêu,” *BAVH*, vol.2, no. 2 (1914):128.

<sup>34</sup> “Đê vương từ xưa chưa ai là không học. Thế cho nên Thái Giáp làm được châu hiền của Vua Thang, Thành Vương làm được vua giỏi của nhà Chu, cũng đều nhờ học mà nên đức. Khi việc binh rồi con nên vâng theo *sur phó*, chăm học kinh sách, khiến cho sự học được sáng tỏ, nghiệp đức được tiến lên,” *DNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 302-303.

<sup>35</sup> “Bá Đa Lộc người Phú Lang Sa chết. Đa Lộc trước theo giúp việc quân, tham dự bàn bạc, đến khi Đông-cung sang Tây, hết lòng gìn giữ trông nom. Vua bảo Đông-cung đi theo lễ *sur phó*. Đến bây giờ chết, tặng thái tử *Thái phó Bi Nhu quận công*, thụy là Trung Ý, dùng hậu lễ để chôn cất,” *DNTLCB 1/Q. xi*, 397.

fabric of local political alliances. A report on the conversation between Gia Long and his French officer, Jean-Baptiste Chaigneau (1769-1832), demonstrates how untouchable the subject of polygamy was. Gia Long confided in Chaigneau that it was much easier for him to govern the kingdom than to manage his rambunctious imperial consorts. The French officer replied:

“Your Majesty, would it be better to rid yourself of this nuisance by reducing the number of these court ladies?” “Shh!” interrupted the king. “Lower your voice! Lower your voice!” He then ordered the servants to leave, then resumed the conversation: “My dear, Mr. Chaigneau, if other mandarins, colleagues of yours, had heard what you have just said, they would immediately have taken you as their mortal enemy.” “Don’t you know that all these ladies are daughters of the mandarins?” He continued, “Not very long ago, a mandarin offered his daughter to me, despite the age difference, I could not refuse. If I had refused him, I would have irritated him deeply. Here is an issue of honor as well as an asset to a mandarin to have his daughter to serve me. It is also the surest pledge of loyalty from him to me.”<sup>36</sup>

In this highly charged and competitive atmosphere, a crown prince was just below the emperor in rank and prestige. Aspiring bureaucrats jockeyed with one another for the prospect of marrying their daughter to the crown prince.

Because of this political milieu, the threat became all too real for the old guard when Catholics and their sympathizers appeared to form a tight protective circle around the Crown Prince Cảnh. Their suspicion of a political Catholic camp at court may well have had some justification. The increasing presence of Catholics in the inner Nguyễn ruling circle was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they won respect for Catholicism or even conversion among the members of the upper class. On the other hand, their close proximity to the inner ruling circle

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<sup>36</sup> “Il serait très-facile à Votre Majesté de diminuer ses ennuis en restreignant le nombre de ses femmes. – Chut! Interrompit le roi, palez bas! Parlez bas!’ Il fit retirer les porteurs d’ordres, sortes d’aides de camp qui l’accompagnaient partout, et reprit ainsi: ‘Ah! Monsieur C..., si vos collègues les mandarins avaient entendu ce que vous venez de proférer là, ils deviendraient vos ennemis mortels. Vous ne savez donc pas, continua-t-il, que les femmes du serial sont Presque toutes filles de mandarins? Tenez, il n’y a pas longtemps, un tel m’a offert sa fille, et, malgré mon âge, je n’ai pu la refuser: je l’aurais irrité profondément. Ici, c’est un honneur et un avantage pour un mandarin d’avoir une fille dans le sérail, et c’est pour moi une assurance de plus de sa fidélité,” Michel Đức Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Hué* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Imperial, 1867), 123-124.

increased the chance of being caught in a web of court intrigue.<sup>37</sup> The identifiable and verifiable high profile converts from this circle included three commanders—Nguyễn Văn Liêm, Phạm Văn Nhân, Tống Phước Đạm, and a brother of Nguyễn Phúc Ánh’s first wife—Tống Phước Sóc. Beside these four, according to Laurent Barisy (1768-1802), a French navy officer serving under the Nguyễn, there was a strong Catholic presence in the Nguyễn military leadership including two other Catholic commandants, *dong Thien-Phaou* [*Ông Tiên Phong*] and *Dinh-Tien*, who participated in the final campaign to annex Đàng Ngoài.<sup>38</sup> Barisy also mentioned another important high-ranking commander, though he was not a convert but a Catholic sympathizer. The commander was the father-in-law of the late Crown Prince Cảnh.<sup>39</sup> Barisy continued: “I hope that in Macao you will soon hear about the arrival of our army at Tonkin. The general commander is a brave and eminent man who holds the Christians very dear. He is the father-in-law of the late crown prince and thus the grandfather of the young prince whom the king is considering naming as his heir after the fall of Qui-Nhon.”<sup>40</sup> This letter suggests that Catholics and Catholic sympathizers championed the cause of Crown Prince Cảnh, and then supported his royal line when the Crown Prince Cảnh died in 1801, at the age of twenty-two.<sup>41</sup> To the backers of the late Prince Cảnh, it was an utter disappointment when Gia Long passed over the line of Prince Cảnh and named Prince Đảm, born to his second wife, as his successor in 1816.<sup>42</sup> Gia

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<sup>37</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. vi*, 302-303; Trần Mỹ Vân, *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan: Prince Cường Để (1882-1951)* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 15, 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Laurent Barisy, “Lettre XI,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc.1926): 410-411.

<sup>39</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. ii*, 49-50.

<sup>40</sup> “J’espère qua à Macao vous entendré parler de L’arrivée de nôtre armée au Tong kin Le général en chef est désigné cest un Brave Et digne home qui aime les chrétiens il est Beau Père du feu prince Royal Et par consequent grand père du jeune prince que le Roi se propose de faire reconnoiter pour heritier aussitôt après la debacle de Quin-Nhon,” Laurent Barisy, “Lettre XI,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 411.

<sup>41</sup> Trần Mỹ Vân, *A Vietnamese Royal Exile*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. lii*, 920-921; *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. liii*, 927-928; Trần Mỹ Vân, *A Vietnamese Royal Exile*, 21-22; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 49-51.

Long's forewarning to Chaigneau came true: Catholics in high politics had made mortal enemies for themselves both among the envious court officials and with the new crown prince.

E. The harbingers of religious persecution during the Gia Định regime

Confessional historians of Vietnamese Catholicism often contrast Gia Long as an enlightened king to Minh Mạng as a despotic ruler and frequently use the reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1840) to mark the beginning of the Nguyễn anti-Catholic persecution. However, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his Gia Định regime already manifested a growing antipathy toward Catholicism. A Confucian mandarin in the Board of Rites, Ngô Tòng Chu (d.1801), petitioned Nguyễn Phúc Ánh to eliminate all religions in Đàng Trong, not only Christianity but also Buddhism as well as Taoism.<sup>43</sup> These Confucian bureaucrats bore a deep distrust toward religions of any stripe, which they accused of spreading superstitious activities among the population. They went on to argue that the Lê dynasty (1428-1788) had lost its mandate to rule because the later Lê rulers had neglected their sacred “Confucian civilizing mission” (*giáo hoá*) but allowed the people to indulge in irrational religious customs.<sup>44</sup> Thus, we have to interpret the Nguyễn policy toward Catholicism in the local political and ideological context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the fledgling Nguyễn government, the way they handled religions in their territory was a matter of survival and legitimacy of their political power.

The Nguyễn dynasty never felt secure in their bid for power. Their expansion from restoring the Nguyễn seigneurial power in Gia Định to establishing an imperial court in Huế followed series of deliberate, cautious steps.<sup>45</sup> In 1792, for instance, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh rejected

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<sup>43</sup> *DNTLCB 1/Q. x*, 371; Lý Kim Hoa, *Châu bản triều Nguyễn: Tư liệu Phật Giáo qua các triều đại nhà Nguyễn 143 năm từ Gia Long 1802 đến Bảo Đại 1945* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 2003), 226-243, 286-291.

<sup>44</sup> *KĐĐNHĐSL VI/Q.186*, 238; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 1 ([Sài Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 247.

<sup>45</sup> Keith Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 379; Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response* (Ithaca,



the advice of his generals to take advantage of recent military victories to push further north into the land of Tây Sơn. He argued that he did not want to be burdened with extra responsibilities to take over a northern region known for constantly being on the verge of famine.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the Nguyễn ruler did not want to rush to assume the imperial title because he did not want to risk offending the political sentiments of Confucian bureaucrats in Tonkin. He and his court continued using the reign name *Cảnh Hưng* of Lê Hiển Tông (r.1740-1786) in their official documents even twelve years after the death of that Lê emperor.<sup>47</sup>

When the southern troops conquered Thăng Long (Hanoi) in the late spring of 1802, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh did not hasten to claim the spoils of victory, but carefully orchestrated his steps. We cannot know for sure whether this was out of true modesty or adept politics, but according to the Nguyễn chroniclers, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh waited for three months after the capture of the northern capital before inaugurating his new dynasty, surrounding the event with much ritual fanfare marking the transfer from one dynasty to another. In the late summer of that year, the victors gathered the remnants of the Lê and the Trịnh nobles for a formal audience with Nguyễn Phúc Ánh. These high-born northerners did not only agree but also petitioned Nguyễn Phúc Ánh to institute a new dynasty for the sake of restoring stability and order to the society which had suffered a decline in morale.<sup>48</sup>

However, later accounts indicate that the Lê loyalists reluctantly rather than willingly consented to acknowledge Nguyễn authority. Beneath all the ostentatious court rituals, there seems to have lurked a sense of insecurity, which emerged as an obsessive concern for the

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NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004), 23; Trương Bá Càn, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 1 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2008), 343.

<sup>46</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q.* vi, 287-288.

<sup>47</sup> Léopold Michel Cadière, “Les Français au service de Gia Long: Nguyễn Ánh et la mission, documents inédits,” *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué* 13, no. 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1926): 1-50; *ĐNTLCB 1/Q.* iv, 240; *ĐNTLCB 1/Q.* xvi, 479, 488.

<sup>48</sup> *ĐNTLCB 1/Q.* xviii, 518-519.

legitimacy of Nguyễn authorities. On the one hand, the Huế court constantly had to mobilize its army to suppress rebellions led by such various Lê pretenders as Lê Duy Hoán (d. 1816) under the reign of Gia Long, Lê Duy Minh (d. 1832) under the reign of Minh Mạng, and Lê Duy Cự (d. 1856) and Lê Duy Phụng (d. 1865) under the reign of Tự Đức.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the Nguyễn strategists still had much to do to persuade the Lê loyalists into submission on more occasions than just that ceremonial gathering in the summer of 1802. Ideologically, as the Nguyễn domain expanded further into the former Lê-Trịnh territory in the north, the Nguyễn court was more and more concerned to accumulate political merit by defending the Confucian civilizing mission (*giáo hoá*) which would legitimize its rule.

F. Confucian civilizing mission (*giáo hoá*) as Nguyễn's subscribed political legitimacy

From a close analysis and synthesis of the dynastic documents, we can sum up, in two premises, the Nguyễn ideologists' rationale for why the Lê had forfeited their mandate to rule: one, the Lê's inability to free themselves from the Tây Sơn and, two, their ineptitude at curbing the proliferation of sectarianism in the kingdom. As for the former, the Nguyễn officials first came up with that argument when the Huế court deliberated upon their plan to carry the offensive attack against the Tây Sơn deep into the northern territories of Tonkin. These officials reasoned that the Nguyễn did not take the control of Tonkin from the Lê but from the Tây Sơn:

Since the Lê king took refuge with the Qing, he has never come back. Thus, he has abandoned Tonkin to fall into the hands of the Tây Sơn rebels. Since Your Majesty reclaimed your ancestral capital, none of the Lê loyalists bothered to take any action to overthrow the usurper. Thus, it is self-evident that the Lê no longer has the strength to restore their rule. We, in contrast, destroy the Tây Sơn and annex the territories from the clutches of the Tây Sơn and not from the Lê.... Now, as we plan to move our troops into Tonkin, to keep the reign name of the Lê is not prudent because people will accuse us of advancing our cause under the pretext of the Lê. The best option is to proclaim a new

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<sup>49</sup> ĐNTLCB 1/Q. liv, 937-938; ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxiv, 379; ĐNTLCB 7/Q. xiii, 404; ĐNTLCB 7/Q. xxxiii, 964; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 2 ([Sài Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 271.

dynasty, change the reign name, and lay claim to our own mandate. By such action, no one can challenge our legitimacy, thus we rightfully possess the whole country.<sup>50</sup>

Fourteen years later, this argument for why the Lê dynasty had already given up its mandate was mentioned again as Gia Long passed a death sentence on a Lê pretender, Lê Duy Hoán (d. 1816):

A newly enthroned ruler, who wants to be known as the observer of the righteous way, must show his reverential respect to the previous dynasty. We learn of this wisdom from examples of the past and experiences of the present. We wish to be considered among the ranks of the ancient sages. From the fall of the Lê to the havoc caused by the Tây Sơn, roughly about ten years, the Lê neither possessed a yard of land nor a single subject in Tonkin. The Lê had nothing left to claim as their own from their former glory. With a heaven-sent might, we swept the kingdom clean of impious imposters. Therefore, it has been clear that we have obtained the realm from the Tây Sơn and took nothing from the Lê.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, the Lê had brought its own demise when the last emperor of the Lê dynasty, Lê Chiêu Thống (r. 1886-1889), took refuge in China and never returned.

The second premise was more serious than the first. It accused the Lê of incapacity to hold the society up to the Confucian moral standards. The failure of the Lê to regain their political authority from the Tây Sơn was nothing compared to a more serious underlying cause of their losing the mandate to rule. The Nguyễn ideologists denigrated the Lê's incapacity to live up to the ideal Confucian moral obligation of civilizing the people. They charged the Lê with letting society sink into sectarianism and allowing local rules and irrational habits to corrupt the populace. In 1804, Gia Long issued an edict first summarizing the ideal image of a well

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<sup>50</sup> “Từ khi vua Lê chạy sang nước Thanh, đi không thấy trở lại, đất Bắc Hà đã lọt vào tay giặc Tây Sơn rồi. Huấn chỉ từ khi quân nhà vua lấy lại đô cũ tới nay, những tôi dân nhà Lê không một người nào ứng nghĩa để đánh giặc, nhà Lê không dấy lại được đã có thể biết rõ rồi. Nay ta diệt được giặc Tây Sơn, chiếm được đất đai, đó là ta lấy ở giặc Tây Sơn chứ không phải lấy ở nhà Lê... Nay ta đánh miền Bắc mà còn dùng niên hiệu nhà Lê, thực e người Bắc bảo ta mượn tiếng phù Lê, chỉ bằng cứ chính để vị, đổi niên hiệu, tỏ bày đại nghĩa với thiên hạ, như thế thì được nước là chính đáng, không ai dị nghị được,” *DNTLCB 1/Q. xvi*, 488.

<sup>51</sup> “Vương giả lúc mới được nước, phải tôn trọng triều đại trước, là giữ đạo trung hậu. Trẫm đã xem khắp xưa nay, chính muốn sánh với hiền triết đời trước. Nghĩ từ nhà Lê suy tàn, nguy Tây nổi loạn, một thước đất, một người dân Bắc Hà đều không phải của nhà Lê nữa, kể hơn mười năm. Trẫm kính đem uy trời quét sạch yêu nghiệt, vậy là lấy được thiên hạ từ giặc Tây Sơn chứ không phải lấy ở họ Lê,” *DNTLCB 1/Q. lv*, 949.

governed society, but then shifting his message to fault the Lê for not committing their governance to the civilizing enterprise:

A country consists of villages. A righteous ruler has to pay attention to a village as his first governing unit and then to a country. It is expected of him to teach the people to form good habits. Recently, rulers neglected their civilizing mission. The rule of law has been corrupted. Villages created and became addicted to their own idiocies. The whole society has been falling into brutishness.<sup>52</sup>

In this way, the Nguyễn authorities deemed perfectly legitimate to inaugurate their own dynasty rather than to restore the Lê. In this same edict, the Gia Long emperor avowed his and his dynasty's commitment to the Confucian ideals: to enlighten the people through education and to establish worthy customs after years of political turmoil.<sup>53</sup>

As for the cause of cultural decline, Gia Long singled out three religions: Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity. He forbade the building of new Buddhist temples and pagodas except some basic renovations of the existing ones. He asked his mandarins to find proper but strict punishments for any Daoist practices of magic. As for Christianity, the edict states:

It is a religious sect from far distant lands that spreads and grows in our country. It invents stories of hell and demons. It indoctrinates people with vague promises of paradise. Gradually, this religious sect cajoles uneducated men and women into believing in their teachings. They all turn into religious fanatics. They are all infected without knowing it. Henceforth, it is our mandate that no repairs be made to their worship houses unless first they ask for permission from the officials of their metropolitan area. But, new Christian worship houses are forbidden. Those who have the habit of keeping village customs and show contempt for the laws of the state will be severely punished when discovered. The village heads of those people will be exiled to the frontier. As for commoners, conscript labor will be reserved for serious violations; caning for minor violations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “Nước là hợp các làng mà thành. Từ làng mà đến nước, dạy dân nên tục, vương chính lấy làng làm trước. Gần đây giáo dục trễ nải, chính trị suy đồi, làng không tục hay, noi theo đã lâu, đắm chìm quá đời,” *ĐNTLCB 1/Q. xxiii*, 583; *KĐDNHDSL 6/Q.186*, 238.

<sup>53</sup> “Khai hóa cho dân, làm nên tục tốt, là việc đầu tiên của vương chính,” *KĐDNHDSL VI/Q. 186*, 238.

<sup>54</sup> “Lại như Gia tô là giáo phái ở phương xa, lưu hành vào trong nước, đặt ra tên địa ngục quỷ quái, nêu ra thuyết thiên đường thần kỳ, dần dần kẻ ngu phu, ngu phụ theo đuổi điên cuồng, tiêm nhiễm thành thói mê mà không biết. Từ nay, phạm các xã dân có thờ Gia tô đồ nát, phải làm đơn trình lên quan ở trấn mới được sửa chữa. Còn làm nhà thờ mới đều cấm. Nếu quen giữ thói làng, can phạm phép nước, khi phát giác ra, xã trưởng phải đày lưu châu xa, còn dân làng ai tội nặng thì sung cấp làm phu sai dịch, ai tội nhẹ thì phân biệt phạt tội xuy, tội trượng,” *KĐDNHDSL VI/Q. 186*, 239; John Rutherford Shortland, *The Persecutions of Annam*, 137-138.

Among the three specifically named religions, the edict significantly shows a marked bias against Catholicism. The edict forbids the Buddhists from constructing new temples, yet the same edict allows them to renovate their existing temples without need for express permission. This is in stark contrast to the imperial edict regarding the Christians. Not only were Christians forbidden to build new churches, but they were also required to obtain the permission of provincial officials before renovating an existing church. This was exacerbated by the fact the Christian community was mostly comprised of poor, unlettered peasants who had no experience in seeking official permission or navigating the bureaucracy of metropolitan representatives of the emperor.

From these edicts, instructions, and remarks, one can conclude that the Nguyễn authorities deliberately cultivated a public image as a rational bureaucratic structure guided by Confucian principles. Both the older religious traditions of Buddhism and Taoism and the recently imported Christian sect were seen as nothing but irrational, superstitious practices that distracted and enervated people from the civilizing mission to reform the society, a corruption for which according to the Nguyễn ideologists, the Lê dynasty was chiefly responsible.

#### G. The rise of imperial aversion toward Catholicism

In theory, however, while Gia Long repudiated Catholicism, in practice he tolerated this religion. The conflict toward Catholicism was clear, but under Gia Long the court opted for a policy of containment rather than eradication.<sup>55</sup> In comparison to his successors, he adopted a more laissez-faire attitude not only toward Catholicism but toward all other religious activities in the empire. Of court documents dealing with Buddhism, Gia Long left behind only one recorded involvement with Buddhism during his eighteen-year-reign. In contrast, his successors, Minh

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<sup>55</sup> Nguyễn Quang Hưng, *Công giáo Việt Nam thời kỳ triều Nguyễn*, 219.

Mạng, who ruled for twenty years, was directly involved in thirty-one cases, and the next emperor, Thiệu Trị (r.1841-1847), ruled only six years but saw thirty-two cases.<sup>56</sup> Gia Long appeared to remain pragmatic rather than doggedly adhering to uncompromising ideologies. Political pragmatism of the Gia Định regime and the atmosphere of religious tolerance during the reign of Gia Long came to an end under Minh Mạng's centralization.

Before ascending the Nguyễn throne, Prince Đảm, who later assumed the reign name Minh Mạng, proved to be a caustic critic of Christianity. Letters, written by Chaigneau and Philippe Vannier in 1819, warn of an ominous immediate future. Chaigneau wrote: "The designated heir to the throne bears a deep hatred for our Holy Religion. He has pledged to persecute it."<sup>57</sup> Vannier elaborated on the general hostility to Catholicism and the direct personal involvement of Prince Đảm behind the reluctance of the Nguyễn authorities to renew trade with Europe:

Court intrigues and strong opposition from the crown prince have caused much failure in our endeavors. They used their laws to make excuses for not granting us an audience with the king. They said that [Mr. de Kergariou] did not have letters from the French king to their king nor from a minister there to the one here. Then, they told us that they were unable to do anything for him. Such ingratitude from a prince who owes to the Europeans and especially the French his acquisition of the kingdom! I swear to you, after that incident, Mr. Chaigneau and I, we have had enough with Cochinchina. We will find a way to leave and get back to our dear homeland. Moreover, the crown prince already presumptuously proposed to persecute our holy religion. He urges his father to have only one religion in the kingdom. He twice said to mandarins who were on their way to offer sacrifice that in the kingdom there ought to be only one religion, that of the emperor.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Châu Bán Triều Nguyễn: Tư Liệu Phật Giáo*, 23-225.

<sup>57</sup> "Le Prince nommé successeur du Roi, a une grande haine contre notre Ste. Religion, et a assuré qu'il La persécutoeroit," Jean Baptiste Chaigneau, "Letter XVIII," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct-Déc. 1926): 423.

<sup>58</sup> "Les intrigues de la Cour et la défiance du prince héréditaire, a fait que l'on a pas réussi, s'excusant sur les lois du pays, et de ce que ce Monsieur [M. de Kergariou] n'avoir point de letters du roi de France, pour le roi; ni du minister pour le minister d'ici, disant que l'on ne savoit comment le recevoir etc. etc. quelle ingratitude pour un prince qui doit aux Européens surtout aux Français la conquête de son pays, je vous avoue que depuis cette époque, M. Chaigneau, et moi nous sommes bien dégouté de la Cochinchine, et que nous allons prendre des moyens pour en sortir et nous en retourner dans notre chère patrie, de plus le prince héritier présomptif parle déjà de persécuter notre sainte religion, et pousse son père à n'avoir dans le royaume que la sienne, il a dit par deux fois aux mandarins en allant faire un sacrifice, que dans le royaume il ne devoit y avoir qu'une religion qui étoit celle de l'Empereur," Philippe Vannier, "Lettre XIX," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 424.

Nevertheless, the letters of these two French officials do not spell out why Prince Đảm took an antagonistic stand against Catholicism.

Forty-nine years later, in a rare moment reported in ĐNTLCB, the Minh Mạng emperor candidly revealed a particular event that had led to his aversion to Catholicism. He appeared to harbor a deep personal indignation toward native Catholics over what he saw as their fanatical rejection of a traditional ritual after their conversion. That event likely happened sometime between Prince Cảnh's return from France in 1789 and his installation as the crown prince in 1793. During this period, the future Minh Mạng emperor was at most about three years old (he was born in 1791).<sup>59</sup> His knowledge of the incident, must have been taught to him later.

Emperor Minh Mạng, nevertheless, still described the affair with raw emotion:

Oh, what a culture and custom of that Christian religion! It is so pernicious and abnormal! I detest it. Do you still remember the crown prince Anh-Duệ [Prince Cảnh] incident? In those days, my sage father had just re-established the kingdom. The Siamese kept exerting their control over the new realm. Under such duress, my father entrusted Crown Prince Anh-Duệ to the French as a strategic move to safeguard the royal line. When we recaptured Gia-Định, the French returned the crown prince to us. The crown prince refused to kowtow and participate in the ceremonies at the ancestral hall—Tôn[g] Miếu. He even preferred to dress in their style. My father was in so much distress. Fortunately, Empress Cao took the crown prince in and guided him for a few months, only then the crown prince had a conversion; otherwise he would have ended up being a Frenchman! Reflect well on that event and see how seductive that culture is. Oh, how much I loathe it.<sup>60</sup>

It is unlikely that Prince Đảm was aware of the situation at that young age, yet he was very likely to grow up hearing murmurs of discontent over this Anh-Duệ fiasco at court. He perhaps appropriated this institutional memory as his own direct experience because the refusal of Prince

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<sup>59</sup> ĐNTLCB 1/Q. v, 273-274; Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang*, 61.

<sup>60</sup> “Phong tục nước ấy, giả dối nham hiểm bất thường, đạo giáo Gia Tô, ngày thường trầm càn ghét lắm, bọn khanh há không nhớ việc Thái Tử Anh Duệ ư? Hoàng khảo ta lúc mới mở nước, bị Xiêm khống chế, gửi Thái Tử Anh Duệ cho người Tây đem nuôi dạy, để mưu tính giữ gìn. Đến khi lấy lại được Gia Định, nước ấy trả về, Thái tử không chịu bái yết Tôn miếu, nói rằng áo quần theo cách thức nước ấy, Hoàng khảo ta đến bây giờ mới hối, may có Cao hoàng hậu khéo dạy dỗ, vài tháng sau Thái tử mới thay lòng, đổi dạ, không thể, hầu làm người Tây rồi, lấy đây suy ra, phong tục nước ấy dễ làm mê đắm lòng người, thực là đáng ghét,” ĐNTLCB 5/Q. cxvii, 401-402.

Cảnh to participate in the ancestral rites threw the court into a state of panic.<sup>61</sup> Letters of de Béhaine and Jacques Liot not only confirm this event but also elaborate on the strong and immediate response from Nguyễn Phúc Ánh to the bishop. Besides removing de Béhaine from the entourage of the prince, the Nguyễn authorities replaced the bishop with a party of seventeen Confucian scholars who came up with a special task force on reeducating Cảnh. They met and instructed him twice a day.<sup>62</sup> No extant record survives of the content of this emergency crash course, but it would not be Catholic-friendly because Trịnh Hoài Đức (1765-1825), one of the two principal instructors, was not one of the sympathizers of the Catholic cause.<sup>63</sup> In his famous local gazette, *Gia-Định Thung Chí*, in spite of the fact there was a large Catholic presence of about sixteen thousand in Đồng Nai alone<sup>64</sup> and their religious activities within his own class and various public celebrations sanctioned by the early Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's southern administration,<sup>65</sup> he did not include Catholicism in his description of Gia Định religious culture. His willful silence in the gazette betrayed his antagonistic attitude toward Catholicism.<sup>66</sup>

In essence, the story personally recounted by the future Minh Mạng, the confirmation around this episode in missionary letters, and the absence of acknowledgment of the Catholic presence in the *Gia-Định* gazette suggest that anti-Catholic feelings were already running high within the immediate royal family and among the Confucian bureaucrats of the Gia Định regime in the early 1790s.

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<sup>61</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang*, 31-32; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 285.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Liot, *LEC* (1797): 163; Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine, *LEC* (1797): 184-185.

<sup>63</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*.vi, 291.

<sup>64</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, 232.

<sup>65</sup> *ĐNTLCB I/Q*. xi, 397; *Sử ký Đại Nam Việt quốc triều* (hereafter *SKĐNVQT*), 2d ed. (Saigon: Tân Định, 1885), 111-112, 116-128.

<sup>66</sup> Trịnh Hoài Đức, *Gia Định Thung Chi—Histoire et description de la Basse Cochinchine*, trans. G. Aubaret (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1864), 71-72.



## V. Boiling Tension in the Early Minh Mạng Reign toward Missionaries

In spite of repeated warnings from Prince Đảm, a full scale persecution did not take place during the first decade of his reign. Perhaps because the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance of the previous generation remained significantly strong, Minh Mạng circumspectly carried out his bureaucratic reform program and therefore did not launch persecutions. Instead, Minh Mạng used the first half of his reign to solidify and fortify his political power base.<sup>67</sup>

### A. The secret royal instruction in 1825

Minh Mạng, nevertheless, was unwavering in his determination to eliminate Catholicism, as shown in letter by a young French missionary, Jean-Louis Taberd (1794-1840), a conversation between Minh Mạng and Jean Baptiste Chaigneau in 1822, and then a secret instruction in 1825. After being in the mission for six months, Taberd sent a letter to a priest in Lyon describing the rising tension against Catholicism from the court of the new emperor toward the end of 1821. He wrote: “[The king] gave a strict order to bar Europeans from entering his kingdom. As for those with permission to stay, he designated a fixed place that they could not venture beyond.”<sup>68</sup> Less than a year later, a European enclave was no longer a favorable option. In a letter dated 25 June 1822, Chaigneau wrote: “The present king does not like our Holy Religion. He himself said in front of me that he will send all the Europeans back to their home countries as soon as he receives a complaint against the mission or the missionaries.”<sup>69</sup> This verbal threat in 1822 turned into an imperial directive in 1825. In a *DNTLCB* entry in the second lunar month of 1825, a court chronicler nonchalantly mentioned that the emperor had reprimand a captain of the Coast Guard

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<sup>67</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, 84.

<sup>68</sup> “Il a donné des ordres très-sévères pour défendre aux Européens l’entrées de son royaume, et il a fixé un lieu particulier au delà duquel ceux qu’il admet ne peuvent aller,” Jean-Louis Taberd, “Extrait d’une lettre de M. Taberd, prêtre du diocèse de Lyon, à M.\*\*\*, à Lyon,” *APF*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1827): 11.

<sup>69</sup> “Le Souverain actuel n’aime pas notre Ste Religion, il a meme dit devant moi qu’à la premiere plainte qui lui seroit porté contre la Mission ou les missionnaires il renverroit tous les Europeens dans leur pays,” Jean Baptiste Chaigneau, “Lettre XXV,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 436.

for wrongly identifying an official boat as a European one. To rectify the error, Minh Mạng supplied the Coast Guard with more binoculars.<sup>70</sup> Behind this apparently innocuous event, the context reveals a more serious but covert campaign organized by the Court of Huế about which Pierre Eyot (1762-1827) alerted his superior in a letter on 13 June 1825. Eyot relayed the following secret memorial from the court, which he somehow managed to obtain:

The false religion of the Europeans spoils the human heart and soul. For a long time, many European ships have come into our kingdom to do business and secretly brought here many religious teachers. They have seduced and perverted the hearts of the people and corrupted our good customs. They hinder us from correcting and guiding our people on the right mind. For these reasons, we order all mandarins, during the season when French ships often appear on our coasts, to carefully keep watch over them day and night. Moreover, you must be vigilant to keep an eye on seaports and on every landing situated between the sea and the land. We need to stop them lest the teachers of this European religion make secret entry and propagate their erroneous darkness in this kingdom.<sup>71</sup>

This document from Eyot appears authentic for two reasons. First, the dating of this secret order on being vigilant in regard to ships arriving from Europe fits within the timeframe when the *DNTLCB* entry mentioned the mistaken identification of an official boat for a foreign boat. Second, the sense of exasperation of the Nguyễn authorities regarding the frequent but stealthy flow of missionaries into the country resonates with another embarrassing episode involving Jean Baptiste Chaigneau. In 1823, a local former priest-turned-apostate, Father Thât, a native of Cồ Vuru village of Quảng-Trị province, exposed Chaigneau to the authorities. Chaigneau, a French

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<sup>70</sup> *DNTLCB* 2/Q. xxxi, 399.

<sup>71</sup> “La religion perverse des Européens corrompt la droiture du coeur et de l’esprit de l’homme. Jusqu’à present plusieurs vaisseaux européens, venant faire le commerce en ce royaume, y ont apporté secrètement des maitres de cette religion, qui trompent le peuple et détruisent nos usages et nos coutumes, et nous empêchent de corriger et de redresser le coeur de notre peuple; en consequence nous ordonnons à tous les mandarins que, dans la saison où les bâtimens français paroissent sur nos côtes, ils les fassent surveiller avec le plus grand soin, et fassent garder jour et nuit, avec le plus severe exactitude, tous les ports et toutes les avenues par terre et par eau, de crainte que les maitres de la religion d’Europe ne s’introduisent secrètement parmi le peuple et ne progagent les ténèbres dans ce royaume.’ L’édit est date de la cinquième année du règne actuel, le 25 de la douzième lune, ce qui répond au 11 ou 12 février 1825,” Pierre Eyot, “Lettre de M. Eyot à M. Langlois, supérieur du séminaire des Missions étrangères,” *APF*, vol. 8 (1826): 198-199; John Rutherford Shortland, *The Persecutions of Annam*, 154-155; Jean-Louis Taberd, “Lettre de M. Taberd, supérieur de la mission de Cochinchine, à MM. les Supérieurs et Directeurs du séminaire des missions étrangères, à Paris,” *APF*, vol. 3 (1828): 456-457.

military officer at court, had been smuggling missionaries into the country.<sup>72</sup> In November 1826, the court summoned all missionaries to Huế to work in the Nguyễn translation office.

Missionaries understood that persecution was imminent.

#### B. The remnant of the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance

With evidence mounting against the activities of so-called heterodox religion, Minh Mạng still had to wait for the right moment because the old Nguyễn-Catholic alliance continued to retain its significant presence at the Huế court, especially among the “Bangkok meritorious ministers” (*Vọng Các công thần*).<sup>73</sup> Although anxiety was spreading widely among the embattled Catholics and their sympathizers, they remained active and visible in the world of high politics. According to the travelogue of John White (1782-1840), a lieutenant on board *USS Independence* on its 1819-1820 Pacific expedition, Catholics in the former Đàng Trong enjoyed wide freedom under the protection of the military governor-general Lê Văn Duyệt (1763-1832).<sup>74</sup> They served as clerks in the Gia Định administration. White noticed four local Catholics working as paid translators for the governor.<sup>75</sup> The Governor-general Lê Văn Duyệt confirmed his solid support for Catholics when he personally appealed to Minh Mạng after learning about the order summoning all missionaries to Huế in 1826.<sup>76</sup> Lê Văn Duyệt gathered all extant correspondence between Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and the Catholics and ordered copies to be made. He then allowed his official seal to be stamped on these documents before submitting them to Huế.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Jean Baptiste Chaigneau, “Lettre XXX,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 444-445.

<sup>73</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 219; Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang*, 32-33, 63-66, 83; Jean-Louis Taberd, “Lettre de M. Taberd, vicaire apostolique, à M. Cholleton, vicaire general du diocese de Lyon, et à M. Durand, cure de St. Irénée, à Lyon,” *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 359.

<sup>74</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, 67, 232, 272-273; Léopold M. Cardière, “Les Français au service de Gia Long: Nguyễn Ánh et la mission, documents inédits,” *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1926): 2-12.

<sup>75</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, 312.

<sup>76</sup> Jean-Louis Taberd, “Lettre de M. Taberd, vicaire apostolique, à M. Cholleton...,” *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 357-359.

<sup>77</sup> Léopold M. Cardière, “Les Français au service de Gia Long: Nguyễn Ánh et la mission documents inédits,” *BAVH* 13, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1926): 1-50.

It is essential to point out that by placing his seal on these documents, he did not simply perform a perfunctory bureaucratic act, but also put himself on the line for the Catholics.

In addition to Governor-general Lê Văn Duyệt's open defence of Catholics, foreign visitors also mentioned a visible presence of Catholics at various provincial and local levels outside Gia-Định. Lieutenant John White reported that when *Independence* arrived at Đà Nẵng (Turon), one of three local mandarins communicated with the American officers by writing in Latin.<sup>78</sup> On another occasion, when a French missionary, Guillaume Masson (1801-1853), described the increasingly anti-Christian atmosphere at the court of Huế, he nevertheless emphasized that Christian mandarins were still able to maintain their official posts even as late as the 1820s without needing to hide their religious affiliation:

Even though the king and high ranking civil mandarins hate our holy Religion, bearing a Christian identity is not a cause to be excluded from any positions. In fact, several of our Christians are officials and even include some among the upper class mandarins. Regrettably, being a mandarin nowadays is incompatible with Christianity. Because of their official status, it is expected of them to take part in superstitious ceremonies.<sup>79</sup>

Unfortunately, missionary sources failed to record who these Christian officials were. One can be certain that the Catholics whom Masson mentioned must have included some of the “Bangkok meritorious officials” such as Phạm Văn Nhân and his own social elite associates. This assertion can be made by referring to one of the letters written by another missionary (François Jaccard [1799-1838]). On the occasion of Ming-Mạng's fortieth birthday in 1830, Jaccard staged a public novena with prayers and mass to pray for the emperor. He boasted: “Several military and civil mandarins, even a nephew of the king and the oldest sister of the king could not help but admire

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<sup>78</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, 79-81.

<sup>79</sup> “Quoique le roi et les grands mandarins lettrés détestent notre sainte Religion, le titre de chrétien n'est cependant pas un motif d'exclusion pour aucune place: nous avons plusieurs mandarins, et meme de grands mandarins qui sont chrétiens; mais c'est pour leur Malheur, car la place de mandarin est incompatible avec le christianisme, en ce que tous sont obliges à faire des ceremonies superstitieuses,” Guillaume Masson, “Lettre de M. Masson, missionnaire apostolique au Tong-King, à M. Mansuy, supérieur du séminaire de Verdun,” *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 312-313.

the order and solemnity of such larger gatherings as they had never seen before.”<sup>80</sup> According to the imperial biographies in *ĐNLT*, Minh Mạng had eighteen sisters; four of whom bore the status of grand imperial princess (*trưởng công chúa*).<sup>81</sup> The one who attended the novena might have been the oldest princess, Bình Thái Công Chúa Ngọc Châu (1781-1847).<sup>82</sup> A more likely candidate would be the second oldest princess, Bình Hưng Công Chúa Ngọc Quỳnh (1787-1849), because she married Phạm Văn Tín (d. 1844), a son of Phạm Văn Nhân.<sup>83</sup>

In brief, the combined information from missionaries’ letters and Vietnamese sources imply that though Minh Mạng hated Catholicism, he could not do away with it immediately. He had to bide his time for the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance created in his father’s military generation to wane. He was afraid to challenge too much of the old network and would not risk launching his plan too soon. Instead, he was busy building his own political power base among the civil officials who more closely aligned with his domestic policy.

### C. Minh Mạng on the path of consolidation of power

So the young emperor waited. However, he did not leave things to chance. Minh Mạng proved exceptional at sapping the regional political powers.<sup>84</sup> The former players in the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance all died off or were gradually pushed out. The first group to disappear from the Nguyễn military circle was the French. In the early years of the Nguyễn, Gia Long had employed about four hundred Frenchmen, but by the early 1820s, only three were still serving with the Nguyễn: Jean Baptiste Chaigneau and Philippe Vannier in military service and Jean Marie

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<sup>80</sup> “Plusieurs mandarins militaires et lettrés, et même un neveu du Roi et sa soeur aînée vinrent admirer un ordre et une gravité qu’ils n’avaient jamais vue dans les grandes réunions,” François Jaccard, “Lettre de M. Jaccard, miss. en Cochinchine, à M. Langlois, supérieur du séminaire des Missions étrangères,” *APF*, vol. 5 (1831): 405.

<sup>81</sup> *ĐNLT 2/Q. iii*, 75-79.

<sup>82</sup> *ĐNLT 2/Q. iii*, 76.

<sup>83</sup> *ĐNLT 2/Q. iii*, 76; *ĐNLT 2/Q. vii*, 139.

<sup>84</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, 83-99.

Despiau (d. 1824) in medical matters.<sup>85</sup> Not only these Frenchmen, but also the mandarins serving under Gia Long found themselves forced out of the political center. Chaigneau grieved and sneered at the rise of non-military men, whom he considered merely house servants, at the Huế court under the new reign:

[The king] has many enemies among the older mandarins of his father's administration. All the domestics who worked for him when he was only a prince now take up many very favorable positions, whereas the mandarins of the former ruling circle are dwindling away. All the mandarins who were demoted by his father are now reinstated; he even promotes some of those disgraced mandarins to higher posts.<sup>86</sup>

On the one hand, this information from Chaigneau betrays his strong personal dissatisfaction with the changes happening in the court. On the other hand, the letter essentially reveals how Minh Mạng carefully and patiently secured his political base before launching his comprehensive political and cultural reform. His calculated patience contributed to the success of his centralization effort. Minh Mạng's strategy resembled an elaborate psychological game of cat and mouse played through the administrative tool of promotion and demotion.<sup>87</sup> He successfully executed his plan by intermittently sending out ambiguous verbal threats mixed with acts of reconciliation, and thus kept his political enemies constantly disoriented, oscillating between fear and hope. He effectively cornered the generation of older power holders.

#### D. The twelve-year game between the Huế cat and the European mice

Missionaries became the most susceptible target in this game of political maneuver.

Anxiety was spreading among the Christians toward the end of Gia Long's reign, given the rising certainty that Prince Đảm would succeed to the throne. Nonetheless, in the first year (1820) of

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<sup>85</sup> C. Michele Thompson, "Jean Marie Despiau: Unjustly Maligned Physician in the Medical Service of the Nguyễn," in *Vietnam and the West: New Approaches*, ed. Wynn Wilcox (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2010), 41-70; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 16.

<sup>86</sup> "... Il a beaucoup d'ennemis dans les anciens mandarins de son père, tous ses serviteurs quand il n'étoit que prince son actuellement en faveur tandis que les anciens mandarins de la garde on beaucoup tombé tous les mandarins disgracié par son père ont presque tous été réabilités et meme ont des grades supérieurs," J.B. Chaigneau, "Lettre XXIV," *BAVH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Déc. 1926): 434.

<sup>87</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, 84-86.

Minh Mạng, there was no persecution, and missionaries were relieved that the feared crack-down did not occur, and even entertained a hope of converting the new emperor to Catholicism. Jean-Jacques Guérard (1761-1823), bishop of West Tonkin, seemed excited about the prospect of a Catholic king:

The old king of Tonkin passed away in the beginning of this year. His son succeeds him. The son had uttered threats against our holy religion. People thought that he was going to initiate the persecution as he often had said. The Lord, who holds in his hand the heart of kings as well as those of the people, did not permit it to happen. As soon as he ascended the throne, he appeared to be markedly different. Until now, he deserves a high praise for all he has done. May God open his eyes to embrace our holy religion.<sup>88</sup>

Guérard did not live long enough to see how quickly his dream turned into a nightmare for the Catholics and especially his confreres. The bishop died in June 1823. Three years later, Minh Mạng summoned all missionaries to Huế.<sup>89</sup> The imperial order was carried out with ceremony so that missionaries had no choice but to comply, though they were acutely aware that the pomp was a smokescreen. One can pick up a hint of irony in Taberd's description of his obligatory journey from Phường Rượu Seminary in Quảng-Trị to Huế in December 1826:

By the end of December, the king sent one of his courtiers, an interpreter, and six soldiers with a palanquin to bring me to the court under the pretext of a need to translate some letters.... Local priests, students, and all the Christians watched in amazement how the king gave me such a ceremonious reception.... I feared my refusal would spark the persecution. I would like to shield myself from any blame.... In June [1827], two of my confreres, who were in the southern Cochinchine province—[François Isidore] Gagelin, a French missionary, and Father Odorico, an Italian Franciscan, came. They were sent by the provincial governor-general according to the royal order to leave for Huế since the king needed the Europeans. The governor-general was a good man; he did not know

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<sup>88</sup> “Le vieux roi du Tong-king est mort au commencement de cette année. C’est son fils qui lui succède, celui qui avoit tant menacé notre sainte religion. On croyoit qu’il alloit commencer par la persécuter, selon qu’il l’avoit dit si souvent. Le Seigneur, qui tient en sa main le coeur des rois, comme celui des peuples, ne l’a pas permis. Il n’a pas plutôt été sur le trône, qu’il a paru tout autre; et, jusqu’à ce moment, il n’a rien fait que de très-louable. Dieu, lui fasse la grâce d’ouvrir les yeux et d’embrasser notre sainte religion,” Jean Jacques Guérard, “Extrait d’une lettre de Mgr. Guérard, évêque de Castorie, coadjuteur du Tong-king occidental, à M. Guérard, son frère, curé de Hottot, dans le diocèse de Bayeux,” *Nouvelles lettres édifiantes* (hereafter *NLE*), vol. 8 (1823): 339-340.

<sup>89</sup> Guillaume Clément Masson, “Lettre de M. Masson, missionnaire apostolique, à M. Ferry, supérieur du séminaire de Nancy,” *APF*, vol. 3 (1828): 436.

Minh Mạng's the secret intention. When he learned about us becoming a target of rough treatment, he wept.<sup>90</sup>

A year and half later, the same governor-general, Lê Văn Duyệt, intervened and procured from Minh Mạng the release of the two French missionaries, Taberd and Gagelin.<sup>91</sup> However, the Nguyễn court did not let the missionaries get away that easily. Fifteen days after the departure of these two Frenchmen to Gia Định, Huế summoned another missionary, François Jaccard, also known as Phan Văn Kinh (1799-1838), who had been hiding in the same seminary in Quảng-Trị.<sup>92</sup> While Jaccard would undergo a few years of de facto house arrest, he nevertheless had an unexpected but agreeable experience in interacting with the upper Nguyễn echelon.<sup>93</sup> Not only did he have an audience with Minh Mạng but was also visited by many high-ranking mandarins on a regular basis. The missionary bragged about the nuisance of requests to entertain members of the royalty and of hosting a throng of mandarins at his residence. In his December 1829 letter, he wrote:

The king often makes me translate some old documents.... He does not appear to be hostile to us at this moment. Not very long ago, he asked me for five bottles of altar wine.... Soon after that, his oldest son found out about his father's request of wine, and he was curious about the taste of it. He sent his men to fetch it from me.... I also created good connections with mandarins whenever I had a chance to meet them. Several third

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<sup>90</sup> "Vers la fin de décembre, le roi envoya un de ses pages, un interprète, et six soldats avec un palanquin, pour me conduire à la cour, sous prétexte de traduire quelques lettres.... Les Prêtres du pays, les écoliers et tous les chrétiens étaient émerveillés de ce que leur roi me faisoit une si pompeuse réception.... Je craignois qu'un refus de ma part ne fit éclater la persécution, et je voulois être à l'abri de tout reproche.... Au moins de juin, deux de mes confrères qui étoient dans la basse Cochinchine, M. Gagelin, missionnaire français, et le père Odorico, Franciscaïn italien, sont arrivés. Ils étaient envoyés par le vice-roi de la province, qui, conformément aux ordres du roi, leur dit qu'il falloit partir pour Huế, que le roi avoit besoin d'Européens. Le vice-roi étoit dans la bonne foi, il ne connoissoit pas les intentions secrètes de Minh-Mang; mais depuis, ayant appris la manière indigne dont celui-ci en agissoit envers nous, il en a pleuré," Jean-Louis Taberd, "Lettre de M. Taberd, vicaire apostolique, à M. Cholleton....," *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 357-358, 359; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol.2, 57.

<sup>91</sup> Jean-Louis Taberd, "Lettre de Mgr. Taberd, élu évêque d'Isauropolis, vicaire apostolique de Cochinchine, à messieurs les directeurs du séminaire des missions étrangères," *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 391; François Jaccard, "Lettre de M. Jaccard, missionnaire apostolique en Cochinchin, à M. Langlois, supérieur du séminaire des missions étrangères," *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 371-372; *DNTLCB 2/Q. cix*, 835.

<sup>92</sup> François Jaccard, "Lettre de M. Jaccard, missionnaire apostolique en Cochinchine, à M. Langlois supérieur du séminaire étrangères," *APF*, vol. 4 (1830): 374.

<sup>93</sup> *DNTLCB 2/Q. xlvii*, 649; Léopold M. Cardière, "Les Français au service de Gia Long....," 2-3.



and fourth grade mandarins became acquainted with me. These things take up much of my time, but what can one do? <sup>94</sup>

Jaccard continued to serve as court translator for almost ten more years. Then, in 1838, at the height of the persecution, Minh Mạng sentenced Jaccard to death. <sup>95</sup> We will come back to this story of Jaccard at the end of this chapter when we discuss his role in the famous Dương Sơn case. All in all, during the first ten years on the throne, the new ruler employed the cat and mouse tactic to further debilitate the morale of the old Nguyễn-Catholic network. By the end of the 1820s, the Court of Huế confidently believed that it had wrapped the missionaries around its little finger. With the combination of power, patience, and threat, Minh Mạng maneuvered, distracted, and swung the missionaries on a pendulum between utter fear and high hope.

#### E. The period of confidence, the time of action

After more than a decade of consolidation, in 1832 the emperor ushered in a period of confidence that also marked the beginning of religious persecution against both missionaries and converts. This persecution was causally linked to the completion of the construction of the imperial palace, Minh Mạng's personal involvement in two lawsuits against Catholic converts, and the death of Lê Văn Duyệt.

The completion of the Huế citadel in the fifth lunar month of 1832 symbolized that confidence, especially in Nguyễn military might. Minh Mạng proudly told his court advisors, "The capital city is the center of cultural activities and the Forbidden City is the most important of all.... Now, the whole palace has reached its completion. The city walls and its fortresses are

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<sup>94</sup> "Le roi me fait souvent travailler soit à traduire de vieilles paperasses.... Il ne parait pas indisposé contre nous en ce moment. Il y a quelque temps qu'il me fit demander cinq bouteilles de vin de messe.... Quelques jours après, son fils aîné ayant appris que son père m'avait fait demander du vin, eut aussi la curiosité de vouloir en goûter et m'en envoya demander.... J'en agis ainsi, autant que possible, avec les mandarins que je puis avoir occasion de rencontrer. Plusieurs de troisième et de quatrième classe on cherché eux-mêmes à faire connaissance avec moi; cela fait perdre quelques momens, mais qu'y faire?" François Jaccard, "Lettre M. Jaccard, miss. apost., à MM. les Supérieurs et Directeurs du séminaire des Missions étrangères," *APF*, vol. 5 (1831): 387-388.

<sup>95</sup> Trương Bá Cẩn, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 92.

firmly planted to leave their mark for generations to come. I am very pleased.”<sup>96</sup> According to descriptions by contemporary Westerners, there was much to be proud of. American Navy lieutenant, John White, wrote in 1824:

[The Hué imperial city] is certainly a stupendous object, and would be esteemed so, even in Europe. It is situated upon a barred river, accessible to large vessels at high water only. It is surrounded by a ditch nine miles in circumference, and about one hundred feet broad; its walls are of brick, laid in a cement, of which sugar is a principal ingredient, and are sixty feet high; the pillars of the gates, which are of stone, are seventy feet high; over the arches, which are of the same materials, are towers from ninety to one hundred feet high, to which access is had by a handsome flight of stairs, on each side of the gateway inside the walls. The fortress is of a quadrilateral form, and built on the plan of Strasburg in Germany. It has twenty-four bastions, each mounting thirty-six guns, and the distance between each bastion is twelve hundred Cochin Chinese perches, of fifteen feet each; the smallest guns are eighteen pounders, and the largest are sixty-eight pounders, cast in the king’s own foundery. The whole number of guns to be mounted, when the works are completed, is twelve hundred. The casements within the fort are bomb proof.<sup>97</sup>

Aside from the detailed description of the fortress-like palace complex, White offered an insightful interpretation of the Nguyễn fortifying project. The completion of the Hué palace could be read paradoxically both as a symbol of stability and as a sign of stagnation. He grieved over the current Nguyễn authorities for inefficiently investing so much of its resources into the militarization enterprise in preference to modernizing the country. He elaborated:

A prince who would understand, and pursue the true interests of his country, would, instead of building cities like Hué, commit his abundant resources to the ocean, under the protection of a powerful navy, which would also guarantee the safety of his maritime frontier, with the assistance of proper fortifications:--a few small garrisons would effectually protect the interior, already naturally guarded by lofty and inaccessible mountains, and boundless and impenetrable forests, from the incursions of a hostile army:--he would remove the vexatious restrictions, by which commerce is now shackled, and invite his neighbors and strangers to a liberal participation in its blessings, which would at the same time be the means of enriching his own country, and introducing the arts of more civilised and polished nations.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Kinh sư là nơi khôì đầu giáo hoá mà Kinh thành lại càng quan trọng lắm... Nay toàn cục đã xong, công việc đã hoàn thành cả, thành trì bền vững, truyền lại hàng ức muôn năm, lòng Trẫm thực rất vui mừng,” *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxx*, 316.

<sup>97</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, 263-264.

<sup>98</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, 266.

It was a classical example of spending one's money to win a previous war. White ventured to explain why the Nguyễn authorities adopted the defensive rather than proactive strategy. He suggested that the Nguyễn ruling family operated out of fear and suspicion of their own subjects because of the misfortunes that had befallen the recent Nguyễn seigneurial history.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the Huế court did not tolerate any forms of competition, as demonstrated in how it stifled the development of Gia Định, its former economic-political-military home base, regardless of Gia Định's promise as a hub for Southeast Asian maritime trade.<sup>100</sup> The same American Navy lieutenant melancholy described Cochinchina under Minh Mạng: "There was formerly a cannon foundry in Saigon, under the direction of the bishop [of] Adran; and the ruins of another are still standing in the city of Don-nai."<sup>101</sup> We will see some other observations and insights of John White again in the next chapter when the dynasty faced the military challenge from the French-Spanish coalition in the late 1850s.

John White's analysis seems to provide a reasonable assessment of Vietnam under Minh Mạng. Centralization was the first and foremost concern of the Nguyễn dynasty. Trading and shipbuilding activities were later used as evidence to posthumously incriminate the former governor-general, Lê Văn Duyệt.<sup>102</sup> Thus, the all-out effort put into the construction of the Huế citadel revealed an obsession with displaying signs of a well-ordered realm.<sup>103</sup> Minh Mạng determined to eliminate so-called heterodox religion once and for all because of the obsession of the Nguyễn court to prove its political legitimacy to the northern Confucian elites and especially the emperor's personal distaste of Catholicism rather than any substantial threat to the reign posed by Catholics.

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<sup>99</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, 263.

<sup>100</sup> Keith W. Taylor. *A History of the Vietnamese* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 383-384.

<sup>101</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China* (London: Longman, 1824), 236.

<sup>102</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxiii*, 371.

<sup>103</sup> John Rutherford Shortland, *The Persecutions of Annam*, 152-153.

## VI. Three Important Local Cases before the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict

After a decade of lying in wait, around the time of the death of Lê Văn Duyệt, the staunch protector of converts and missionaries, in 1832, the court of Minh Mạng became more aggressive against Catholicism.<sup>104</sup> After rounding up the missionaries, the Huế government attempted to force local Catholic converts to renounce their faith. The first warning sign had a decade earlier: the case of Nam-Dương-Tây in the province of Quảng Trị in the early 1820s. Catholics' fear thereafter diminished, however, because Minh Mạng did not pursue the persecution further until ten years later. The tension finally resurfaced with two landmark legal cases, first against the Catholics of Mông Phụ in 1830, and then against Catholics of Dương Sơn in 1831. The former involved an extortion; the latter a land dispute. At first glance, these two lawsuits would not appear serious enough to warrant royal attention. The lower courts independently judged in favor of the Catholic parties. However, when the cases reached an appeals court, the emperor took a strong personal interest and directly intervened in each case. He heavy-handedly penalized the Catholic parties mainly because of their religious belief.

### A. The case of Nam-Dương-Tây, Quảng Trị

The earlier case involved an apostasy of Nam-Dương-Tây villagers en masse in the early 1820s. Nguyễn-Catholic historians understandably have missed this incident because the dynastic chronicle makes only a passing comment and the *Annales propagation de la foi* offer no mention of this embarrassing episode. *DNTLCB* reported:

People of Nam-Dương-Tây in the province of Quảng Trị previously were the followers of [Christian] religion, but now they have repented and recanted. They destroyed all their religious images and books. They also demolished their church and their teaching hall. They turned over to the authorities the construction materials of those buildings for public use.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxii*, 354.

<sup>105</sup> “Dân ở phường Nam Dương Tây, tỉnh Quảng Trị, trước đây cũng theo đạo, đến bấy giờ biết hối, đem huỷ hết các ảnh tượng và kinh thánh, còn nhà thờ, nhà giảng thì triệt hạ, sung công,” *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxvi*, 415.

This official account suggests that the former Catholics' willingly and voluntarily abjured their religion. Surprisingly, a letter from Jean-Baptiste Chaigneau in November 1823 independently confirms this report.<sup>106</sup> Chaigneau elaborated on the affair in his letter sent to Pierre-Jacques Lemonnier de La Bissachère (1763-1830), a former Tonkin missionary, now director of the Seminary of the *Mission Étrangères de Paris*.<sup>107</sup> According to Chaigneau, a certain former indigenous priest, Thât, scandalously apostatized and led many other villagers to do the same:

This wretched Father Thât, whom once I was fond of and had much admiration for, because of his own dedicated efforts, had made a grievous mistake. His behavior nowadays is completely opposite of what it was. He is like an unleashed demon who causes more harm than the good that he did. He was responsible for a large group of Christians who almost abandoned [our] religion.<sup>108</sup>

In this same letter, Chaigneau revealed further that this same ex-priest had reported to the local mandarins on Chaigneau's clandestine operation of bringing missionaries into the country.<sup>109</sup>

However, the official record provides no information on why the Court of Hué neither took advantage of the apparent momentum that the Nam-Duong-Tây case had generated by launching a persecution, nor even pressed charges against Chaigneau. Nevertheless, looking back from the perspective of the 1830s, Minh Mạng did not fail to act, but wanted a more thorough preparation for a systematic and comprehensive campaign of persecution. According to a letter from Father Pierre Eyot written on 5 May 1823, Eyot described the secret discussion between Minh Mạng and his privy council:

The king gave a long harangue to his officials about us. All of his mandarins agreed that an edict of persecution must be issued right away. "No, the Tây Sơn rebels had issued an

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<sup>106</sup> J. B. Chaigneau, "Lettre XXX," *BAVH*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1926): 444-445.

<sup>107</sup> J.B. Chaigneau, "Lettre XXX," *BAVH*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1926): 444-445; Alastair Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hué* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1970), 228.

<sup>108</sup> "Ce malheureux père P. Thât pour qui j'avais tant d'amitié et de considération, qui paraissoit si bien le mériter étoit il a présumer que cet homme eut failli aussi grièvement sa conduite est tout opposé à celle qu'il tenoit ci devant c'est un diable déchainé qui fait plus de mal qu'il n'avoit fait de bien, il est cause qu'une grande partie des chrétiens de ce district ont presque abandonné la religion," *BAVH*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1926): 444-445.

<sup>109</sup> J.B. Chaigneau, "Lettre XXX," *BAVH*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1926): 445.

edict and persecuted this religion,” said the king. “But, they could not achieve their goal abolishing it. There must be another way.” People do not know what way the king may want to take.<sup>110</sup>

Retrospectively, despite the dramatic apostasy of many converts from Nam-Dương-Tây, including their local Father Thât, Minh Mạng’s way was to concentrate his effort in rounding up existing missionaries in the country and blocking any new arrivals. Ten years later, he revisited and revised his way of tackling the Catholic question. As demonstrated in Minh Mạng’s direct handling of the next two cases, Mông Phụ in 1830, then Dương Sơn in 1831, the Nguyễn’s antipathy toward Catholicism expanded from missionaries and notable personages to the rank-and-file members of the local Catholic communities.

#### B. The case of Mông Phụ

The case of Mông Phụ went on for almost two years, from the winter of 1828 to the summer of 1830. The meager information on this case comes from missionary reports, a written account by a local priest sixty years later, and a brief mention in the dynastic history.<sup>111</sup>

However, it marked a significant turning point in the Nguyễn-Catholic history. The verdict on the Mông-Phụ affair established a precedent for the Court of Huế in dealing with Catholics. In 1828, Đỗ Mô, Nguyễn Huy Văn, and Nguyễn Huy Bích, who worked as yamen runners for a local prefect, fabricated an imperial order. They arrived at Mông Phụ and ordered the arrest of Christians and confiscation of their properties. A Catholic villager, Phan Văn Thắm, reported the incident to Lê Phúc Bảo, the governor of Sơn Tây. The governor arrested the three imposters and summoned the Catholic complainant. Then complications began. Intimidated by the summons,

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<sup>110</sup> “Le roi, dit-on, fit une longue harangue à notre sujet; tous les madarins furent d’avis qu’il falloit aussitôt porter un édit de persécution. Non, dit le roi, les rebelles Taysons portèrent un édit et persécutèrent la religion; mais ils ne purent venir à bout de l’abolir, il faut prendre un autre moyen. On ignore quel est ce moyen que le roi veut prendre,” Pierre Eyot, “Une lettre de M. Eyot, missionnaire apostolique au Tong-king, en date du 5 mai 1823,” in “Missions du Tong-King et de la Cochinchine,” *AFP*, vol. 2, no. 6 (Aout 1825): 35.

<sup>111</sup> Guillaume Masson, “Lettre du même [de monsieur Masson, missionnaire apostolique au Tong-King] à M. Ferry supérieur du séminaire de Nancy,” *AFP*, vol. 6 (1833): 394-400; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 62-63; *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxvi*, 416.

the complainant went into hiding. The governor summarily ordered the arrest of three other Mông Phụ villagers, Giang Văn Lầy, Giang Văn Bài, and Kiều Văn Quyển, who then allegedly identified themselves as Catholics. For some unknown reason, the provincial government did not resolve but rather escalated the case into a state-religion problem. In the late spring of 1829, not only were the impostors beheaded, but the three Catholics were also caned and then exiled. In that summer, Minh Mạng reviewed the case and increased the punishment meted out to the Catholic parties.<sup>112</sup> They were exposed to the elements, resulting in the death of Kiều Văn Quyển.<sup>113</sup> In a July 1831 letter, a missionary, Guillaume Clément Masson (1801-1853), wrote: “Moreover, the king sent copies of his judgment on this case to all mandarins. He asked them to pattern their decisions on future Catholic cases to his.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, though it has received less attention than the Dương Sơn case, the Mông Phụ affair became the test case for how the Court of Huế could criminalize the followers of Catholicism.

### C. The case of Dương Sơn

More than other cases, Dương Sơn attracted considerable attention, as evident in the official chronicle, missionary reports, and Catholic local history. It confirmed the determination of the Nguyễn court to make anti-Catholicism its official policy. The case began as a simple land wrangle between the Catholic villagers of Dương Sơn and their non-Catholic neighbors of Cỗ Lão, but the conflict quickly centered on the issue of religion. Thirty years later, a priest and an official under Tự Đức, Đặng Đức Tuấn (1806-1874), grieved over how the authorities had mishandled the whole event. In a popular style of prose narrative, his *Việt Nam giáo sử diễn ca* describes how the Nguyễn-Catholic relations deteriorated:

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<sup>112</sup> Guillaume Masson, “Lettre du même à M. Ferry...,” 395.

<sup>113</sup> Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 62; Guillaume Masson, “Lettre de même à M. Ferry...,” 395.

<sup>114</sup> “Outre cela, il a envoyé des copies de ce jugement à tous les mandarins, en leur enjoignant de se conformer dorénavant à ce modèle dans les procès des chrétiens,” Guillaume Masson, “Lettre du même à M. Ferry...,” 395.

Eternal mystery like a spinning wheel turns from beings to unbeing,  
 Neither can one guess its plan nor know all its hues.  
 The petty fight between Dương Sơn and Cỗ Lão started it all,  
 Lawsuits escalated over village limits and communal ownership of certain  
 ricefields.  
 The entire inhabitants of Dương Sơn were the followers of the Way,  
 But not Cỗ Lão's who wilfully instigated malcontents.  
 Out of hearts filled with hatred, they brought a false charge against the other,  
 First with the local magistrates, then with the higher court.  
 Charge: "Converts boasted about their western connection,  
 Jaccard was responsible for instigating the whole mess."<sup>115</sup>

In 1831, the peasants of Dương Sơn were named as defendants by a neighboring village in a dispute over territory. The plaintiff village lost its case and appealed to a higher court. In their appeal, the plaintiffs identified Dương Sơn as a Christian village. The appellate court confirmed the decision of the local court regarding the land dispute but initiated a new case against Dương Sơn, alleging that the conflict between Christians and non-Christians over ancestral rituals was the root of the disturbance. The situation spun out of control:

Up high may be bright and illustrious, but an upside down bushel basket can still  
 block the rays,  
 It was only a small thing to start with, then obtained a cosmic scale.  
 Royal proscription was issued against the Way throughout the kingdom,  
 It was in the thirteenth reigning year of Minh Mạng.  
 From the north to the south, from far to near,  
 Meeting Halls of the Way were destroyed, the clergy were put to death.  
 Believers who refused to comply,  
 Immediately they were put to death; their families were implicated by the crash  
 and peal of thunderous verdicts.  
 As for those who trampled upon a cross,

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“Máy thiêng tạo hóa xoay vần,  
 Khôn lường ý nhiệm, khôn thông lẽ màu.  
 Dương Sơn, Cỗ Lão cơ cầu,  
 Kiện nhau giới hạn, tranh nhau đất làng.  
 Dương Sơn có đạo vẹn toàn,  
 Cỗ Lão không đạo quyết toan gây thù.  
 Bời lòng giận ghét phao vu,  
 Trước vô phủ huyện sau vô pháp đường.  
 Rằng: “Đạo ý thế Tây Dương,  
 Phan, Kính đạo trường mối giường đôi co!”

Đặng Đức Tuấn, “Việt Nam giáo sử diễn ca,” in *Đặng Đức Tuấn tinh hoa Công Giáo ái quốc Việt Nam*, ed. Lam Giang and Võ Ngọc Nhã (Saigon: Tân Văn Ấn Quán, 1970), 73.



The authorities released them for manifesting their renouncement of the faith.  
 God on high staged a competition,  
 Numerous were the weak who had failed.  
 In a large lump of gold, silver, tin, and lead,  
 Through the furnace, one was known either as pure ore or alloy.  
 God uses hardship to test us,  
 A struggle on this earth will reap a threefold reward in heaven.<sup>116</sup>

A prefectural mandarin pressured Christians to renounce their faith but met with immediate resistance. They refused to denounce their religion, rejecting the mandarin's threats and persuasion alike. This contempt of state authority by unlettered peasants living within the vicinity of the imperial city dismayed the emperor and his court. Because the French missionary and court translator François Jaccard resided in the same Catholic village, he was accused of inciting converts to escalate the conflict.<sup>117</sup> The court sentenced him to death but then commuted the sentence to indefinite exile in order to keep him as translator until 1838 when he finally was executed by strangulation.<sup>118</sup> The appeals court also condemned sixteen other local converts to *corvée* labor for life, including a former and a current village headman as well as a military

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“Cao minh chậu úp khôn dò,  
 Việc đầu thời nhỏ, sau to bằng trời.  
 Chi truyền cảm Đạo nơi nơi,  
 Minh Mạng trị đời năm thứ mười ba.  
 Bắc Nam khắp chốn gần xa,  
 Đạo đường triệt hạ các cha tử hình.  
 Giáo nhơn ai chẳng thuận tình,  
 Trảm giáo lập tức, lòi đình oan gia.  
 Ai mà thập tự bước qua,  
 Ấy là thiên thiện, chỉ tha về nhà.  
 Chúa cao xa mở khoa thị hội,  
 Biết bao người yếu đuối bước đi.  
 Bạc vàng lộn lạo thiết chì,  
 Một phen vào lửa thử thì biết pha.  
 Chúa dùng sự khó thử ta,  
 Gian nan dưới thế vinh ba trên trời.”

Đặng Đức Tuấn, “Việt Nam giáo sử diễn ca,” 73-74.

<sup>117</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxx*, 317; François Jaccard, “Lettre de M. Jaccard, missionnaire apostolique, a MM. les Directeurs du séminaire des Missions étrangères,” *APF*, vol. 6 (1833): 452.

<sup>118</sup> Trương Bá Càn, *Lịch Sử Phát Triển Công Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 92.

mandarin.<sup>119</sup> Thus, after twelve years of consolidating political power in Huế and waiting for the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance of the previous generation to die off, the Court of Huế launched an all-out attack on local Catholics and missionaries. The former allies of the Nguyễn, from when the seigneurial clan was on the run in the 1770s, now found themselves enemies of the dynasty sixty years later.

## VII. Conclusion to Chapter Three

This chapter has investigated the underlying reasons for the rise of the Nguyễn antipathy toward Catholicism over thirty years from the beginning of the Gia Long reign in 1802 to the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict. Post-colonial Nguyễn-Catholic historiography ascribes the cause of tension to an external source: culturally, to alien Christian elements, and politically, to local authorities' sense that alien Christian elements posed a European imperial threat from the start. This chapter argues otherwise: that the cause of Nguyễn-Catholic tension was internal and personal.

Consider the decorative art in the Phát-Diệm cathedral. Without a doubt, when one looks at the bas-relief on the left of the main entrance of the church, one can identify it immediately with the Archangel Michael slaying the dragon, as depicted in popular devotional Catholic art. However, one may equally admire this stone panel from the Nguyễn perspective. This could as well be a depiction of an ideological battle between Confucian orthodoxy and Christian heterodoxy. With the end of the Nguyễn conquest of the short-lived Tây-Son, when alliance and military strength took a back seat to the requirement of established rule, the Nguyễn rulers perceived Catholicism as their political liability to be expunged even by violent means. By paying more attention to the local developments, we see how apparently tangential events were

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<sup>119</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxx*, 317.

important turning points. The persistent presence of converts among the “Bangkok meritorious officials” and their family members, the mass apostasy of Nam Dương Tây villagers, the persecution of Mông Phụ inhabitants in the province of Sơn-Tây, and the personal intervention of Minh Mạng in the Dương Sơn case—all were crucial stages on the Nguyễn’s road to anti-Catholicism.

Contrary to the established historiography, my analysis of the first official edict in this chapter demonstrates that the geographical and cultural origins of Christianity was not so much a determining factor in Nguyễn anti-Catholic policy as was internal friction, political intrigues, and court jealousy that engendered hostility toward Catholicism. And it was not some distant military threat. Since the 1770s, the increasing presence of Catholics and missionaries at royal court made them a prime target in a fierce competition with other local political parties jockeying to control the imperial family. Nguyễn-Catholic historians rightly zero in on the most enigmatic figure in the East-West interaction in the history of early modern Vietnam, Pigneau de Béhaine. However, they do not place him in local political context but anachronistically link him with the imperialism of the late nineteenth century. This chapter serves to relocalize de Béhaine in the Vietnamese political tradition: he was a suspected regent (*quốc phó*). I locate the sources of the religious persecution in the conflict between Catholic promotion of monogamy and the traditional practice of political alliance through polygamy; I trace Minh Mạng’s calculated and patient step-by-step process to undo the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance back to the first ten years of his reign. And this chapter ends with the three events leading to the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict: the cases of Nam-Dương-Tây of Quảng Trị in 1823, Mông Phụ of Sơn Tây in 1830, and Dương Sơn of Huế in 1831. In the previous chapter, the Catholicism of Đàng Trong was represented by converts in high politics; in this chapter, Catholics fade away from elite circles but emerge as

collective units at the village level. The next chapter will argue that the common experience of being subjected to the Nguyễn's brutal and systematic persecution for more than forty years united these separate social units together and gradually appeared as a national Catholic political community.

## Chapter 4: Catholicism—an Affront to the Nguyễn Imperial State-Building

During the four decades between the 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict to the 1874 Second Saigon Treaty (*Hòa ước Giáp Tuất*), the Huế court did not only assert forcefully its administrative centralization, but also moved steadily toward the absolutist side of the political spectrum. However, from a Vietnamese Catholic-centered perspective, this process of imperial state-building was anything but peaceful, as the bas-relief to the right of the main entrance of the Phát-Điêm Church depicts. In contrast to the battle waging on the left, where the angel is vanquishing the demon, the angel on the right seems to be in a state of readiness, definite victory not yet certain: in fish-scale armor, his hands clasped tight around the hilt of a straight sword, this angel is either riding to battle on swirling clouds, preparing to swing his blade, or emerging from the settling dust after a pitched battle. This right-hand scene might well represent for us the fiercest persecution that Catholic communities in Vietnam went through, that during the period between the 1830s and the 1870s.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the cumulative effects of the Nguyễn imperial state-building under the reign of Minh Mạng (r.1820-1841), the systematic religious persecution of Catholics, and the Huế draconian measures against converts from the onset of the French invasion all inversely fostered a national political awareness among previously separated Catholic communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Văn Phòng Tổng Thư Ký Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam niên giám 2005* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2005), 226-228.



Fig. 4. The bas-relief depicting an angel on the right side of Phát-Diệm Cathedral's main entrance, 2005. Photo by Lân Ngô, S.J.

## I. The Marxist Eurocentric Interpretation on Modern Vietnam

This chapter specifically identifies the Nguyễn imperial state-building as the main force that fashioned Catholic imagination as a national political entity just as modern Vietnam was coming into existence. In contrast to Vietnamese state-sponsored historiography,<sup>2</sup> which exaggerates the Catholics' foreign connections, in this study I continue to emphasize Catholic agency within the local political context. I challenge the anachronistic Marxist assumption that missionaries and collaborator converts actively schemed with the Western powers to carry out an elaborate grand design of European cultural and territorial expansion from the sixteenth century forward. Based on a wide range of documents, from dynastic records to travel journals, this chapter attempts to reconstruct the internal court debates behind Nguyễn's anti-Catholic policy. I conclude that in the context of Minh Mạng's bureaucratic reforms, the Nguyễn's anti-Catholic stance emerged principally neither as a consequence of cultural incompatibility of Catholicism nor a response to Western military threat. Rather, the Huế court used Catholics as pawns in a political and ideological game to neutralize the Lê heritage and to demonstrate the new dynasty's claims to legitimacy.

Furthermore, more than just simply emphasizing the Nguyễn's centralization that Choi Byung Wook has already demonstrated in his *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang*,<sup>3</sup> but from the Catholic-centered history, I discover the underlying absolutist direction of the Nguyễn's ruling style at the height of its powers during the first half of the nineteenth century. In theory, Nguyễn's governance was inspired by the Song's Neo-Confucianism; in practice, that

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<sup>2</sup> Nguyễn Văn Kiệm, *Sự du nhập của Thiên Chúa Giáo vào Việt Nam từ thế kỷ XVII đến thế kỷ XIX* (Hà Nội: Viện Nghiên Cứu Tôn Giáo, 2001); Nguyễn Văn Kiệm, *Góp phần tìm hiểu một số vấn đề lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 2003); Nguyễn Quang Hưng, *Công Giáo Việt Nam thời kỳ triều Nguyễn (1802-1883)* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004), 33-42.

governance displayed all archetypal elements similar to that of traditionally known as monarchical absolutism in Europe. This absolutist tendency, however, obtained its form not from some externally inspired governing template but developed from an agglomeration of locally available statecraft. I argue further that even though the Nguyễn anti-Catholic policy was a manifestation of the growing absolutism of Nguyễn government, it bore far-reaching political ramifications in defining Vietnam at the beginning of the French colonial period.

## **II. Four Stages that Transformed the Catholic Issue from Domestic Tensions to International Affairs**

In order to demonstrate that the increasing pressure on Catholics was primarily the result of the growing absolutist direction of Nguyễn government, I divide the development of this political system into four different stages that took place during the reigns of three successive Nguyễn emperors who ruled from the Huế court: Minh Mạng (1820-1841), Thiệu Trị (1841-1847), and Tự Đức (1847-1883).

The first decisive stage was the Phiên An Rebellion (1833-1835). Following the death of Gia Định's General-governor Lê Văn Duyệt (1764-1832), the southern elites rebelled against Minh Mạng's efforts to curb their regional power. The Phiên An Rebellion was a severe jolt to the Nguyễn government. The imperial court of Huế accused Catholics of Gia Định along with ex-convicts from the north and Chinese settlers of lending their military support to the revolt. According to the official records, moreover, the presence of the missionary, Joseph Marchand "Du" (1803-1835), within the citadel of the rebels irrefutably implicated him as the mastermind behind the rebellion. After the Phiên An Rebellion, the Nguyễn government moved from a case-by-case opposition to Catholics to a full-scale national policy aimed at eradicating Catholicism from the realm.



The second was the launch of Minh Mạng's grass-roots cultural reform at the height of the Phiên An Rebellion. In 1834, Minh Mạng popularized his ambitious plan into ten articles, also known as the Ten Moral Maxims (*Thập Điều*). Against the immediate background of that southern rebellion and especially the alleged involvement of Catholics, the seventh article singled out Catholicism as a threat to the stability of the kingdom. From then on, the anti-Catholicism was definitively Huế's domestic policy until the establishment of the French colonial power.

The third phase took place between the 1840s to the 1850s. The Nguyễn anti-Catholicism was internationalized from its earlier domestic tensions. As argued in previous chapters, before the 1840s, the linkage of Catholicism with French imperialism was not in the thinking of the Nguyễn rulers. However, after the Opium War (1839-1842), the West became more persistent to have the Huế court open the country for trade than before. Frequent harassment by the French and Spanish navies along the coast of Vietnam fueled Huế's suspicions of converts and missionaries. In 1859, Tự Đức imposed the most draconian measure, *phân tháp*, to uproot Catholics from their villages and disperse them into non-Catholic communities.

The last development consisted of twelve years between the 1862 First Saigon Treaty and the 1874 Second Saigon Treaty. In 1862, the Nguyễn court had already promised to allow Catholics to practice their religion. However, this initial agreement actually exacerbated the situation, because in the same document the Nguyễn had to yield its sovereignty over three of the six southern provinces of Cochinchina to France. Dissident literati denounced the court for signing this treaty and led local militias to seeking out and brutally slaughter Catholic communities while the Nguyễn authorities either could not or did not want to do anything to protect these local converts. Anti-Catholicism was at this point no longer an imperial policy, but

had become a patriotic act for the literati. Under the increasing threat of French cannons and the French annexation of the remaining parts of Cochinchina, the Nguyễn religious persecution officially ended with the signing of the Second Saigon Peace Treaty in 1874. In this second treaty, the Nguyễn agreed to expurgate inflammatory remarks against Catholicism from the ten moral maxims.<sup>4</sup>

### III. Entanglement between Catholics and Lê Văn Duyệt's Legacy

After fifteen years on the throne, while aggressively securing his political authority, Minh Mạng launched his bureaucratic reforms. As his court set out to dismantle regional powers and assimilate local cultures, the Gia Định military clique came out in open armed revolt in the Phiên An Rebellion (1833-1835).<sup>5</sup> As presented in the last two chapters, in the south of Vietnam, the military alliance had served as a power base to support the re-establishment of the Nguyễn rule.<sup>6</sup> During the reign of Minh Mạng's father, Gia Long left this southern military alliance intact under the governorship of Lê Văn Duyệt. However, as the central court became more assured of its authority under the reign of Minh Mạng, the Huế court began to change its view of the southern military power from friend to foe, from asset to liability, and from rice basket to powder keg. The opportunity to eliminate once and for all the southern power came when Governor-general Lê Văn Duyệt died in the eighth lunar month of 1832.<sup>7</sup>

Immediately after the state funeral of Lê Văn Duyệt, Minh Mạng sent his bureaucrats and launched a campaign to reform the governing structure of the southern provinces. He ordered Lê Văn Duyệt's southern army dismantled and placed southern military leaders under the

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<sup>4</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 2 (Saigon: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 169-287.

<sup>5</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841)*, 83-99.

<sup>6</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841)*, 30-33.

<sup>7</sup> Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam thực lục chính biên* (hereafter *ĐNTLCB*) 3/Q. lxxxii (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, Viện Sử Học, 2007), 354.

supervision of a new crop of civil servants.<sup>8</sup> Less than a month after Lê Văn Duyệt's death, the emperor began to build a case against Lê Văn Duyệt. Evidence was collected to show that the late governor was in possession of an unreported number of stockpiles of timber and a number of "blank check" papers that had been pre-signed with the imperial seal.<sup>9</sup> In the fourth month after his death, the plot to discredit the late governor thickened when the Huế court cited the finding of a pair of elephants being kept at the late governor-general's private residence as evidence of staging a rebellion. The emperor disparaged the southern mandarinates for their glaring omissions, lack of oversight and especially for their failure to warn imperial authorities of Lê Văn Duyệt's illegal activities. He threw this scathing remark at the southerner officials:

War elephants are not of small matter like cattle and horses. Private subjects have no permission to domesticate them. Lê Văn Duyệt was an arrogant, proud, presumptuous, excessive man. He listened to the bad advice of untrustworthy people. He committed himself to reckless plans. His actions were clearly intended to break the law. The local notables of Gia-Định have had full knowledge of these things. If you, out of fear of tyrannical rule, dared not to stop him, at least, you should have sent in a secret report to the throne. Why did you give him your tacit approval?<sup>10</sup>

Having heard this charge, the former generals under Lê Văn Duyệt volunteered to give back the elephants that Emperor Gia Long had granted them.<sup>11</sup> By March of 1833, Nguyễn Văn Quế, the new provincial governor, named and discharged from their military posts three associates of the late governor-general. They faced charges of assisting Lê Văn Duyệt in accumulating a large amount of illegally collected timber. The campaign to discredit the former governor came to a head in May of 1833 when Lê Văn Khôi, one of three southern military officials being

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<sup>8</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxii*, 354.

<sup>9</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxiii*, 371.

<sup>10</sup> "Voi trận không như trâu ngựa, tư gia sao được nuôi riêng. Lê Văn Duyệt ương bướng, tự phụ, cậy trông kiêu rông, thiên lệch, nghe theo lời nói của tiểu nhân, liều lĩnh dám làm, thực có can phạm pháp luật. Các tào ở Gia Định thành đều có biết cả sự việc, nếu vì sợ quyền thế đè nén, không thể can ngăn được, thì cũng nên làm tập tâu kín dâng lên, chứ sao lại cam lòng hùa theo, một loạt bung mồm nín lặng?" *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxvii*, 433.

<sup>11</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxvii*, 433.

discharged, assassinated Nguyễn Văn Quế, and led the Phiên-An revolt which would last three years.<sup>12</sup>

The Huế court identified Catholics as one of the four major groups in the Gia Định population who provided military backing for the revolt.<sup>13</sup> However, the allegations that all Catholics sided with the revolt and thus committed treason, as they have been repeated in the Cold War era and then in anti-canonizational historiographies, do not fit well with other data related to the revolt in the dynastic record itself.<sup>14</sup> Court historians faithfully took note of the presence of Catholics fighting on the side of the imperial camp. The imperial mandarins even asked some of their Catholic soldiers to enter clandestine rebel camps in order to gather intelligence and convince their fellow Christians to surrender. Unconvinced by the loyalty of Christian subjects who risked their lives at the request of his mandarins, the emperor sent secret instructions to his generals that Christian soldiers should be monitored at all times, lest they foment rebellion from within. For him, Christians could not be trusted:

In the imperial army, among those who follow the Christian religion, secretly observe their actions. We have to be vigilant, and nothing should be a surprise for us. In this regard, it is of vital importance to the success of our military campaign, thus you have to keep this instruction with the utmost care. Use your judgment to discern the proper action. Do not take this matter lightly. Do not reveal your intentions even with the expression on your face or in your tone. Only in this way, will we be able to be prepared for any situation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. xcvi*, 600; Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyen Dynasty in Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 48-53.

<sup>13</sup> *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. cv*, 765.

<sup>14</sup> Nguyễn Văn Kiệm, *Góp phần tìm hiểu một số vấn đề lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 2003), 211; Mark McLeod, *The Vietnamese Response to French Intervention, 1862-1874* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 30-31; Đỗ Quang Hưng, *Công giáo trong mắt tôi* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2012), 51-57.

<sup>15</sup> “Còn như ở trong quân, đối với người nào đã theo đạo Gia tô, cũng nên mật sai dò xét, phòng giữ trước khi xảy ra, khỏi đề lo về sự bất ngờ. Và lại, việc này có quan hệ đến quân sự, cần phải cẩn thận kín đáo mười phần. Các người nên tùy tiện liệu tính, đã không nên coi thường chút nào, cũng không nên để lộ ra nét mặt hoặc lời nói, thì mới mong mọi việc có phòng bị sẵn, không lo ngại,” *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. cix*, 825.

With much difficulty, the imperial army succeeded in suppressing the revolt in the tenth lunar month of 1835. The Phiên-An Rebellion proved to be a severe shock to the Nguyễn central authorities. The presence of Christians, especially of Joseph Marchand “Du,” among the rebels, confirmed official Nguyễn suspicions as to the seditious nature of the Christian religion and its potential as a source of domestic unrest and threat to national security. Minh Mạng revealed his intense disdain for Christianity by publicly executing the captured French missionary Joseph Marchand “Du” along with four others in the ceremonial presentation of prisoners of war to the throne, just as Gia Long had done to the leaders of the Tây Sơn thirty three years before.<sup>16</sup>

#### **IV. Nguyễn Centralization in an Absolutist Direction**

When the military victory against the Phiên-An Rebellion was certain, Minh Mạng did not wait for the full pacification of Gia Định, but straight away inaugurated his ambitious imperial state-building. This grand political campaign strongly resembled the ruling style of an absolute European monarch of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: subscribing to the doctrine of patriarchal nature of royal authority, cultivating a personality cult around a ruler and reinforcing that cultic aura with theatrical demonstrations, centralizing bureaucracy that owed its allegiance directly to a monarch, and imposing a certain form of cultural uniformity at the expense of other local institutions.<sup>17</sup> Minh Mạng and his two successors, Thiệu Trị and Tự Đức, fortuitously managed to cobble together all tools and events that simultaneously became available on the local political scene. These three Nguyễn emperors linked their political legitimacy with the Confucian filial piety, embraced the traditional cultic role of the Southeast Asian kingship, co-opted the Censorate Department (*Đồ Sát Viện*) into serving at the ruler’s

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<sup>16</sup> *DNTLCB 4/Q. clx*, 782-783.

<sup>17</sup> Judith G. Coffin and Robert C. Stacey, *Western Civilization: Their History & Their Culture*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 539-577.

pleasure, and flouted regional customs by enforcing sumptuary laws. However, I have to use the term, “absolutism,” with certain qualification because this political system was never so unlimited in practice as it was in theory even for France under Louis XIV himself.<sup>18</sup> Absolutism refers to a political theory that monarchs aspired to have a complete sovereignty according to their personal will. Nevertheless, in reality, these monarchs had to negotiate and share powers with various forms of existing local institutions. They almost never achieved the absolute rule. With this caveat, I call the general pattern of state-building under the Nguyễn as absolutism or absolutist direction but not as a fully achieved absolute rule.

## V. Minh Mạng’s Ten Moral Maxims—*Thập Điều*

In 1834, Minh Mạng proclaimed his *Thập Điều* as the blueprint to confucianize the entire realm.<sup>19</sup> In marked contrast to the missionaries’ frequent portrayal of Minh Mạng as the Nero of the East,<sup>20</sup> the Minh Mạng emperor came across in the *Thập Điều* as an idealized moral arbiter who at times taught and at times admonished his subjects with a prevailing tone of paternal tough love. This paternal tone became more apparent in his explanation on the personal motive behind the *Thập Điều*: “I have often handled criminal cases submitted by the Board of Punishments. Many offenders were simply ignorant and thus transgressed the laws. I felt pity for them and did not want to mete out heavy sentences on them.... Thus, let these maxims be taught and learned.”<sup>21</sup> The *Thập Điều* were (1) fulfill your duties of your social state (*hậu đường luân lý*), (2) cultivate virtues of humaness, right conduct, politeness, and knowledge (*giữ lòng ngay thẳng*), (3) master your vocation (*chăm nghề nghiệp*), (4) nurture a habit of frugality (*chuwong tiết*

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<sup>18</sup> David Parker, *The Making of French Absolutism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 236-237.

<sup>20</sup> Adrien Launay, *Histoire générale de la Société de Missions-Étrangères*, vol. 3 (Paris: Téqui, Libraire-Éditeur, 1894), 83.

<sup>21</sup> “Ta thường duyệt những tập văn án do bộ Hình dâng lên, thấy có những hạng gian ngoan mờ tối, không biết gì, khinh thường phạm vào lưới pháp luật, thực đáng thương xót, lòng ta không nở... Vậy sai soạn lời giáo huấn này để ban hành trong thiên hạ,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 237.

*kiệm*), (5) lead your life by drawing inspiration from moral precepts rather than by living in fear of the laws (*gây phong tục cho trung hậu*), (6) teach your children (*dạy con em*), (7) love and learn orthodox belief (*tôn sùng đạo học chân chính*), (8) control your carnal passion with temperance (*răn chữa tà dâm*), (9) obey the laws of the state (*cẩn thận giữ phép nước*), and (10) earn more moral merit through good deeds (*rộng làm việc lành*).<sup>22</sup>

#### A. The political philosophy of the *Thập Điều*

*Thập Điều* epitomized the political philosophy the Nguyễn authorities utilized to pave their own way to an absolutist direction. The first maxim presented the Confucian world as a harmonious but stratified patriarchal society:

The Way mirrors that of moral principles. One needs to have a clear and firm grasp of these principles. There are five of them: Mutual loyalty bonds ruler and subjects together; warm affection connects father with his sons; propriety protects the conjugal love; respect preserves harmony among siblings; trustworthiness nurtures friendship.<sup>23</sup>

In this hierarchical framework, family served as the basic unit of the society where the father and then the older son held the authority and responsibility as the final moral arbiters of the family.<sup>24</sup>

Within Confucian social moral norms, children were taught to show submissive obedience to their parents. Primary school students were indoctrinated with *Twenty-four Stories of Filial Piety* (*Nhị Thập Tứ Hiếu*). Once parental authority was entrenched in the society, this filial piety could be easily translated and logically extended into political authority during adulthood.<sup>25</sup> The ideal ruler reflected in the *Thập Điều* governed in the patriarchal manner of the ancient sages, looking

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<sup>22</sup> ĐNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix, 232-237; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 188-190; Choi Byung-Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841)*, 119-121.

<sup>23</sup> “Đạo làm người, không có gì cốt yếu bằng cho luân lý được trong sáng. Vua tôi có nghĩa, cha con có tình thân, vợ chồng có riêng biệt, anh em có thứ bậc, bạn bè có tin cậy. Ấy là năm điều luân lý quan trọng của người ta,” ĐNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix, 232.

<sup>24</sup> ĐNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix, 232.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 11, 14; Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hemery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 59-61.

upon subjects as children, with the ruler's own virtuous example prompting his people to good habits.

Since the Nguyễn authorities subscribed to the twelfth-century Chu Hy (Zhu Xi, 1130-1200) school's interpretation of Confucian political theory, they presupposed that the whole politico-ethical structure came from an *a priori* knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Though the human mind should be innately receptive to this social order or the universal Principles, people of the mythical past had the special privilege to possess this complete knowledge. Moreover, time itself validated this ancient wisdom because deviation from these Principles had repeatedly led to social instability. Therefore, the *Thập Điều* political model showed a profound reverence for the past because the former sage kings taught and practiced the Principles of government.<sup>27</sup> Learning from the past, especially through the sages of old, was the path to reach the ideal Confucian world where “cultivated virtues and worthy customs would render laws, punishments, and forces obsolete.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in this philosophical framework, one did not question but simply and obediently absorbed the teachings of the past. The goal of a government was to reproduce the ancient order.

To nurture the truths was not only the duty of a government, but it was also an individual responsibility. Confucianism taught that the human essence resides in the heart (*tâm*)—meaning not exclusively a biological heart but including the mind, affections, and volition. The heart by nature was good and innately gravitated to social and universal good.<sup>29</sup> If hierarchical society brought stability, then a person with a virtuous heart garnered merit bestowed by Heaven (*Trời*)

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q. ccii*, 502; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), 102-106; Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 2, *The Period of Classical Learning (from the Second Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A. D.)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 533-571.

<sup>28</sup> “Thói tốt tục hay thì có thể bỏ được hình luật và thôi được việc binh, trong bốn biển sẽ có âm thanh thái bình,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 234.

<sup>29</sup> “Tâm là gốc của con người. Tâm mà ngay thẳng, thì muôn điều lành do đấy sinh ra; tâm mà bất chính, thì trăm điều ác đều theo đó mà gây nên,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 233.



either to that person while alive or to the descendents of the deceased.<sup>30</sup> However, this Heaven did not share the same connotation of God as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In his second maxim, Minh Mạng limited Heaven to the role of fate, which simply “assigned each person a certain social status and vocation in life.”<sup>31</sup> Then fate stood back to observe and kept score on how responsibly each individual carried out the expected duties of his station in life. In the final maxim, this Confucian ethical system enumerated these individual moral obligations into eight virtues. Each person should strive to cultivate, regardless of social station, filial piety (*hiếu*), fraternal piety (*đễ*), loyalty (*trung*), trustworthiness (*tín*), humaneness (*nhân*), right conduct (*ngĩa*), politeness (*lễ*), and knowledge (*trí*).

Overall, *Thập Điều* was hardly a political innovation, nor was it the intention of the Nguyễn authorities for it to be original. Instead, the Huế court wanted to demonstrate to themselves and to others their respect for the ancient order, even beyond that of their northern counterpart, the Qing dynasty.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, despite its ten clearly enumerated maxims, *Thập Điều* was still far from being a well-developed systematic political philosophy. It superficially built its validity on a collection of abstract Confucian principles, yet it offered counsel with an imperious tone. The distinctiveness of the Nguyễn’s *Thập Điều* lay not in its boilerplate but in its condemnation of Catholicism and in the manner of its implementation.

#### B. Catholics—*Thập Điều*’s only identified enemies of the state

Unlike the earlier 1804 *Giáp Tý* Religious Ordinance under Gia Long that was critical of Buddhism and Taoism as well as Catholicism, *Thập Điều* singles out Christian doctrine, with superstitious ideas of heaven, hell, and “magical” rituals, as the cultural threat. In stark contrast

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<sup>30</sup> “Nhà tích thiện hẳn có phúc thừa... Nếu chậm báo ứng mà mình chưa được vinh hiển, thì con cháu cũng sẽ được nhờ phúc âm, thịnh vượng rạng rỡ, mãi mãi vô cùng,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 236.

<sup>31</sup> “Trời sinh ra người, thế nào cũng phó cho mỗi người một nghề,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 233.

<sup>32</sup> Yoshiharu Tsuboi, *L’Empire Vietnamien face à la France et à la Chine 1874-1885* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987), iv.

to the general abstract philosophical niceties in the entire *Thập Điều*, the seventh maxim is not crafted in flowery literary language, but is instead presented with blatantly disparaging language that expresses official aversion towards Catholicism. The commentary on the seventh maxim states:

As for heterodox religions, their doctrines are merely conglomerations of fallacies and we must be vigilant against their allurements. In particular the so-called Jesus religion is the most absurd and immoral one because man and woman live in a confused state similar to that of the animals. They commit crimes, sow disunity everywhere, rush stupidly to their deaths, destroy true teachings and spoil human nature. We must not believe in such a religion. Those who have fallen under the spell of its doctrine must give it up.<sup>33</sup>

The followers of this religion are classified as sub-human because of the alleged widespread Christian practice of the black arts of magic.<sup>34</sup> We learn more about this allegation from graphic details as reported in *DNTLCB* in the same year (1835) by a mandarin, Phan Bá Đạt (1783-1846), of the Censorate Department (*Đô Sát Viện*):

The Western heterodox religion bewitches the people.... We hear that this heterodox religion has a ritual of plucking out people's eyes. They also select a male convert and place him in the same house with a female convert. They separate the couple with a wall, but these two constantly live in a stage of titillation. Without warning, they let the house fall on this couple. They extract the liquid out of these dead bodies and mix it with flour to make the so-called holy cakes out of this mixture. Then, whenever they gathered to discuss their doctrines, they give these cakes to the converts to eat. This is how they bewitch the people. And, for their marriage ritual, a priest brings a bride-to-be into a secret house. They say that this is in order to instruct the young girl, yet, as a matter of fact, the whole thing is a business of debauchery.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Còn như tà đạo dị đoan, chớ để nó lừa dối cảm dỗ. Đạo Gia tô lại càng vô lý: trai gái chung đụng nôm tạp, việc làm giống như cầm thú. Gây vấy cánh, cổ động gian tà, tự sa vào tội chết. Đó là làm cho bại hoại luân lý, hư hỏng giáo hoá, không thể tin được. Nếu người nào đã bị dỗ dành thì nên mau chóng bỏ đi,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 235.

<sup>34</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang*, 62.

<sup>35</sup> “Tà giáo Tây dương làm say đắm lòng người... Tục truyền rằng tà giáo Tây dương thường khoét mắt người, và cho một trai một gái ở chung một nhà có tường ngăn cách, lâu ngày động tình dục, nhân đấy rập cho chết bẹp, lấy nước [xác chết đó] hoà làm bánh [thánh], mỗi khi giảng đạo, cho mọi người ăn, khiến cho mê đạo không bỏ được. Cả đến người theo đạo, khi trai, gái lấy vợ lấy chồng, thì đạo trưởng đem người con gái vào nhà kín, với danh nghĩa là giảng đạo, thực ra là để dâm ô,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. clxiv*, 837.

It is something of an enigma how erudite bureaucrats who went through a rigorous education and learned how to interpret difficult classical texts were at the same time credulous adherents of nonsensical rumors and themselves willfully perpetuated such absurdities.<sup>36</sup>

However, in order to gain a deeper appreciation of the significance of this anti-Catholic rhetoric, one has to compare it with the Nguyễn handling of other religions. Admittedly, Catholicism was not the only religion that was under investigation; the activities of other religions were also monitored by Nguyễn authorities. In the 1840s, while Catholics were being subjected to severe persecution, Buddhists also came under critical scrutiny of zealous Confucian mandarins, as shown in an 1844 memorial against Nguyễn Đăng Giai (d.1854), the governor-general of the tri-province Sơn-Hung-Tuyên of northern Tonkin. Other court officials denounced this high-ranking mandarin for his favoritism toward Buddhism, especially in his lobbying for construction of more new pagodas. Emperor Thiệu Trị reprimanded Nguyễn Đăng Giai for his project and rejected the proposal with an additional scathing remark:

Your petition for fixing and building pagodas is an unseemly proposal. Did not the sages of old draw a clear distinction between the true path and superstition? We model ourselves on these saintly sages. We govern in order to bring blessings upon the people. The civilizing mission is the underlying motive behind our rulings. Our government has already established a course on how people should cultivate good behavior. We admit that a part of that policy allows people to build pagodas and shrines. Yet, the real purpose is to house relics, to capture the beauty, or to enhance the scenery, so that people can learn to appreciate the good. We have no intention of promoting any superstitious practices. We, being the ruler and the father of all, follow meticulously and preserve carefully the essence of the law, so that we can lead people on the right path to harmony and prosperity. But, here your language is loaded with spurious religious doctrine. Your proposal inadvertently advises us to collude with you to promote superstitious customs.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q. ccii, 501-503.*

<sup>37</sup> “Thậm chí khoản xin sửa dựng chùa Phật thì rất là sai dối. Ôi chính đạo và dị đoan, từ xưa thánh hiền biện bạch đã rõ rồi! Nước nhà ta thần quyền thánh kế, chấp trung mà trị lấy phước cho dân, đường chính rõ ràng hợp cùng giáo hoá. Còn như việc vì dân cầu phước khuyên dân làm lành, triều đình vốn đã có đường lối. Trong đó tuy cũng có dựng chùa lập quán, nhưng là vì thần trung thánh tích để lại hoặc là nơi chung tú phát tuồng, nhân đó mới dựng lên để ghi nhớ phương huy, cho ngàn muôn đời về sau chiêm ngưỡng công đức chứ chẳng phải để sùng chuộng tà giáo đâu. Trẫm kính tuân tâm pháp trị pháp cũng chỉ để đưa dân vào khuôn phép để được hưng thịnh, chung hưởng phước thái bình. Thế mà viên ấy đã đắm chìm vào giáo lý hư vô đã lấy mình dối gạt người, dám dùng

Nevertheless, one has to read this kind of Nguyễn propaganda and political image-creation as intended to demonstrate how committed the Huế court was to the Confucian civilizing mission even in the face of Buddhist practice. Within four months of the same year (1844), Thiệu Trị issued two other instructions that were favorable toward Buddhism. In the first, he approved the petition from court officials to sponsor a week long chanting marathon at the Pagoda of Diệu Đế on the birthday of the queen mother. At its end, the petition states the emperor's wish that all the adult royal members be present at the first prayer service.<sup>38</sup> In the second directive, he asked his council members to organize a solemn Buddhist service for the repose of the departed victims of epidemics and other natural disasters.<sup>39</sup> Nguyễn favoritism toward Buddhism did not escape the watchful eyes of the Confucian purists. In 1860 a group of mandarins submitted a memorial to ask Tự Đức to be sterner with Buddhism if the emperor truly wanted to eradicate Catholicism. They bluntly wrote: "If we desire to eliminate the superstitious practices of other people, we must first abandon our own heterodox habits. A turn away from Buddhism is the key to get rid of Catholicism."<sup>40</sup>

At the outset, Minh Mạng's *Ten Moral Maxims* simply reiterated the long-standing tenets of the patriarchal nature of royal authority in an ideal Confucian society.<sup>41</sup> However, as one

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lời lẽ sách ân hành quái như thế đối trước quân phụ. Như vậy là muốn đem cái dị đoan ra cho thiên hạ noi theo sao?" Lý Kim Hoa, *Châu bản triều Nguyễn: Tư liệu Phật Giáo*, 134-135.

<sup>38</sup> "Vườn nhà của nguyên Phước Quốc công (Châu phê: Nội các lập chiếu) nơi ấp Xuân Lộc phía Đông kinh thành là đất phát điền tốt, đã chuẩn y đề nghị của bộ cho lập ngôi phạm vũ để vi dân cầu phúc, đặt tên là Diệu Đế tự... Tháng sau nhân tiết Vu Lan, mừng Thánh tổ mẫu ta Nhân Tuyên Từ Khánh thái hoàng hậu hưởng thọ tuổi tiên thật là phúc lớn, lòng trăm chi xiết vui mừng. Truyền lấy giờ tốt này mừng 9 tháng 7 mở đại trai đàn khánh chúc tại chùa Diệu Đế tụng kinh một thất bảy ngày đêm, chúc thánh thọ tăng long và cầu khắp nước mưa thuận gió hòa, dân chúng yên ổn cùng hưởng phúc thái bình... Lại từ ngày khai kinh, truyền phủ Tôn Nhân chọn phái các hoàng thân đã trưởng thành, họp cùng các quan chức trong Tôn Thất thay phiên đến trai đàn đánh lễ cho được thận trọng." Lý Kim Hoa, *Châu bản triều Nguyễn: Tư liệu Phật Giáo*, 120-123.

<sup>39</sup> Lý Kim Hoa, *Châu bản triều Nguyễn: Tư liệu Phật Giáo*, 123-125.

<sup>40</sup> "Muốn trừ tuyệt cái dị đoan của người trước phải bỏ cái tà đạo của mình. Bỏ Phật là cái bí quyết để trừ tuyệt Gia Tô," Lý Kim Hoa, *Châu bản triều Nguyễn: Tư liệu Phật Giáo*, 286-288.

<sup>41</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, 121; Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 189.

investigates further the official motivation behind the singular tirade against Christianity in the seventh maxim that seems stylistically at odds with the rest of the document, one begins to notice an internal disjunction within Nguyễn bureaucratic ideology. On the one hand, one can conclude that what may appear as an addendum to *Thập Điều* turns out to be the pledge of an unequivocal and systematic anti-Catholic campaign. Minh Mạng and his officials purposely used this religious minority group as a pawn to magnify their political legitimacy by posing as champions of the Confucian civilizing mission. On the other hand, when one compares this diatribe against Catholicism with long-standing Nguyễn preferential treatment toward Buddhism, one begins either to question the commitment of the Nguyễn authorities to the Confucian civilizing mission or to wonder about another political evolution behind the Nguyễn statecraft—the rise of Nguyễn absolutist tendency.

### C. The Southeast Asian model of an absolute cultic king

As one may suspect, the official favoritism toward Buddhism bespeaks more complicated political machinations than just an avowed Confucianism that the Huế court professed in order to secure its authority.<sup>42</sup> Though a dominant ideology, Confucianism was by no means the only system which the dynasty utilized. Apart from representing themselves as emperors (*hoàng đế*) in the East Asian tradition, the Nguyễn rulers also claimed to be the *vua* or the absolute cultic kings of their Southeast Asian subjects.<sup>43</sup> The rulers of the Southeast Asian political tradition of the early modern period appeared much keener on controlling the religious activities of their subjects than did those of the Confucian tradition in Tonkin, as French anthropological historian of Southeast Asia, Alain Forest, argues. When Forest compared the Mahayana Buddhism in Tonkin with the Theravada Buddhism in Cochinchina and its neighboring southeastern region,

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<sup>42</sup> Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyen Dynasty in Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 60.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 10, 22.

he noticed that the social political system of each region dealt with Buddhism differently, and accordingly produced its own specific model of a religion-state relationship. The northern Neo-Confucians did not put much effort into incorporating religion, in this case Buddhism, into their governance. Buddhism was tolerated but reduced to the realm of personal devotion. The Nguyễn's southern fiefdom, in contrast, adopted a governing system that demanded a larger degree of uniformity than the northern model. The whole kingdom operated as a national hierarchical patron-client chain in which everybody except the king was the client of somebody else.<sup>44</sup>

One can find evidence to support Forest's claim from the accounts given in a nineteenth-century Catholic local history, *Sử Ký Đại Nam Việt Quốc Triều*. One verbatim entry recounts an argument between Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and his Catholic mandarin, Tống Phước Đạm (d.1794): “As for you [Tống Phước Đạm], we will send you to the Siamese court. The Siamese king will make an example of you. He will teach you how to kowtow to Buddha,” mocked the king. The Catholic mandarin did not give up: “The Siamese king can do whatever he wants. I will not kowtow.”<sup>45</sup> This dialogue gives a rare glimpse into a political religious orientation of a Southeast Asian court. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and Tống Phước Đạm worked and offered their military services to the Siamese court when they fled from the Tây Sơn during the 1770s. They had first-hand experience of the inner workings of governments in this region. One can surmise from their conversation that religious conformity would be the non-negotiable issue in that Southeast Asian socio-political environment, as Alain Forest proposes. Besides Forest, Nola

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<sup>44</sup> Alain Forest, *Les missionnaires français au Tonkin et au Siam, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles: Analyse comparée d'un relatif succès et d'un total échec*, 3 vols. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> “Vua rằng: ‘...Còn phần mây thì trẫm sẽ gởi cho vua Xiêm, cho vua ấy bắt mây lay.’ Ông Dinh-trung rằng: ‘Vua Xiêm nói làm sao, thì mặc vua ấy, tôi không lay.’ Vua rằng: ‘Mây nói làm vậy thì phải, vì chung vua Xiêm bắt người ta lay bụi; còn trẫm thì có ý ép mây lay tổ tiên trẫm, cũng như khi còn sống vậy thôi,’” *Sử Ký Đại Nam Việt Quốc Triều*, 2d ed. (Saigon: Tân Định, 1885), 93.

Cooke and other regional historians also underscore this political aspect of the Nguyễn dynasty and even advance a revised interpretation of the Nguyễn court from the Southeast Asian perspective rather than the East Asian.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the penchant for imposing cultural religious uniformity as an official policy under the Nguyễn dynasty probably derives from its southern heritage.

Nola Cooke even makes the bold claim that Buddhism rather than Confucianism was the core of Đàng Trong governing system. In contrast to its Trịnh counterpart in Đàng Ngoài, the Đàng Trong elites had a long tradition of patronage of Buddhism.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the Đàng Trong seigneurial lords enthusiastically championed Buddhism and, in effect, made it the state religion.<sup>48</sup> This tradition continued to find its place as these elites ascended from being the lords of Đàng Trong to being the emperors of Vietnam. Despite occasionally being denounced by Confucian purists at court, Buddhist institutions under the Nguyễn had access to significant imperial subsidies ranging from the use of sets of expensive porcelain from the imperial treasury for temple worship to large public funds to build pagodas.<sup>49</sup> The emperors did not even bother to mask their personal affinity toward Buddhism. For instance, as avowedly Confucian as Tự Đức was, he did not see Buddhism as a contradiction but an integral part of his own legacy.<sup>50</sup> In 1867,

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<sup>46</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response*; Nola Cooke, "The Composition of the Nineteenth-Century Political Elite of Pre-Colonial Nguyen Vietnam (1802-1883)," *Modern Asian Studies*, 29 (1995): 741-764; "The Myth of the Restoration: Dang-Trong Influences in the Spiritual Life of the Early Nguyen Dynasty (1802-47)," *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*, ed. Anthony Reid (London: Macmillan, 1997); "Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Confucianization in Historical Perspective: Evidence from the Palace Examination (1463-1883)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25,2 (September 1994); "Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyen Rule in Seventeenth-Century Dang Trong (Cochinchina)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29, 1 (March 1998). Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina—Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> Nola Cooke, "Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyen Rule in Seventeenth Century Dang Trong (Cochinchina)," 136.

<sup>48</sup> Li Tana, "An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyen Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29 (1) (March 1998), 114; Nola Cooke, "Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyen Rule in the Seventeenth Century Dang Trong (Cochinchina)," 136.

<sup>49</sup> Lý Kim Hoa, *Châu bản triều Nguyễn: Tư liệu Phật Giáo*, 13-22, 25-27.

<sup>50</sup> Lý Kim Hoa, *Châu bản triều Nguyễn: Tư liệu Phật Giáo*, 230.

Tự Đức composed a reflection of his own reign and ordered it to be inscribed on the stele erected in front of his tomb. He tacitly confessed how he sought spiritual solace in the Buddhist tradition while he exerted his efforts to fulfill his Confucian obligations. When he described his burial place, he wrote:

My chosen site is located on a mount surrounded by auspicious sites in four directions. The Circular Mound Altar to Heaven stands in front of it; the Pagoda of Linh Mục in the back. The former inspires me to go forward, and the latter bolsters my steps. Here I can render proper worship when I am still alive as well as pay an eternal obeisance when I die. On the right is the Xương Lăng Tomb of my father, and the left the Temple of Literature. I am at peace knowing that forever I can pay my reverent homage to all of them.”<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, more rooted in the Southeast Asian heritage than in the East Asian cultural sphere since the seventeenth-century, the Nguyễn dynasty had developed its own distinct southern Cochinchina characteristics far different from the Confucian Lê-Trịnh government of Tonkin.<sup>52</sup> In this hybrid socio-political framework, the Nguyễn rulers assumed a greater cultic religious mantle than that of East Asian Confucian emperors.

Nguyễn rulers, nevertheless, infused Confucian statecraft into the larger Southeast Asian religious ideological context, and thus created a new model of emperors. The authority of the Son of Heaven was enhanced further by playing the role of the royal cultic high priest.<sup>53</sup> In the 1802 proclamation of the founding of the new dynasty, Gia Long laid claim to the accumulated spirit potency, “*khí thiêng*,” in the universe and the spiritual merits garnered by generations of his ancestors. Here he found the ultimate source of the Nguyễn dynasty.<sup>54</sup> The Southeast Asian kings considered themselves not merely mediators between heaven and earth, but also part of

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<sup>51</sup> “[Khiêm lăng] lên cao trông bốn phía, trước mặt là đàn tế Giao, sau lưng là chùa Linh Mục, đủ để tỏ việc trông và dựa của đời ta, sống chưa được hết lễ, chết cũng được chầu mãi, bên hữu gần Xương lăng, bên tả đối Văn miếu, đủ để yên lòng nhớ mến kính trông của ta,” *DNTLCB 7/Q. xxxvii*, 1075.

<sup>52</sup> Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina—Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 13, 107.

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 10, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Nola Cooke, “The Myth of Restoration,” 274-277.



heaven themselves.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the new hybrid Son of Heaven embodied the essence of the royal nation. The Southeast Asian Confucian emperors did not simply observe the civil rituals, but also embodied mythic power. Their sovereignty rested upon the mystical influence built upon the virtuous conduct of the royal line.<sup>56</sup> Only from this sacrosanct and intrinsic emperorship, could regulations and bureaucracy derive their political legitimacy.<sup>57</sup> The Neo-Confucian political model was a political language to use for palcatating the northern Lê loyalists, but the regime was southeastern at the core of its socio-religio-political structure.<sup>58</sup> If under the Lê-Trịnh regime, religions remained in the realm of personal devotion, for the Nguyễn rulers, the state-sponsored Confucianism spoke in deep religious tone of the Southeast Asian context.

#### D. Manipulation of the theatrical ritual of an absolute state

Another characteristic of Nguyễn absolutist style was its meticulous attention and serious devotion to state rituals to bolster a cultic personality around a ruler. The Nguyễn government put in considerable efforts to reinforce the sacral image of the cultic monarch with elaborate ceremonies in order to reinforce its political legitimacy as well as to sow terror among the ruled. The most telling example is the detailed description of “presenting the prisoners of war to the throne”—*hiển phò*—found in the *1851 Compendium*.

In the instruction for the Board of Rites on how to carry out the ceremony, the *Compendium* described the executions of the Tây Sơn emperor, Nguyễn Quang Toản (r.1792-1802) to lay down the rubrics.<sup>59</sup> On the morning of the eleventh lunar month of 1802, the guards lined up Quang Toản and his brothers—in cages—in front of the Zenith Gate (Ngọ Môn) of the

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<sup>55</sup> Li Tana, “An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyen Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” 116.

<sup>56</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xxxvii*, 1076-1077.

<sup>57</sup> John K. Fairbank, “A Preliminary Framework,” *The Chinese World Order*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 6-8; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Nola Cooke, “The Composition of the Nineteenth-Century Political Elite of Pre-Colonial Nguyen Vietnam (1802-1883).”

<sup>59</sup> *KDDNHDSL 4/Q. 114*, 256-257.

imperial palace. Along with the now-defunct Tây Sơn emperor and princes, the executioners placed a jar containing the exhumed remains of Quang Toản's father, Nguyễn Huệ (r.1788-1792), and a trunk full of dismembered left ears of lesser ranked prisoners who had already been beheaded. The Nguyễn imperial princes and mandarins filed in on both sides of the plaza and waited for the emperor Gia Long. From the inner precincts of the palace—*Đại Nội*—a large instrumental ensemble of over forty court musicians accompanied the emperor to the Gate.<sup>60</sup> When Gia Long ascended and was enthroned in the *Ngũ Phụng Pavilion* built on top of the Gate, bells pealed and drums rolled from the side towers to signal the start of the ceremony. Military generals presented the captured prisoners and returned the commanding seals to the emperor to symbolize the completion of the military campaign. A mandarin of the Board of Punishments then stepped up to the throne and requested that the emperor issue verdicts on the prisoners. After pronouncing the sentence, the emperor and his entourage departed as an encore of ritual music filled the air. As for Quang Toản and his brothers, they were dragged to a nearby field. Each of their limbs and neck were tied with a rope to an elephant. After the prisoners were torn apart, their heads were salted and paraded through out the empire. As for the remains of Nguyễn Huệ, his ashes were desecrated with fecal matter and scattered, and his skull was housed in a specially built imperial dungeon.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout the ceremony, the deliberately staged theatrical demonstrations created a sacral aura surrounding the godlike ruler by carefully maintaining an atmosphere of august remoteness from his officials, let alone his people. For example, when the death sentence to the prisoners of war was issued, the request first came from a mandarin of the Board of War to a eunuch who then reported to the emperor. The emperor uttered the verdict via the eunuch to a

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<sup>60</sup> Alain Daniélou and Ivan Vandro, eds., *Anthology of World Music: The Music of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: International Institute for Traditional Music, 1999), 8-10.

<sup>61</sup> *DNTLCB I/Q*. xix, 531.

mandarin of the Board of Punishments rather than back to the mandarin from the Board of War.<sup>62</sup> Through this complicated chain of communication, albeit in the ceremonial setting, the rituals emphasized that only the emperor had a complete personal control over the whole government while even his officials were seemingly allowed to participate in only some but not the entire process.

E. The co-opting of the Confucian judicial office into an instrument of the absolute monarch

Besides surrounding a hybrid image of a Southeast Asian cultic king and a Confucian emperor with state ceremonies, Nguyễn success in building up an absolute monarchical government also owed much to the utilization of the judicial system to the full via the Censorate (*Đồ Sát Viện*). The Censorate had been a long established agency of the Sinic bureaucratic tradition assigned to monitor not only mandarins but also all of the imperial members.<sup>63</sup> Though two high-ranked mandarins served as its co-presidents, most of the bureaucrats in the Censorate were only clerical staff at the grade of fifth or lower-ranked mandarins.<sup>64</sup> Under Minh Mạng's judicial reform, the increase in usage of lower ranking functionaries was the key for the effectiveness of this agency to become the tool of absolute rule. Technically, the real power of these bureaucrats was vested not by their own status but by the patron-client association with the emperor when they exercised their authority over their superior officials.<sup>65</sup> Thus, by design, the staff of the Censorate was de facto the extension of the emperor who through the Censorate took personal charge of the government.

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<sup>62</sup> *KĐĐNHĐSL 4/Q. 114, 257.*

<sup>63</sup> *KĐĐNHĐSL 8/Q. 227, 54.*

<sup>64</sup> *KĐĐNHĐSL 8/Q. 227, 56; KĐĐNHĐSL 2/Q. 8, 44; ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxiii, 360-364.*

<sup>65</sup> Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 68, 71-74.

At first, under Gia Long, the Nguyễn court did not make full use of this agency because its bureaucratic organization of the state was still primitive.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the Censorate remained dormant until 1822, by which time Minh Mạng had been on the throne for three years.<sup>67</sup> Minh Mạng used this unit to launch his campaign to centralize his government by sidelining the old generals of his father's generation, and finding channels to allow him to work with lower-ranked bureaucrats and by-pass the higher mandarinates traditionally ensconced in the Six Boards (*Lục Bộ*).<sup>68</sup>

Minh Mạng jealously guarded the Censorate in order to take personal charge of the government rather than to delegate the task to officials of the six existing ministries—Revenue, Civil Office, War, Criminal Justice, Public Works, and Rites—of the so called Six Boards. In 1829, he rejected the request of his ministers to increase their staff:

If we follow your request, then where will be its end? In all the existing boards, there are as many mediocre and lazy people as intelligent and honest ones. The problem began with mistaken recommendations simply based on appearance, geographical origins, or personal connection. And so, now we end up with incompetent functionaries. Whose fault is that? If we do not examine thoroughly the roots of the problem, and if we continue to maintain a flock of do-nothing people, then what is the benefit of increasing the number of clerks?<sup>69</sup>

While he refused to staff the Six Boards, he steadily promoted his intendants to the Censorate and admitted the new ones.<sup>70</sup> It provided career prospects for lesser-ranked literati and

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<sup>66</sup> *KĐĐNHDSL 2/Q. 8, 44*; Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, 45-46.

<sup>67</sup> *KĐĐNHDSL 8/Q. 227, 55*.

<sup>68</sup> Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, 85-87.

<sup>69</sup> Emmanuel Poisson, *Mandarins et subalternes au nord du Việt Nam: une bureaucratie à l'épreuve (1820-1918)* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004), 36; “Nay nếu cứ theo lời xin thì đến đâu cho cùng? Và lại các nha môn, người liêm cần giỏi giang tuy không thiếu, mà người lười biếng tầm thường cũng không ít, bởi vì lúc đầu cất nhắc có khi lầm ở lời nói coi đáng mạo mà dùng thực cũng không trách làm gì, hoặc giả nể là người làng hay ngấm ngấm đi lại, đến nỗi quan có người không xứng chức, lại có người không được việc, thế là lỗi ở ai? Nếu không xét cùng đến nguồn gốc mà muốn số ngạch ngày tăng lên, rồi cứ bắt chước nhau mà ngồi rồi ăn không, thì dẫu nhiều mà có ích gì,” *ĐNTLCB II/Q. lvii*, 814.

<sup>70</sup> *KĐĐNHDSL 2/Q. 8, 44*; *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxiii*, 360.

engendered personal loyalty to the absolute ruler.<sup>71</sup> At court, the officials of the Censorate accompanied the emperor from his rising to his reclining to write down every word the emperor spoke.<sup>72</sup> By 1833, Minh Mạng perfected a system of note taking. Every moment, even during breaks, he had two censors on his right to copy down his words and four on his left to write down the reports from other officials to him. At the end of the day, these censors submitted their notes to the editing mandarin; and at the end of each month, these notes were bound, sealed, and handed over to the Imperial Academy to archive.<sup>73</sup> The Censorate became an indispensable tool and a great source of patronage with which the emperor could expand his personal power.

#### F. Arrogation of local cultures

Nguyễn centralization was also achieved by arrogating local cultures. Since the founding of the dynasty, the Nguyễn rulers had equated cultural uniformity with political stability and national security. In the spring of 1804, immediately after his installation ceremony as the Gia Long emperor, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh issued his first ordinance to regulate religious practices:

Cultivation of right conduct recently has been neglected. Village customs have been corrupted. Ruinous habits are deeply ingrained into the rhythm of daily life such as in wedding banquets, in funeral practices, and in worshipping deities and Buddha. These rituals no longer follow the ancient rites. They exhaust both monetary as well as labor resources. Local notables turn these events into opportunities to plunder commoners. We need to reform.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, the Huế court implemented this principle of conformity by trying not only to regulate, but also to codify imperial authority over all religious practices in the kingdom. This codification is set forth in the *1813 Gia Long Law Code—Hoàng Việt Luật Lệ (Luật Gia Long)*

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<sup>71</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 56.

<sup>72</sup> *KĐĐNHĐSL 8/Q. 227*, 55-60.

<sup>73</sup> *KĐĐNHĐSL 8/Q. 229*, 89-90.

<sup>74</sup> “Gần đây giáo hóa suy đồi, làng không tục tốt, nói noi đã lâu, đăm đuối càng sâu. Những việc ăn uống giá thú, táng tế, Thân, Phật phần nhiều là tiếm lễ, trái phép, tổn của cải, hại sức người. Hào mục mượn cơ để đục khoét hạng dân bản cùng, dồn đến bước đường tự sát. Tệ ấy cần phải sửa đổi lại,” Phan Thúc Trực, *Quốc Sử Di Biên* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hoá-Thông Tin, 2009), 68.

and in *Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ* (*Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Great South*). Nguyễn Ngọc Huy and Tạ Văn Tài, scholars of Vietnamese dynastic laws, pointed out that in comparison with their Lê predecessors, the Nguyễn rulers paid unusual attention to the regulation of religious practices.<sup>75</sup> “Ritual Law” found in the *Hồng Đức Code* of the Lê dynasty addresses such practices cursorily in a very short clause of Article §141:

Whenever there are funerals and burials in a village, neighbors must help one another. The head of the family in mourning shall feed his guests in accordance with his financial situation. Those who adduce vile ancient customs to demand big trays of rice, wine, fish, and meat from the mourning family shall receive eighty strokes of the heavy sticks rods.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast, the *Gia Long Code* has turned this short legal article into six lengthy sections of the “Ritual Law,” which is further clarified and elaborated in a full volume of the *1851 Compendium*.<sup>77</sup> The new ritual code covers everything from the proper preparations before participating in a sacrificial ritual to punishments for not lighting the full seven candles on the altar for Heaven.<sup>78</sup> This law code gives state officials broad authority to oversee and override traditional, local customs if the officials deem them to fall into the category of cultic heterodox practices.<sup>79</sup>

Nguyễn centralization was achieved by an accumulation of small regulations. By means of implementation of Gia Long’s “ritual law,” the Huế government aggressively intruded into and drastically curtailed the autonomy of peasant society.<sup>80</sup> The most telling evidence of the Nguyễn determination to take control of local affairs is in the instruction on the usage of gongs and drums in religious processions in the *Gia Long Code*. In the name of the Confucian

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<sup>75</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, Tạ Văn Tài, and Trần Văn Liêm, *The Lê Code—Law in Traditional Vietnam: A Comparative Sino-Vietnamese Legal Study with Historical-Juridical Analysis and Annotations*, 3 vols. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987, 118-119).

<sup>76</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Huy et al., *The Lê Code—Law in Traditional Vietnam*, vol. 2, 144.

<sup>77</sup> *HVLL III/Q. ix*, 405-416; *KĐĐNHĐSL 4/Q. 186*, 232-239.

<sup>78</sup> *HVLL III/Q. ix*, 412.

<sup>79</sup> *HVLL III/Q. ix*, 415.

<sup>80</sup> Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 152-158.

civilizing mission, the central authorities declared local traditions null and void. The ordinance specifies: “Common tradition does not forbid [gongs and drums]. However, if this kind of instrument induces participants to fall into a hypnotic trance, then it will no longer be allowed.”<sup>81</sup> This imperial instruction was an affront to popular sentiment represented in the time-honored axiom “*phép vua thua lệ làng*—royal orders cannot trump village customs.” Besides abrogating practices of village communities, the Nguyễn emperors even attempted to prescribe how people should dress—an attempt that produced mutual frustration.<sup>82</sup> Ten years after Minh Mạng had passed his sumptuary laws, the persistent popular resistance infuriated the emperor. In the fall of 1837, he issued another decree hoping to resolve the matter once and for all:

Those who live on the northern side of Gianh River still cannot break away from their old custom. We had ordered all people to dress uniformly like our southerners. We all should conform to one culture. Out of consideration for the need for gradual change, we granted them a very generous grace period to comply with the rule. It has been ten years. People in Tonkin still kept their old habit. They should learn how to style themselves like the people of Quảng Bình and of all other southern provinces. The southerners have headdress, gown, and trousers like the Han and the Minh. As for the north, men wear only a loincloth. Tonkin women scantily cover their upper body and indecently wrap in skirts. What an awful lot of indecent exposure has been committed! Some regions have complied with the regulation better than others. Some continue to keep the old style; it is not because they are unable to change, but they are simply obdurate.... They have until next year to change. Severe punishments will be next.<sup>83</sup>

The peasants did not give in that easily. They resisted the royal encroachment into their personal and communal space not only by their non-compliant attitude but also with heavy sarcasm. Their resentment is still evident in a satirical folksong:

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<sup>81</sup> “Mang tượng thần đánh trống, phèng la rước thần, dù dân gian không cấm, nhưng việc ấy cũng làm mê hoặc lòng người, cho nên cấm,” *HVLL III/Q. ix*, 416.

<sup>82</sup> *ĐNTLCB II/Q. xli*, 547; *ĐNTLCB II/Q. liv*, 775; *ĐNTLCB V/Q. clxxxiv*, 164.

<sup>83</sup> “Trước đây từ sông Gianh trở ra Bắc, cách ăn mặc vẫn còn tục cũ, ra dụ cho đổi theo cách ăn mặc từ Quảng Bình trở vào, để cho phong tục như nhau, lại gia hạn rộng cho được cất may thông thả, thế mà từ năm Minh Mệnh thứ 8 đến nay đã trải 10 năm, vẫn nghe nông phu thôn phụ miền ngoài, phần nhiều lần lữa chưa đổi, xét ra từ Quảng Bình trở vào Nam, hết thấy ăn mặc theo lối nhà Hán, nhà Minh, đội mũ, mặc áo mặc quần chỉnh tề như thế, so với ngoài Bắc còn theo như cũ, con trai đóng khố, con gái mặc áo vạt khép với nhau, dưới mặc váy thì đẹp xấu dễ thấy rõ ràng, lại có nơi đã theo tục hay, cũng có nơi vẫn yên như cũ, há chẳng phải là có ý trái lệnh ư?... Nếu sang năm sau, vẫn có người theo như cũ, thì trị tội,” *ĐNTLCB V/Q. clxxxiv*, 164.

The edict issued by Minh Mạng  
 Forbidding skirts, terrifies people.  
 If you do not go to the market, it will not be crowded.  
 But to go to the market, how can you have the heart to strip your husband  
 [naked]?<sup>84</sup>  
 Those have trousers: keep your shops open.  
 Those without trousers: hide at the village gate and take a peek at our great  
 mandarins.

In the short traditional three couplets of six-eight meter style (*lục-bát*), people deliberately flouted the *lèse-majesté* taboo by pairing words for imperial regulations with those of sexual innuendoes. The stanza opens with “chiếu,” which means a royal proclamation, but its homonym can also mean a grass mat that people use to sleep on. The ridicule is no longer ambiguous starting in the second line. It describes how the imperial might has created a paralysing fear because of the emperor’s consuming interest in their skirts. The contempt conveyed in the next four lines descends into the level of crass naked truth. These last four lines shame the court for its interference in the mundane details of people’s daily life in a manner beneath the dignity of its own office. The popularity of this satirical poem testifies to the strong, widely-shared resentment by the general public toward the rise of Nguyễn absolutism.

## VI. Catholicism—a Direct Affront to the Nguyễn’s Fuller Absolutism

During the twenty years under the rule of Minh Mạng (1820-1841), as a religious minority group in Vietnam, Catholics felt the effects of Nguyễn absolutism keenly. Their feelings exceeded the level of resentment. They lived in a state of terror, as described by Étienne-

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“Chiếu vua Minh Mạng ban ra:  
 Cấm quần không đày người ta hãi hùng.  
 Không đi thì chợ không đông,  
 Đi ra bóc lột quần chồng sao đang.  
 [Có quần ra quán bán hàng,  
 Không quần đứng nấp đầu làng trông quan,]”

Alexander Woodside’s translation, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 134-135.



Théodore Cuénot (1802-1861), an apostolic vicar of Đàng Trong. On 14 November 1836, he wrote:

The consternation of the Christians was then at its height; they thought that they were on the eve of the execution of the furious menaces, which were so often repeated during the preceding two years. If ever the presence of Missionaries caused them embarrassment, it was on the present occasion. There was no hole sufficiently deep to bury the few articles that we possessed; a set of beads, a pious medal, became a cause of serious alarm.<sup>85</sup>

The first ominous sign pointing toward the eventual period of official persecution came with the secret instruction in 1825 to bar further admission of missionaries into the country.<sup>86</sup> In the winter of 1832, Minh Mạng issued the first edict to criminalize all followers of Catholicism and threaten them with heavy punishment.<sup>87</sup> The Huế court specifically condemned Catholicism in its promulgation of *Thập Điều* in 1834.<sup>88</sup> Minh Mạng imposed a death sentence on captured missionaries in 1836.<sup>89</sup> In 1839, a year before his death, the emperor ordered the Board of Punishments to make his proscription against Catholicism a permanent feature of the Nguyễn penal laws.<sup>90</sup> These imperial orders and edicts against Catholicism were intimately linked with the development of the Nguyễn imperial state-building toward the absolutist side, which will be explained in the following section according to their chronological order: In 1831, Catholicism was considered a menacing challenge to the official patron-client system; in 1832, it was the first legal case handled by the Censorate; and, in 1834, it was singled out in the *Thập Điều* monthly and ritually in every village in the kingdom.

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<sup>85</sup> Étienne-Théodore Cuénot, "Letter of Dr. Cuenot, Bishop of Metellopolis, Coadjutor of the Vicar Apostolic of Cochinchina, to the Directors of the Seminary of Foreign Missions," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, vol. 2 (1838-1839): 131.

<sup>86</sup> Jean-Louis Taberd, "Lettre de M. Taberd, supérieur de la mission de Cochinchine, à MM. les Supérieurs et Directeurs du séminaire des missions étrangères, à Paris," *APF*, vol. 3 (1828): 456-457.

<sup>87</sup> *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxvi*, 415-416.

<sup>88</sup> *ĐNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 232-236.

<sup>89</sup> *ĐNTLCB 4/Q. clxiv*, 837-839.

<sup>90</sup> *ĐNTLCB 5/Q. ccii*, 501-503.

A. A non-member of the patron-client system

Minh Mạng saw the stealthy presence of a religious group outside of his patron-client chain as a deliberate snub to his authority. The group's underground existence exasperated him. As seen at the end of the last chapter regarding the legal dispute between the Catholic Dương Sơn [Xuân] village and its Cổ Lão neighbor (1831), when it became known that many of his imperial guards were Catholics of this village, Minh Mạng was utterly perplexed: "To my understanding, the Christian religion only exists among the illiterate peasants because only these are more prone to fanaticism. It is quite beyond my comprehension that even people on my right and on my left also fall into this sect."<sup>91</sup> As the Dương Sơn case unfolded, Catholic resistance enraged him in proportion to his incomprehension of their religious ideals.<sup>92</sup> Five years later, when the emperor reflected on the case, he was still in disbelief about the fanatical effects of this religion. He recalled:

This heterodox Christian religion mesmerized people (*làm mê người*) for a long time. Men may still have some conscience left in their hearts, so they can be reconverted. But, as for girls and women, they are extremists.... As in case of Dương Xuân [Sơn] village near the capital a few years ago, the edict imposed an immediate punishment of death by strangling for those who followed this religion. A certain older woman petitioned to be killed even at the threat of being trampled by elephant and then being decapitated. She still insisted on choosing the death sentence. This religion bewitches so many people.<sup>93</sup>

This attitude of contempt towards state authority by unlettered peasants living within the vicinity of the imperial city left the emperor and his court dismayed and aghast. The Nguyễn court interpreted Christians' fanatical adherence to this religion, and their public contempt of the

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<sup>91</sup> "Đạo Gia Tô, ta cho là chỉ có lũ ngu mới bị mê hoặc, không ngờ ngay ở bên tả hữu ta cũng có kẻ tin theo, thật rất đáng lạ," *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxvi*, 415.

<sup>92</sup> *DNTLCB 3/Q. lxxx*, 317.

<sup>93</sup> "Và lại đạo giáo Gia Tô làm mê người đã lâu, các người con trai chưa mất lương tâm, còn chịu bỏ giáo, còn như con gái đàn bà mê hoặc càng quá lắm... Như ở Kinh năm trước, người xã Dương Xuân, theo đạo Gia Tô, án xử phải tội thối cổ ngay, mà người cùng đạo có một bà già muốn đem mình chết theo, tuy dọa bằng oai voi giầy và gươm chém, cũng cam xin chết, đủ biết đạo Thiên chúa sao mê hoặc đến thế," *DNTLCB 5/Q. clxxxv*, 172.

imperial order, as a direct challenge not only to Minh Mạng personally but to the majesty of the Nguyễn state he personified.

#### B. The Censorate Department and Catholicism locked in opposition

The verdict against the Catholic village of Dương Sơn also marked the beginning of the official anti-Catholic policy which was further reinforced by the Censorate—the main engine behind the Nguyễn absolutism.<sup>94</sup> When the Dương Sơn case came before the Censorate, its legal dimensions were far from straightforward. The Gia Long Code does not explicitly proscribe Catholicism. Section 5 of Article § 164 of the Gia Long Code condemns all rituals and magic practices of the White Lotus Sect and several other religious activities deemed to be part of a heterodox religion. In the middle of Section 5, the Code ambiguously declares: “All of these mentioned rituals are considered as heterodox practice. A few other religious activities are not conclusively being defined by the authorities as heterodox; however, they all should be included.”<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the Censorate could not press charge against the villagers of Dương Sơn just simply from a prohibition of the so-called “heterodox religions” (*tà đạo*) mentioned vaguely in the Code. The Nguyễn jurists had to borrow another set of regulations on court rites and state rituals (*Lễ luật*) in order to construct an *a posteriori* argument against the Dương Sơn Catholics. Since many Catholics preferred to die rather than to recant their belief, the court officials reasoned that the followers of Catholicism must be under some bewitching power (*mê hoặc lòng người*). Bewitching power was a characteristic of heterodox practice (*sự vu tà thuật*), and thus such superstitious practice was a crime punishable according to an addendum in the *Code*.<sup>96</sup>

After this landmark court decision, Catholicism and the Censorate were locked in opposition

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<sup>94</sup> *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxx*, 317; *ĐNTLCB 3/Q. lxxxi*, 335.

<sup>95</sup> “Những điều nói trước đều là tà đạo hoặc có thứ chưa hẳn là tà đạo, cho nên gộp chung mà nói thôi,” *HVLL III/Q. ix*, 414.

<sup>96</sup> “Mang tượng thần đánh trống, phèng la rước thần, dù dân gian không cấm, nhưng việc ấy cũng làm mê hoặc lòng người, cho nên cấm,” *HVLL III/Q. ix*, 416.

through the rest of the Nguyễn dynasty until the signing of the 1874 Second Saigon Peace Treaty.

### C. Anti-Catholicism as state rituals

In addition to the legal argument buttressed by Censorate and enforced by imperial intimidation, the Nguyễn's anti-Catholic policy was ritualized and became a permanent feature in the daily life of everyone in the realm. In 1834, Minh Mạng assigned the Board of Rites—*Bộ Lễ*—to institute a ritual for the promulgation and reception of *Thập Điều* that notables of every village had to conduct twice monthly. The Huế court stipulated:

On the designated days, at the center of the public hall a red ceremonial table is set up. A copy of the document is placed on this table. Mandarins of prefecture, district, and outer district gather together with clerks and military officials as well as teachers and their students. All must put on formal gowns. When the ceremony begins, people process in and make five bows to the imperial maxims. The participants then go to their assigned seats on the opposite side of the aisle. The highest ranking mandarin in the group reads the maxims, explains the imperial instruction, and then explicates the *Thập Điều*. One should go line by line instructing the audience on the philosophical theses behind each maxim. After the instruction session, place the document back on the ceremonial table and bow five more times. Each local community chooses two auspicious days in the first and seventh month to perform this ritual annually. Imperial appointed instructors lead the same rite on the first day of the second, fifth, eighth and eleventh months. At the canton and commune level, village heads or teachers preside over the ceremony on the first day of the third, sixth, ninth and twelfth months. At the village commune house, *đình*, the most learned member is appointed to read out loud. People are seated to receive instruction.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, throughout the Nguyễn realm, in every month except the fourth and tenth, the state liturgy was celebrated with *Thập Điều* being the center of the gathering. The theoretical concepts might

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<sup>97</sup> “Đến ngày đã định, đều đặt một cái án sơn đỏ ở gian giữa công đường, đem nguyên bản đặt lên. Các quan phủ, huyện, châu trong địa phương đều tề tựu; các quan văn võ, học thân cũng đều tề tựu; các học trò đang theo học đều khăn áo chỉnh tề, đến sân lạy 5 lạy, rồi chia ngồi hai bên. Trường quan tuyên đọc, trước giảng lời dụ Chỉ, sau giảng đến huấn điều, diễn dịch từng câu, cốt cho nghĩa lý rõ ràng tường tận, để người nghe đều có thể hiểu rõ và tiếp thu đại khái được. Giảng xong, lại để nguyên bản lên án, lạy 5 lạy rồi lui ra. Từ đó, hàng năm, các địa phương thì cứ chọn ngày lành trong 2 tháng mạnh xuân [tháng giêng] và mạnh thu [tháng 7]; học quan thì nhằm ngày mùng 1 trong 4 tháng trọng [tháng 2, tháng 5, tháng 8 và tháng 11], hội giảng theo như nghi tiết. Các thôn xã cũng hội giảng một lần, sau đó cứ nhằm ngày mùng 1 trong 4 tháng quý [tháng 3, tháng 6, tháng 9 và tháng 12], đặt làm kỳ hạn, đều họp ở đình, một người trưởng mục hoặc hương thân có văn học đứng ra tuyên đọc; nhân dân ngồi yên mà nghe giảng,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxix*, 238.

escape people's attention but not the plain-spoken graphic remarks against Catholicism. For Catholics, the discomfort of sitting through this monthly state-sponsored instruction unwittingly reinforced Catholic awareness of the presence of a larger community of converts as opposed to just the people of their immediate primordial village with whom they had face-to-face contact. In a letter written in July 1839, Apostolic Vicar Pierre André Retord "Liêu" (1803-1858) described how converts bribed local teachers to exempt the Catholic villagers from sitting through these state-sponsored doctrination sessions:

Last year [1838] about the end of October, schoolmasters were appointed by the king to teach his decalogue to all our unfortunate apostates, and to exercise them in the prostrations which are made use of here, either as a mark of superstitious adoration, or as a testimony of civil respect. Well, those royal pedagogues opened their doctrinal sittings about the commencement of the present year; and on this account our Christians have also been put to a great deal of expense. For, not content with the slender salary which the king assigned the out of the treasury, they extorted a weighty tribute, which our Christians resigned themselves to pay, either to avoid seeing the priests, nuns, and the faithful (who reside in their canton) denounced to the mandarins, or to escape being compelled to take a part in the pagan ceremonies. In consideration of these payments, our great doctors consent to remain dumb in their chairs, and to spend in peace the salary of the king as well as the gifts of the Christians. What a wonderful thing is money!<sup>98</sup>

Bribery might provide a temporary solution for a few Catholic communities in Tonkin, but it could not outdo the determination of the Nguyễn state to enforce the *Thập Điều* as its ideological blueprint for the imperial state-building. The ritualized recitation of the *Thập Điều* became a state liturgy in the next forty years. It was more than just coincidence that by the late 1830s local converts increased their secret work in publication and distribution of Catholic literature (I will discuss the nature, content, and scope of this burgeoning Vietnamese Catholic "samizdats" in the later section of the chapter). Nevertheless, *Thập Điều* and its subsequent royal harsh measures

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<sup>98</sup> Pierre André Retord, "Letter from Mgr. Pierre Retord, Bishop elect of Acanthus and Vicar-Apostolic of Western Tong-King, to M. Chartres, Rector of St. George at Lyon, and to Mr. Cheynot," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 2 (1840): 559.

against Catholicism directly served as a socio-political catalyst in heightening the awareness of communion among the disparate Catholic communities within the Nguyễn realm.<sup>99</sup>

#### D. Crippling effects on the local Churches caused by two edicts

From the end of the Phiên An Rebellion to the death of Minh Mạng, the central authority issued two more edicts, one in 1836, and another in 1839, to pressure local governments to root out all Christian religious activities.<sup>100</sup> The 1836 *Bính Thân* Edict specifically aimed to purge the empire missionaries. It gave permission to local magistrates to execute any captured missionary. As for the rest of the local converts, the edict instructed officials to “thoroughly remove all vestiges of this cult and mete out severe punishment to its followers.”<sup>101</sup> The 1839 *Kỷ Hợi* Edict carries the prohibition to the extreme. It states: “Immediately after this edict, swords and axes are waiting for the obstinate adherents to this cult. They bring the death sentence on their own heads for their rebellious disobedience. Eliminate them all with no mercy!”<sup>102</sup> Without a doubt, these two edicts might have marked the end of Catholicism in Vietnam. The few remaining missionaries in the country certainly thought so. Of 117 canonized martyrs, 58 were executed under the reign of Minh Mạng, and 51 of those 58 during his last three years. Among the 51 were seven Spanish and French missionaries.<sup>103</sup> Missionaries in both Tonkin and Cochinchina grieved over and feared for the imminent annihilation of the Church under their care. Étienne-Théodore Cuénot “Thế” (1802-1861), a French bishop of Cochinchina, could not hide his despair at the decimation of the missions:

The apprehensions I expressed in my last letter have unfortunately been realized. The progressive violence and intensity of the persecution has already made fatal damage in

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<sup>99</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 6.

<sup>100</sup> *DNTLCB 4/Q. clxiv*, 837-839; *DNTLCB 5/Q. ccii*, 501-503.

<sup>101</sup> “Như vậy thật không thể không mạnh bạo trừ tuyệt và nghiêm khắc trừng trị,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. clxiv*, 837.

<sup>102</sup> “Nếu lần này, sau khi đã dụ bảo cặn kẽ mà chúng còn dám cho việc không bỏ đạo là hiếu, tức là dân làm loạn pháp luật, thì đao búa sẵn trước mặt, quyết giết chết không tha thứ,” *DNTLCB 5/Q. ccii*, 503.

<sup>103</sup> Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 85-102; Văn phòng Tổng thư ký Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam niên giám 2005*, 226-234.

the three missions of the Annamite empire; true, it peoples heaven with martyrs, but it endangers the very existence of Christianity itself in this afflicted land.<sup>104</sup>

A year later, a Spanish Dominican priest and also a future bishop of East Tonkin vicariate, Jerónimo Hermosilla “Liêm” or “Trùm Vọng” (1800-1861), lamented in a letter on 22 April 1839:

The Church of Tong-King, by its precocious fecundity, formerly resembled a vineyard planted by the hands of the Lord, and promised the most abundant fruits. But the misfortunes with which it has been lately visited recall those affecting words of the prophet: “The boar out of the wood hath laid it waste: and a wild beast hath devoured it.” You are already aware that numerous edicts against the Christian religion were issued in that kingdom, and that since 1826, the faithful of Tong-King had to endure vexations of every kind. Those trials, however, are nothing compared with the persecution which now desolates that portion of the flock of Jesus Christ.<sup>105</sup>

Provincial officials and village notables were held accountable for any Christian activity in their territories and mandarins systematically searched for and executed missionaries and the local clergy in hiding. The Nguyễn authorities once and for all incriminated Christianity and marked this religious “cult” as a secretive seditious enemy of the empire.

#### E. Catholics as enemies of Nguyễn state from within

In contrast to a long-standing interpretation common to post-colonial historiographies, the 1836 *Bính Thân* and 1839 *Kỷ Hợi* Edicts suggest that even until as late as the early 1840s the Nguyễn state saw Catholics principally as a source of domestic threat rather a fifth column serving the French interests. Nevertheless, it is quite possible for one to hold this charge of espionage against missionaries because the 1836 Edict explicitly labels them as spies (*trình sát ngoại quốc*) not only once but three times:

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<sup>104</sup> Etienne-Théodore Cuénot, “Letter of Mgr. Cuenot, Bishop of Metellopolis, and Coadjutor of the Vicar Apostolic of Cochin-China, to the Directors of the Seminary of Foreign Missions,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 1 (July 1839-November 1840): 277.

<sup>105</sup> Jerónimo Hermosilla, “Letter of Brother Jermoe Hermosilla, Dominican Missionary in Eastern Tong-King,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 1 (July 1839- November 1840): 448.

From now on, for all portal districts, whenever Chinese junks arrive, local magistrates must personally carry out the inspection. One has to ascertain whether there is a Westerner in the boat. If there is one, find out where he comes from. If there is a missionary, local authorities may apply the penal code against foreign spies to this situation and impose a sentence of death on him.<sup>106</sup>

Yet, on a closer examination of the wording of the edict, it says: “As for captured missionaries hiding in the country, summarily apply the law concerning espionage and put them to death—*cũng chiếu theo luật trình sát ngoại quốc lên vào trong nước mà khép tội chém.*”<sup>107</sup> In other words, in a strictly-literal interpretation of the Code, missionaries were not spies (*trình sát ngoại quốc*); but in a broad-contextual interpretation of the law (*chiếu theo luật*), these foreigners could be categorized under the same penal code. Furthermore, in the same edict, the only named missionary convicted of being a foreign spy was Joseph Marchand “Du” in the Phiên An Rebellion. But he was charged being a spy working for the Siamese army rather than for the French force.<sup>108</sup>

Then, at the height of the persecution, Minh Mạng issued the 1839 *Kỷ Hợi* Edict. In this, Minh Mạng’s last edict, he took great pains to repeat the philosophical and historical reasons for his prohibition. He placed the blame for the spread of Christianity on the lack of governmental supervision under the Lê dynasty as well as on the unfortunate collaboration of Chinese literati converts in translating and disseminating heterodox ideas.<sup>109</sup> On the one hand, the 1839 edict maintains the virulent anti-Catholic language of the 1836 Edict. On the other hand, it is curious that the emperor draws no association between “foreign spy” and Catholics.

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<sup>106</sup> “Vậ xin từ nay phạm các tẩn phạm hễ có thuyền buôn người nhà Thanh đến đậu, thì viên tẩn thủ thân hành tra xét trong thuyền nếu có người Tây dương đáp theo, thì lập tức phải hỏi rõ lai lịch, nếu là đạo trưởng Tây dương, lập tức phải bắt giải quan, cũng chiếu theo luật trình sát ngoại quốc lên vào trong nước mà khép tội chém,” *DNTLCB 4/Q. clxiv*, 838.

<sup>107</sup> *DNTLCB 4/Q. clxiv*, 838.

<sup>108</sup> “Năm Minh Mệnh thứ 14 [1833] thành Phiên An cũ nổi biến, có đạo trưởng người Tây tên là Mã Song, đồng loã với nghịch Khôi, ngầm thông với giặc Xiêm, tập hợp đồ đảng theo đạo Gia Tô, cố giữ cô thành, chống cự quan quân, lâu đến 3 năm!” *DNTLCB 4/Q. clxiv*, 837.

<sup>109</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q.cci*, 502-503.



#### F. Proactive intelligence gathering and the 1840 Nguyễn diplomatic mission

The fact that the Nguyễn court was non-committal about whether Catholics were agents of Western imperialism does not mean that the Huế court was oblivious to international affairs. On the contrary, the Nguyễn court had been proactively monitoring the activities of the Western powers in the region. When the American diplomat Edmund Roberts (1784-1836) arrived at Phú Yên in 1833, Huế sent two mandarins to interview him. Roberts wrote:

They asked several questions respecting America and Europe, for instance, what is the meaning of “the fifty-seventh year of independence?”—“Is England now at peace with France?”—“Has France recovered peace since the last revolution? And where is the dethroned [French] king living?”—“Is America at war with any country?”<sup>110</sup>

One can surmise from these questions that the Nguyễn court had already deemed the West to be a warlike culture. Moreover, when the Nguyễn officials asked about a dethroned French king, this question betrayed their strong misgivings about the social and political instability this Western culture might bring to Vietnam. Perhaps under the influence of earlier French presence in the Nguyễn court, the Nguyễn had been especially cautious of the British. They stayed abreast of English expansion in India and the recent colonization of Malacca under the British rule.<sup>111</sup> When Minh Mạng instructed his generals to select elephants of smaller breed for their agility, he explained his decision by recounting how the Indian army lost its battle to the British force by relying too much on big, heavy elephants.<sup>112</sup> When Vietnamese sea traders came back from Thailand, the court summoned them to collect information on how the English were involved in the territorial conflict between Thailand and Burma.<sup>113</sup> By the time of the promulgation of the

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<sup>110</sup> Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock*, David Geisinger, Commander, during the Years 1832-3-4 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837), 185.

<sup>111</sup> *DNTLCB 4/Q. cxxxix*, 429.

<sup>112</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q. cxviii*, 444-445.

<sup>113</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q. cxviii*, 440-442.

1839 Edict, the Huế court was already well informed about the escalating conflict between the Qing government and the British in Guangzhou—later known as the Opium War (1839-1842).<sup>114</sup> The fear of being attacked by European forces had risen to a new level, so that the Nguyễn authorities frantically sent out envoys to gather intelligence on Western military advancement in the neighboring countries.<sup>115</sup> By early 1840, various missionaries reported sighting Nguyễn warships on official fact-finding missions in Penang of Malaysia and in the Dutch Batavia as well as another group of diplomats en route to Paris.<sup>116</sup>

#### G. Brief of respite under Thiệu Trị

From 1840, when Minh Mạng sent his embassy to Europe, to the first six years of Thiệu Trị (r.1841-1847), the Vietnamese Catholic Church enjoyed a temporary respite from persecution. The Thiệu Trị emperor neither revoked his father Minh Mạng's edicts against Christianity nor rigorously implemented them. From dynastic records alone, one cannot know for sure why Thiệu Trị relaxed implementation of his father's regulations. According to a French missionary and a former professor of Phú Xuân Major Seminary, Marie Adolphe Delvaux (1877-1960), the Nguyễn diplomats to France in the early 1840s might have softened the tension. Upon the arrival of the Nguyễn envoy to France in January 1841, the superiors of the MEP (*Missions étrangères de Paris*) sent a letter to ask King Louis-Philippe (r.1830-1848) to intercede with the Nguyễn authorities on the behalf of their confreres in Vietnam:

With full confidence in you, Sir, your benevolent nature toward all your subjects who scatter around the world, and in your interest in advancing our religion and civilization, these servants of yours hope that Your Majesty takes into consideration the barbaric treatment that French missionaries suffer in Tong King and in Cochinchina. We beg Your

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<sup>114</sup> *DNTLCB 5/Q. cci*, 497.

<sup>115</sup> Marie Adolphe Delvaux, "L'ambassade de Minh-Mang a Louis-Philippe 1839 a 1841," *BAVH* 15 (4) (October-December 1928): 263.

<sup>116</sup> Marie Adolphe Delvaux, "L'ambassade de Minh-Mang a Louis-Philippe...", 259; *DNTLCB 5/Q. ccvii*, 588-589.

Majesty to employ a proper course of action to remove the gross injustice being inflicted on them.<sup>117</sup>

Since there is no other source with further details about this Nguyễn envoy except a cursory mention of the two names of the mandarins found in the dynastic record, one cannot ascertain the impact of this mission.<sup>118</sup> According to Delvaux, Louis-Philippe assured the Nguyễn envoy that France would not retaliate for the maltreatment of French subjects by the Nguyễn government.<sup>119</sup> In any case, in some provinces of Tonkin, Catholics were able to worship publicly. One bishop boasted that he had organized an episcopal ordination with a gathering of almost 10,000 worshippers.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, it was not a blanket amnesty. Missionaries remained in jeopardy: from 1841 to 1846, provincial mandarins captured and handed over eight of them to the throne. Thiệu Trị followed the formal legal procedure of delegating the Board of Punishments to sentence these missionaries to death. He then commuted their death sentences to expulsion from the empire by handing these missionaries over to the captains of European ships docking along the shore of Vietnam.<sup>121</sup> As for the converts, the dynastic record mentions only four executions (including one local priest) for refusing to renounce their religious belief.<sup>122</sup>

In brief, during the twenty-year reign of Minh Mạng and the first six years of Thiệu Trị, though being unnerved at the stealthy presence of missionaries in the kingdom, the Nguyễn government did not perceive either local converts or missionaries as spies for some Western

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<sup>117</sup> “Pleins de confiance dans les sentiments de bienveillance que vous avez, Sire, pour tous vos sujets, dans quelque partie du monde qu’ils soient, et dans l’intérêt que vous portez aux progrès de la religion et de la civilisation, les suppliants espèrent que Votre Majesté prendra en considération les traitements barbares auxquels les missionnaires français exposés dans le Tonkin et la Cochinchine, et ils La conjurent d’employer des moyens propres à les soustraire à ces injustes vexations,” Marie Adolphe Delvaux, “L’ambassade de Minh-Mang a Louis-Philippe...,” 263.

<sup>118</sup> *DNTLCBC 5/Q. ccvii*, 588-589.

<sup>119</sup> Marie Adolphe Delvaux, “L’ambassade de Minh-Mang a Louis-Philippe...,” 264.

<sup>120</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six: Curé de Phat-Diem vice-roi en Annam* (Paris: Librairie Blou & Gay, [1931]), 29-30.

<sup>121</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. vi*, 115-116; *DNTLCB 6/Q. xii*, 228; *DNTLCB 6/Q. xviii*, 326; *DNTLCB 6/Q. xxvi*, 441; *DNTLCB 6/Q. xliii*, 668; *DNTLCB 6/Q. xlvi*, 732; *DNTLCB 3/Q. lvii*, 863.

<sup>122</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. xlvi*, 735; *DNTLCB 6/Q. liv*, 823; *DNTLCB 6/Q. lix*, 882.

powers in the true sense of the word. Rather the Huế court classified them as such simply for the convenient interpretation and application for their own law code. Catholicism continued to be a vexing threat for the Nguyễn authority from within.

## **VII. Transition from a Domestic Problem to a Foreign Threat**

Centralization began to crack in the last year of Thiệu Trị and crumbled in the middle of reign of Tự Đức (r. 1847-1883) under the increasing pressure from European warships along the coast of Vietnam. As early as the late 1830s, the rise of Western imperialism in the region added further complications to the existing Nguyễn-Catholic tension. The Nguyễn dynasty struggled over what to do with the new uninvited player. Catholics—converts and missionaries—were drawn into the web of violent encounters between the absolutist regime and the spread of Western imperialism. Not only were 40,000 Catholic lives lost then, but their reputation has been tainted by modern historians' accusations of their complicity with French colonization.<sup>123</sup> The Nguyễn anti-Catholic policy was no longer a domestic affair but an international issue. The first lunar month of 1847 marked an intensification of anti-Catholic policy. Before 1847, the Nguyễn dynasty opposed Catholicism. After 1847, the government declared war on all Catholics.

### **A. The Khánh Hoà incident**

Almost seven years into the reign of Thiệu Trị, the status quo was shattered by the kidnapping of a mandarin by the crew of an unidentified European ship at the port of Khánh Hoà province. The dynastic records report that Nguyễn Hàm Ninh, the censorate mandarin, had heard about sixteen stranded Europeans who were rumored to be peaceful and magnanimous people. Unable to control his curiosity, Nguyễn Hàm Ninh made an official visit to their ship with two minor mandarins, twenty locals, and customary welcoming gifts. Once they had boarded

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<sup>123</sup> Peter Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 88.

“peacefully” the seamen attacked the entourage and held them hostage until a ransom was paid ten days later. The emperor punished the mandarins for their carelessness and shamed them for damaging imperial dignity.<sup>124</sup> This insulting affair was followed by an incident involving two French ships in Đà Nẵng just a month later.<sup>125</sup> A fully armed French naval officer marched directly to the yamen, disregarding official protocol. He produced a letter to the imperial court demanding freedom of religion and the right to establish French entrepôts on Vietnamese soil. When the mandarin in charge of the yamen refused to accept the letter, the French officer placed the letter on his desk and walked out. This constituted yet another blow to imperial dignity. As if the actions of the French navy officer were not enough to incite a response, local notables reported to the capital that they had seen five or six missionaries in full clerical garb adorned with conspicuous crosses taking the liberty of strolling along the shoreline.<sup>126</sup> While still deliberating on the appropriate response to these violations of national sovereignty and imperial policy, the court forbade local Christians from making contact with the French.<sup>127</sup>

#### B. The first French attack—Đà Nẵng, 1847

In the third lunar month of 1847, the mandarins hatched a plan to invite the French officers to a “diplomatic” banquet in the yamen, with the actual intent of arresting them.<sup>128</sup> The French discovered the plan after capturing Vũ Văn Đĩnh, a low-ranking military mandarin, who provided them with full details of the plot. The French responded by opening fire and destroying five Nguyễn iron-clad warships.<sup>129</sup> Suffering one humiliation after another, and finally a great naval loss, the emperor changed his attitude toward Westerners dramatically. While he had

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<sup>124</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxiv*, 962-963.

<sup>125</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxv*, 975; *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxvi*, 983-984.

<sup>126</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxv*, 975.

<sup>127</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxv*, 976.

<sup>128</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxvi*, 983.

<sup>129</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxvi*, 983-984.

begun his reign with far more tolerance of Christianity and the West than his father had, after the humiliations of 1847 he even ordered that effigies be made in the form of Westerners as targets for his shooting range.<sup>130</sup> Apostolic Vicar Pierre André Retord included colorful personal details on how enraged the emperor was:

Transported with rage at having been so [humiliated] by the loss of his vessels, he burst into a declaration of war against all European objects embellishing his palace—watches, clocks, mirrors, etc., all were smashed. He fought resolutely against Frenchmen in prints and on canvass, whom he got shot at by balls and arrows; he then had them cut into three, or quartered, so that they might be well and duly cut to pieces.<sup>131</sup>

Under these circumstances, Phạm Xuân Quế and Vũ Văn Trị, mandarins from the censorate department, petitioned the throne to reintroduce the proscription against Christianity.<sup>132</sup>

In the ninth lunar month of the same year (1847), Thiệu Trị issued an edict renewing the imperial ban on Christianity. The edict cited the case of Vũ Văn Diễm [Điễm], the low-ranking official who revealed the mandarin's plot after being captured by the French—who happened to be a Catholic—, as proof of Catholic treachery and complicity with foreign powers.<sup>133</sup> Going even further than the original proscription against Christianity, the emperor's edict directly linked Christians to the West, calling them agents of the French and once again escalating the conflict between Christianity and imperial authority.

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<sup>130</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxvi*, 985.

<sup>131</sup> Pierre André Retord, "Another Letter of the Right Rev. Dr. Retord, Apostolic Vicar of Western Tong-King, to Messr. Langlois, Superior, and Charrier, Director of the Seminary of Foreign Missions," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 10 (1849): 154.

<sup>132</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxvi*, 997.

<sup>133</sup> *DNTLCB 6/Q. lxxii*, 1072.

## VIII. Tự Đức (r.1848-1883)—the Last Enforcer of Nguyễn Absolutism

The Thiệu Trị emperor, dying the same month that he issued his edict, did not live long enough to see the implementation of his renewed proscription against Christianity. However, his successor and son, the Tự Đức emperor (r.1848-1883), rigorously implemented his father's will to eradicate Christianity as soon as he ascended the throne. Furthermore, Tự Đức pursued the proscription with vigor and with the same systematic thoroughness as his grandfather, Minh Mạng, had.<sup>134</sup>

### A. Declaration of war against all Catholics

Between 1848 and 1860, Tự Đức authored fourteen anti-Catholic edicts, compared to Minh Mạng's five and Thiệu Trị's two.<sup>135</sup> The court no longer simply categorized Christianity as a heterodox religion that undermined the imperial plan for the Confucian civilizing mission—*giáo hoá*—but rather equated adherence to this religion with treason against the state. The implementation of the anti-Christian policy was no longer limited to the arrest and execution of missionaries and local clergy, but was now extended to prominent lay Catholics.

Among the many arrests of alleged Christian traitors, the case of Micae Hồ Đình Hy (1808-1857) became a *cause célèbre*. In 1856, Hồ Đình Hy, a third-rank mandarin and supervisor of the imperial treasury and workshop, was identified as a crypto-Christian. The Board of Punishments convicted him of “following heterodox religion and committing high treason against the state—*tội theo tà giáo mưu phản quốc*.”<sup>136</sup> The verdict submitted to the throne summarized the case: “Hồ Đình Hy disobeyed the imperial order and was a follower of

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<sup>134</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. ii*, 83; *DNTLCB 7/Q. vi*, 202-203; *DNTLCB 7/Q. xvi*, 509.

<sup>135</sup> Adrien Launay, *Les trente-cinq vénérables serviteurs de Dieu* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1907), 446-474, 499-500; Etienne Vo Duc Hanh, *La place du catholicisme dans les relations entre la France et le Viet-Nam de 1851 à 1870*, vol. II-III (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 283-339.

<sup>136</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xv*, 472.

the Christian religion. He sent his son to Singapore for training in this cult. When the French attacked us at Đà Nẵng, he made contact with the enemy.”<sup>137</sup>

#### B. Catholics’ eagerness for French intervention

By 1858, as reported in the *DNTLCB*, imperial officials summarily lumped all Christians under the category of *giặc*—rebels. In the first lunar month of 1858, a report to the throne about Christians said: “All the Christian rebels (*giặc*) have been destroyed by the imperial army. Though they would not dare to stage a revolt, they still nurture the hope for a foreign intervention. They are not quite sincere in abandoning their belief. We are not certain whether they would plot anything else in the future.”<sup>138</sup> As the Huế court heightened its persecution against the Catholic rank and file, the local converts found themselves torn by conflicting factors: fear for personal safety, the obligatory sense of loyalty to the political authority, and the desire to practice their faith freely. The survival instinct was generally dominant. Some of them sought the French out for help, others succumbed to the promises of religious freedom from both Lê and Nguyễn pretenders to the throne. In 1849, the Board of Rites turned a case of First Lieutenant (*Cai đội*) Vũ Dũng to the Board of War to be court-martialled for making an unauthorized contact with the French.<sup>139</sup> The précis of the case states:

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of the first month, a French ship entered the port of Đà Nẵng. They asked for permission to dock and to conduct a search for their sailor who had been lost at sea. The governor sent Lê Chính Thù and First Lieutenant Vũ Dũng to give them the permit. Without being ordered, Vũ Dũng boarded the ship and talked to the captain of the ship. He also asked for Christian books. Lê Chính Thù stopped and made him return the books. Somehow, Vũ Dũng managed to take and hide fifteen French flags. He was a

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<sup>137</sup> “Bộ Hình trình tâu về bản án Hồ Đình Hy [Hy], một viên quan tam phẩm tại Nội vụ phủ, can tội theo đạo Thiên chúa, gửi con trai đến Hạ châu học đạo, liên lạc với Tây dương vào lúc tàu chiến Pháp bắn phá Đà Nẵng,” *Châu Bản triều Tự Đức (1848-1883)* (Hà Nội: Trung tâm nghiên cứu quốc học/Nhà xuất bản Văn học, 2003), 49.

<sup>138</sup> “Bọn giặc theo đạo Gia tô đã bị quan quân đánh tan, tuy không bạo động nhưng vẫn còn mong bọn ngoài đến, thực lòng chưa bỏ hết, sau này có hành động gì hay không, còn chưa có thể biết được,” *DNTLCB 7/Q. xviii*, 546.

<sup>139</sup> Paulus Huynh Tinh Cua, *Sách Quan Chế* (Saigon: Bản in nhà nước, 1888), 56.



secret follower of the Christian cult. He now is found in contempt of royal order in making contact with Europeans.<sup>140</sup>

For a man to have in his possession fifteen French flags would certainly fuel further suspicion by the authorities about Catholics assisting the French forces. While no other Nguyễn record has elaborated on what Vũ Dũng planned to do with these flags, it is quite probable the local converts did eagerly welcome any help from the French, as evidenced in both Nguyễn and French documents. In the official communiqués—*châu bản*, the Privy Council was often beset with the vexing problems of Catholics supplying provision to the French or trading with them.<sup>141</sup> Some Catholics went further, joining the 1851 palace coup staged by Hồng Bảo, the oldest son of Thiệu Trị. The prince had contacted the Catholic communities with the promise of religious freedom in exchange for their support.<sup>142</sup> In the 1860s, a catechist, Pedro Lê Duy Phụng (d.1865), led a rebellion against the Nguyễn. Pedro Lê Duy-Phụng styled himself a Lê emperor and invited French Admiral Louis-Adolphe Bonard (1805-1867) to recognize him as the legitimate Lê ruler of Tonkin.<sup>143</sup> In both instances, many Catholics threw their support to these pretenders, ignoring warnings from their bishops that these efforts bore no prospects for success.<sup>144</sup> In the event, both rebellions met with complete failure.

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<sup>140</sup> “Ngày 13-1 thuyền Pháp vào Đà Nẵng-Quảng nam, lấy cớ là để tìm kiếm nạn nhân và xin cấp giấy tờ. Quan chức tỉnh đó đã sai Lê Chính Thủy và Cai đội Vũ Dũng mang giấy tờ đến cho thuyền ấy. Vũ Dũng đã tự tiện một mình xuống thuyền, nói chuyện với thuyền trưởng và xin sách đạo. Lê Chính Thủy phải trách mắng, ngăn cản mới trả lại sách đạo, nhưng Vũ Dũng lại ngậm lấy 15 lá cờ của Pháp. Cai đội Vũ Dũng trước đã can tội ngậm theo đạo Gia tô, nay lại coi thường luật pháp, tự do giao thiệp với người Âu. Xin giao Vũ Dũng cho bộ Binh tra hỏi và xét xử,” *Châu bản triều Tự Đức*, 21.

<sup>141</sup> *Châu bản triều Tự Đức*, 67.

<sup>142</sup> François Marie Pellerin, “Letter of His Lordship, the Right Rev. Dr. Pellerin, Coadjutor of His Lordship, the Right Rev. the Vicar Apostolic of Eastern Cochin-China, to the Directors of the Seminary of the Foreign Missions at Paris,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 10 (1850): 283.

<sup>143</sup> Etienne Vo Duc Hanh, *La place du catholicisme dans les relations entre la France et le Viet-Nam de 1851 à 1870*, vol. II-III..., 183-186.

<sup>144</sup> François Marie Pellerin, “Letter of His Lordship, the Right Rev. Dr. Pellerin, Coadjutor of His Lordship, the Right Rev. the Vicar Apostolic of Eastern Cochin-China, to the Directors of the Seminary of the Foreign Missions at Paris,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 10 (1850): 283-284; Etienne Vo Duc Hanh, *La place du catholicisme dans les relations entre la France et le Viet-Nam de 1851 à 1870*, vol. II-III..., 186-188.

C. *Phân tháp*—the most draconian ordinance in response to European invasion

Frequent harassment by the Franco-Spanish navy along the coast of Vietnam infuriated the Nguyễn court. Thus, Tự Đức and his mandarins ordered a community dispersal (*phân tháp*)—the most draconian measure of all. This imperial edict created more than an imaginary sense of unity among Catholics. The *phân tháp* inflicted a real physical, financial, and psychological pain on the entire Catholic population.

The saga began in the seventh lunar month of 1858. Twelve French ships opened fire on the Đà Nẵng port and laid siege to a number of the coastal citadels.<sup>145</sup> Toward the end of that year, the French carried out military campaigns along the northern coast of Tonkin. In 1859 the French shifted their naval power to the south of Vietnam.<sup>146</sup> Court historians reported in the *DNTLCB* that in the third lunar month of 1860 the rise of food costs and the shortage of rice in areas surrounding the capital city were the result of a successful French blockade of rice supplies from the southern provinces to the central region.<sup>147</sup> Since the Nguyễn court had identified the Christians as a clandestine fifth column, the authorities engaged in a panicked and vengeful attack against not only missionaries and local clergy but all members of Christian communities.<sup>148</sup> The early summer 1861 entry in the dynastic record writes about the *phân tháp*—separating and dispersing—order:

Local authorities need to be more attentive and rigorous in separating and dispersing the followers of Christianity. Many provinces have not been faithfully following the imperial instruction. Let there be no more confusion. Here is our ordinance to all prefects and subprefects: Tattoo on the face of every single one of them—old, young, male, female

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<sup>145</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xix*, 567; Lê Thanh Cảnh, “Notes pour servir a l’histoire de l’établissement du protectorat français en Annam,” *BAVH 15* (3) (Juillet – Septembre 1928): 191.

<sup>146</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xix*, 582; *DNTLCB 7/Q. xx*, 608-609.

<sup>147</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xxii*, 653.

<sup>148</sup> “Dụ của Tự Đức đề ra biện pháp chống Pháp của triều đình: Giết dân theo đạo Thiên chúa để trừ bè đảng của Pháp,” *Châu bản triều Tự Đức (1848-1883)* (Hà Nội: Trung tâm nghiên cứu quốc học/Nhà xuất bản Văn học, 2003), 69; Joseph Sohier, “Letter from Monseigneur Sohier, Bishop of Gadare, and Coadjutor Bishop of Septentrional Cochinchina, to Monseigneur Albrand, Superior of the Seminary of the ‘Missions Etrangères’ in Paris,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 23 (1862): 1-7.

practitioner and even those already apostatized. Separate and disperse them to live in non-Christian villages. Place them under strict superintendence. Continue to lock up their leaders. At the sight of an invading Western force within your vicinity, bring out the Catholics and execute them all.<sup>149</sup>

In the fall of 1861, an imperial inspector reported to the throne: “Catholics now obey the rules because of the fear of our stern order but not because of our power of persuasion. Provincial mandarins place them under evening curfew. At night, they are locked up and chained.”<sup>150</sup> A month after this report, the Privy Council asked Tự Đức to implement the decree of *phân tháp* to the entire realm. With the new law, local authorities confiscated property of these incarcerated Catholic villagers:

(a) Put all Christians in prison camps. (b) Register all of their farming lands and turn over their lands to a canton chief to manage. (c) Recruit people to farm these lands. (d) At the harvest, give renters half of the produce, and use the other half to pay tax and feed these Christians.<sup>151</sup>

According to an eyewitness account of the local priest Đặng Đức Tuấn (1806-1874), the last measure of the *phân tháp* stoked primal human greed and brought out the worst in communal life. Non-Catholic neighbors took advantage of the predicament of their Christian neighbors, and were out in quest of plunder:

Opportunists are awaiting in the neighborhood,  
Their lips whimpered, but their hearts set on our fortune.  
They ask about mattresses, mats, shelves, and jars.  
‘Who will you trust with your benches, tables, chairs, and chests?’  
‘Oh, let me take care of them!’  
They offer a few coins for things worth tael.

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<sup>149</sup> “Sức nhắc lại các địa phương phải nghiêm ngặt chia ghép bọn dân đạo. Trước đây, chia ghép các dân đạo, còn nhiều sót lậu. Đến bây giờ, nghiêm bắt phủ huyện các địa phương: phạm những dân đạo trai gái già trẻ, không cứ đã bỏ đạo hay chưa, đều thích chữ vào mặt, chia ghép đến ở xã thôn không có đạo, mà phải quản thúc cho nghiêm. Những tên đầu mục hung ác vẫn nghiêm giam như cũ. Nếu người Tây dương đến nơi, thì đem bọn dân đạo ấy giết cho hết,” *ĐNTLCB 7/Q. xxiv, 725*.

<sup>150</sup> “Dân theo đạo Gia tô bị câu thúc, ban đêm bị gõ cùm nên đã phải tuân theo luật lệnh của triều đình chứ không phải tự nguyện,” *Châu bản triều Tự Đức*, 110.

<sup>151</sup> “Nội các xét duyệt các quy định của tỉnh Quảng Ngãi nhằm xử trí với giáo dân đạo Gia tô: Ruộng đất của giáo dân bị tập trung ở những nơi riêng biệt, giao cho lý dịch quản lý. Các lý dịch này sẽ chiêu mộ dân lương các nơi đến canh tác số ruộng đó. Một nửa số thu hoạch sẽ giao cho người canh tác, còn một nửa dùng nộp thuế và cấp dưỡng cho giáo dân,” *Châu bản triều Tự Đức*, 110-111.

They hoard goods like hungry beasts.  
Some are carted, some are carried under arms.  
A crowd of polite thieves makes repeated visits,  
Their lips pour out words of sorrow, but they walked off with loot!<sup>152</sup>

In a certain way, the *phân tháp* paradoxically was the ne plus ultra among all manifestations of absolutism. The Huế central government sowed seeds of distrust and division in a neighborhood. The royal policies utterly destroyed the basic fabric of the village community. During these four years of Franco-Spanish invasion, the rules and edicts against the local Christians grew harsher in direct proportion to the increasing pressure from the Western attacks.

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“Xóm làng bọm bãi thiếu chi,  
Miệng thăm cô, bác, lòng thì tham ô.  
Hỏi han nệm, chiếu, ký, vò,  
Ngựa, phàn, ghé, tú, gói mô cho ròi?  
Thôi thôi để lại cho tôi,  
Của đáng hai chục giao thời ít quan!  
Thảo nào mèo lại ăn than[m],  
Kẻ khiêng cái nọ, người mang cái này.  
Tới lui thăm viếng đông đây,  
Ngoài miệng mếu máo trong tay quơ đồ,”

Đặng Đức Tuấn, “Việt Nam Giáo sử điển ca,” 100.

## IX. Disintegration of Absolutism

At its most ferocious level, the official persecution came to an abrupt halt. Faced with the advancing French and Spanish military power, the Nguyễn government was forced to make concessions to the invading force. The 1862 First Saigon Peace Treaty marked the beginning of the last stage in the history of the strained relationship between the Nguyễn ruling circle and the Vietnamese Catholic Church. The humiliating military defeat ironically was the result of the successful Nguyễn effort, designed by Minh Mạng in the 1820s, to build an imperial state.

### A. The inherent flaw of Nguyễn absolutism

The Nguyễn dynasty misled itself by four decades of demonizing Catholicism. When the real external military threat came, the Huế court attached too much importance to the local Catholics and coordinated a panicked response to eliminate these imaginary fifth columnists instead of organizing a collective national effort to resist the invading force. Seven out of fourteen edicts which Tự Đức issued against Catholics were promulgated between the end of 1859 and 1860.<sup>153</sup> The prescient warning in 1824 by a lieutenant in the United States Navy, John White (1782-1840), turned out to be correct. White astutely observed that the Nguyễn had unnecessarily committed resources to build fortresses, especially the Huế imperial palace, for a country “already naturally guarded by lofty and inaccessible mountains and boundless and impenetrable forests.”<sup>154</sup> He further assessed that the military vulnerability of Vietnam was its maritime frontier where it should be protected by a powerful navy.<sup>155</sup> White also noted the difference in the metalwork between Vietnam and its southern neighboring countries: “The iron used in the southern provinces is generally brought from Siam in pigs, and is highly malleable and ductile. A harder and more brittle kind is produced in the northern section of the country

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<sup>153</sup> Adrien Launay, *Les trente-cinq vénérables serviteurs de Dieu...*, 500.

<sup>154</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochín China* (London: Longman, 1824), 266.

<sup>155</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochín China* (London: Longman, 1824), 266.

bordering on Tonquin.”<sup>156</sup> This technical information helped to explain the immediate cause of the Nguyễn inability to defend the country from the French-Spanish attack; it also corroborated with the Huế court’s assessment of the situation in the late spring of 1867. According to a surviving note of the Privy Council meeting—intended to be used only by the imperial chronicle office, but discovered and published in the *Bulletin des amis du vieux Huế*—Nguyễn officials finally admitted to Tự Đức that their heavy iron clad ships were not seaworthy.<sup>157</sup> The cannons of the fortresses were unable to match the cannons of French and Spanish ships. Therefore, it is easy to see why the French-Spanish navy and its firepower managed to wreck the whole Nguyễn fortress defense system without much difficulty. In this same document, one finds a report about the inability of the imperial foundry to cast cannons, so they changed their plan from casting cannons to producing 150 cannon balls. Thus the earlier Nguyễn policy to destroy regional manufacturing centers, especially Gia Định, bore its bitter fruit.<sup>158</sup> The emperor had no armor!

#### B. The point of contention in the 1874 Second Saigon Peace Treaty

The technology required to produce a malleable and ductile iron was not the only thing the Nguyễn lost. Rendered helpless by domestic revolts in the north and by French occupation in the south, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June in 1862, the Nguyễn negotiators agreed to the First Saigon Peace Treaty with the French.<sup>159</sup> Besides allowing Christians to practice their religion without any official harassment, the Nguyễn had to surrender three southern provinces to the French. This treaty officially closed the long contentious history between the Nguyễn dynasty and the Vietnamese Catholics. Court historians attempted to exculpate the emperor for this humiliating

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<sup>156</sup> John White, *A Voyage to Cochinchina* (London: Longman, 1824), 236.

<sup>157</sup> “Les navires français doivent nous inspirer moins de crainte que nos propres navires qui semblent avoir le mal de mer. On les voit éternellement en eau douce! Voilà le véritable danger,” Lê Thanh Cảnh, “Notes pour servir à l’histoire de l’établissement du protectorat Français en Annam,” *BAVH* 15 (3) (Juillet – Septembre 1928): 184.

<sup>158</sup> Lê Thanh Cảnh, “Notes pour servir à l’histoire de l’établissement...”: 185-186.

<sup>159</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xxvi*, 768-772.

failure, putting the blame squarely on the two negotiators, Phan Thanh Giản (1796-1867) and Lâm Duy Thiệp [Hiệp] (1806-1863). “Who can sense the aching pain in my heart? These two mandarins will not only owe their crime to this dynasty but also to generations to come,” grieved the emperor.<sup>160</sup> The emperor claimed his negotiators yielded to the French especially on his two supposedly non-negotiable principles. Before the departure of his two delegates to meet the French, the emperor told them: “Categorically do not give away territories; definitively do not permit the spread of heterodox religion.”<sup>161</sup> The 1862 First Saigon Peace Treaty had deflated the authority of the Nguyễn emperor. Twelve years later, the Nguyễn lost the entire six southern provinces Cochinchina to France in the 1874 Second Saigon Peace Treaty.

In this 1874 Treaty, the Nguyễn also finally agreed to remove the diatribe against Catholicism in the seventh of Minh Mạng’s ten moral maxims (*Thập Điều*). Learning from the ineffective implementation of Catholic protections in the 1862 First Saigon Treaty, missionaries made a specific request to the treaty negotiators to amend the *Thập Điều*. On March 15, 1874, the Nguyễn statesmen yielded to French pressure and agreed to include *Article IX* in the treaty:

His majesty of Đại-Nam perfectly understands that Christianity teaches people to perform good deeds. Thus, all previous proscriptions against Christianity have no legal force. Both new converts and old Catholics are free to keep their religion. They may gather to worship with no restriction on the number attending. Non-Catholics cannot force Catholics to act against their religion. Catholics are no longer obliged to register in a separate roster. From now on, Catholics can participate in the civil examination without being forced to go against their religion. His majesty decides the following: Old [Christian] rosters ought to be destroyed. Catholics and non-Catholics will be subjected to the same system of conscription and taxation. Both in speech and in writing, no derogatory remarks against Catholicism can be used. In the *Thập-Điều*, all such pejorative remarks will promptly be corrected.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xxvi, 771.*

<sup>161</sup> “Rồi dụ rằng: ‘Đất đai quyết không thể nào cho được, tà giáo quyết không cho tự do tuyên truyền,’” *DNTLCB 7/Q. xxvi, 770.*

<sup>162</sup> “Vua nước Đại Nam biết rõ đạo Thiên Chúa nguyên để khuyên người làm điều lành, nay đem các giấy tờ cấm đạo Thiên Chúa từ trước bỏ hết đi; lại cho phép người nước Đại Nam có muốn theo đạo và giữ đạo, đều được thông dong tự tiện, vì thế người theo giáo trong nước đều được tùy tiện các việc hội nhau đọc kinh lễ bái, không kể số người, người ngoài không được vin cơ bức bách dân theo đạo Thiên Chúa làm việc gì trái phép đạo và không bắt giáo dân khai riêng sổ sách. Từ nay về sau giáo dân ấy đều được đi thi làm quan mà chớ phải bắt trái phép đạo.

One can argue that the Nguyễn anti-Catholic policy finally came to an end by the ratification of the *Article IX* of the 1874 Treaty. For almost forty years, this seventh maxim did not only lay down the theoretical rhetoric behind the Nguyễn anti-Catholic policy, but it also exhibited the defining absolutist characteristic of the Nguyễn's empire state-building. From this point forward, the French imperialism replaced the Nguyễn imperial rule.

## X. Catholic Response to the Nguyễn Anti-Catholic Policy

In coping with Huế increasing efforts to eradicate Catholicism since the middle of reign of Minh Mạng until the signing of the 1874 Second Saigon Peace Treaty, church leaders did not simply do nothing while in hiding, but they maintained a constant communication with their dispersed communities through writing and even printing their “samizdats.”<sup>163</sup> Scholars of Vietnamese Catholicism observe the proliferation of Catholic literature during the two decades of the most intense persecutions in the 1840s then in the 1860s.<sup>164</sup> This growing body of local Catholic literature created a nationwide consciousness of fellowship among Vietnamese Catholic communities. This process of forming a national identity among these local Catholic groups resonates with Benedict Anderson in his study on the origin of nationalism. He argues that nation is an imagined political community “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each

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Vua nước Đại Nam ước định: đem sổ riêng từ trước bỏ đi tất cả, còn sổ sách binh đao, thuế khoá phạm các việc đều cùng giống như nhân dân và cấm từ nay về sau nói năng, giấy tờ không nên lại dùng chữ nào, câu nào có làm nhục đến đạo Thiên Chúa cùng là trong 10 điều, nếu có những chữ, những câu như thế cũng đều chữa lại.” *DNTLCB 8/Q.1*, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Việt Nam giáo sử diễn ca*, 79; Adrien Launay, *Histoire général de la Société des Missions-Étrangères*, vol. 2 (Paris: Téqui, 1894), 171.

<sup>164</sup> Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2008), 745-749; Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs*, 128.



lives the image of their communion,”<sup>165</sup> especially with an aid of print-languages.<sup>166</sup> Anderson’s theoretical model fits well with the social and political situation of the nineteenth-century Vietnamese Catholicism, since then the sense of national camaraderie among Catholics was figuratively thickened in a mixture of ink and blood.

Notwithstanding the fact that the nineteenth-century Catholic literature dealt chiefly with religious topics,<sup>167</sup> local converts and missionaries also joined forces to produce tracts of counter-narratives against the Nguyễn calumnies. Correspondence between the founder of the Nguyễn dynasty and missionaries was preserved, copied, and circulated.<sup>168</sup> Catholic writers frequently incorporated the legacy of Bishop de Béhaine into the writing of their local histories.<sup>169</sup> But, the most influential printed material of all was the forty-eight study-page section in Jean-Louis Taberd’s *Dictionarium Anamitico Latinum* published in 1838.<sup>170</sup> In this study guide for Vietnamese and Latin, one can find a sample of a classical seven-character eight-line style (*thất ngôn bát cú*) by an unnamed author in the “Compendium of Rules on How to Compose a Poem” (*Lược bày niêm luật làm văn làm thơ*):

#### Persecution

Like the mighty roar of a tiger,  
Imperial edict proscribed Christianity.  
Churches everywhere were razed to the ground.  
Christians (*giáo hữu*) suffered all kinds of afflictions.  
Priests were either hung or quartered.  
Loyal mandarins were beheaded; soldiers were exiled.  
Would that be qualifications for a sage ruler!  
How could one bring so much tears and torments to the people (*chúng dân*).<sup>171</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>166</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44-45.

<sup>167</sup> Nguyễn Hưng, *Sơ thảo thư mục Hán Nôm Công giáo Việt Nam* ([Hồ Chí Minh City]: [Lưu hành nội bộ], 2000).

<sup>168</sup> Léopold Michel Cadière, “Les Français au service de Gia-Long: Nguyễn Ánh et la mission, documents inédits,” *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué* 13, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1926): 5.

<sup>169</sup> Jean-Louis Taberd, *Dictionarium Anamitico-Latinum* (Singapore: J.C. Marshman, 1838), xlvi-xlvii; Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Việt Nam giáo sử diễn ca; Sử ký Đại Nam Việt quốc triều*, 1885.

<sup>170</sup> Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs*, 128.

<sup>171</sup>

Though the immediate purpose of the selected poem is to explain the rule of meter and cadence in Vietnamese, its message is highly political. “Persecution” can be considered as a direct Catholic response to Minh Mạng’s *Thập Điều*. The first six lines describe the injustice of the Nguyễn anti-Catholic policy. Then, as one normally expects according to the strict rule of the eight-line poem, the inner feeling of the author is to be found in the last couplet. Here in the seventh line, the poet let out a plaintive protest in a form of a rhetorical question on whether such kind of rule be called just and humane. Then, in the last line, the author dared the readers to imagine being a world where Christians (*giáo hữu*) be considered as equal (*chúng dân*) before the law. Since this poem is the longest of the only four Latin-Vietnamese bilingual poems in the study page section of Taberd’s *Dictionarium Anamitico-Latinum*, the Vietnam mission’s students who first learned to read and write were very likely spending time to analyze and internalize these stanzas. One can find evidence of the influence of this poem in the writings of subsequent Catholic generations. For instance, Phaolô Nguyễn Trường Tộ (1830-1871), a Catholic Confucian reformer, sent a memorial, “On Religious Freedom” (*Bản về tự do tôn giáo*), to Tự Đức’s court in 1863. He argued:

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Bắt đạo thơ

Lùng lẫy oai hùng tiếng dã rân,  
 Dentibus infrendens sitiensque ut tigris acerba,  
 Chỉ truyền cấm đạo khắp xa gần;  
 Relligionem arcet passim rector atrox;  
 Thánh đàng chôn chôn đều tiêu triệt.  
 Hic ubi cernuntur res sanctae avulsaque templa.  
 Giáo hữu người người chịu khổ bần.  
 Grex Christi innocuous poenis afficitur.  
 Linh mục giáo lưu, hình thâm khắc,  
 Vir sacer immitti gladio laqueove necatur,  
 Cận thần trảm quyết lính đồ thân.  
 Fidus truncatur, milesque exul abit.  
 Há rằng vương đế làm nhon chánh!  
 Quae gens ulla tuum princeps celebrabit honorem!  
 Sao nữ phiền hà hại chúng dân.  
 Qui pascis lacrymis et torques populum.

Jean-Louis Taberd, *Dictionarium Anamitico-Latinum*, xliii.

From the social-hierarchical perspective, a king enjoys more privileges and dignity than his subjects. But, as living being, either king or his subjects share the same fate.... Being a king is to stand in the place of Heaven in order to guide and to feed the people. The king follows the will of Heaven. People speak different languages. They acquire different tastes. Some live in the cold region; other the hot region. They come and go. There are the good and the bad. Loyalty and filial duty are the essential attributes. Why do we pay attention to the appearance then misjudge the heart? Coercing uniformity only multiplies subversion. Therefore, a sage king adjusts regulations but not customs. A just ruler offers rules to govern but not what life has already and harmoniously established.<sup>172</sup>

In this memorial, this Catholic reformer expounded his theory on the political nature of kingship and the universal equality of all human beings. His ideas echoed the similar questioned poignantly raised in the last couplet of the “Persecution.” Tô must be familiar with this poem because the next Vietnamese-Latin dictionary (*Từ điển La Việt*) by Father Marcel Henri Ravier (1847-1899) was not published until 1880—nine years after Tô’s death.<sup>173</sup> Thus, one may deduce that Taberd’s *Dictionarium* had single-handedly shaped and formed the mind and the political attitude of almost all literate Catholics for at least forty-two years from 1838 to 1880.

Therefore, the Nguyễn persecution paradoxically forged among the local converts a new sense of national bonding from Tonkin to Cochinchina that no other groups had. Since Charles Keith refers to the 1930s as the moment of “birth of a Vietnamese national Church,” one may stretch the usage of that metaphor to describe the preceding century as the gestation of Vietnamese Catholic nationalism.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> “Vua đối với dân, xem bề ngoài tuy có tôn ty khác nhau, nhưng bề trong cũng cùng một lẽ sinh thành của tạo vật mà thôi.... Vua đối với dân, là người thay trời mà chăn dắt, theo ý trời mà hành động. Dân sinh ở trên đời, tuy tiếng nói khác nhau, sự yêu chuộng khác nhau, kẻ xử lạnh người xử nóng khác nhau, đên hay đi, nghịch hay thuận, miễn sao biết trung hiếu là được cần gì phải cấu nệ hình tích bên ngoài mà không xét đến cái gốc ở trong tâm, cưỡng ép phải giống nhau để gây ra rối loạn? Vì thế các bậc thánh vương sửa đổi luật pháp mà không thay đổi tập tục, sắp đặt việc chính trị mà không thay đổi cái gì vốn đã thích nghi cuộc sống,” Trương Bá Cần, *Nguyễn Trường Tô: Con người và di thảo* (Hà Chí Minh: Nhà Xuất Bản TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 2002), 132-133.

<sup>173</sup> Nguyễn Hưng, *Sơ thảo thư mục Hán Nôm Công giáo Việt Nam*, 112.

<sup>174</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 88-117.

## X. Conclusion to Chapter Four

From the secret 1832 *Nhâm Thìn* Edict to the 1874 Second Saigon Peace Treaty, the last chapter and this one attempt to reconstruct the progression of the Nguyễn history from the rise of its absolutist imperial state-building to its collapse. The time between the middle of reign of Minh Mạng and the establishment of the French colonial power was a period of ambiguity, of violent encounters, of survival, of ideological presumption, culminating in a complex tangle of causes and effects. However, the rise of Nguyễn absolutist governing style provided the main impetus behind the social and political development of Vietnam during this era. The ambiguity is also reflected in the bas-relief of an armored angel on the right flank of the main entrance of the church of Phát-Diêm, one can be bemused by its real intended depiction. It is not easy to tell whether the angle is a warrior or a dancer.

At first, when one considers when this religious sculpture was carved in the late nineteenth century, one begins to associate the thick armor and the raised sword with the long violent Nguyễn-Catholic history under the reigns of three Nguyễn emperors: Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840), Thiệu Trị (r.1841-1847), and Tự Đức (r.1848-1883). Then, when one directs his or her attention to the calm stoic expression on the face of the angel, one may wonder whether the angel is emerging from the still unsettled dust of a fierce persecution or being lifted up to heaven like the 40,000 Catholics who had been killed during these sixty years.

But perhaps the angel is neither a warrior nor a martyr but a ballet dancer in an almost classic expression of *à la quatrième derrière*. The torso and the head face directly front. The left foot supports the weight of the whole body. The right foot is in back of the left one and points in *battement tendú* to the ground. It is unlikely that a Phát Diêm sculptor had in mind or even was familiar with this textbook ballet position. Nevertheless, the body composition from the art

reflects a delicate dance that had Catholics performing in the midst of a fast changing political backdrop between the Nguyễn centralization and European imperialism.

As the Huế court evolved significantly toward the absolute style under the reign of Minh Mạng in the 1830s and the 1840s, the Nguyễn-Catholic tension reached its zenith. During these two decades, the Nguyễn rulers did not associate Catholicism as an external Western threat to its sovereignty even in the case of Joseph Marchand “Du” and his alleged involvement in the Phiên An Rebellion (1833-1835). The Huế government charged Marchand with a coordinating role between the Phiên An rebels with the Siamese force, but not with being a French agent. Almost until the end of Thiệu Trị’s reign, the Nguyễn dynasty did not perceive of Catholicism as a real source for domestic insurgency, but cleverly propped this so called “heterodox cult” up as a pawn out of their political expediency. The ruling elites viewed this group of “illiterate Catholic peasants” as vulnerable and dispensable pawns in their move to neutralize the Lê heritage and to solidify Nguyễn rule. Over the next four decades, between the 1850s and the 1880s, under the increasing military activities first of the English and then the French navy in Asia, the Nguyễn government conveniently recast their former political pawn as a scapegoat for their own military failure. Ironically, with no intent to do so, six decades of the Nguyễn discriminatory policy drove their Catholic subjects on a path to become the first modern national political entity in Vietnam. The next chapter will use the life and work of an architect of Phát-Diệm, a Tonkinese clergyman, and also one of the first Vietnamese Catholic national leaders, Trần Lục (1825-1899), to illustrate significance of the course of convergence, divergence, and reintegration that marked the history of Nguyễn-Catholic relations.

## Chapter 5: Phêrô Trần Lục (1825-1899)—the Embodiment of Nguyễn-Catholic History

The tomb of Phêrô Trần Lục lies in the courtyard between the Phương Đình bell tower and the main church. On his tombstone, the inscription reads:

Peter  
Father Trần Lục (Six)  
The architect of Phát-Diệm church  
Born in 1825 in Mỹ Quang Village, Nga Sơn Prefecture, Thanh Hóa Province of Kẻ Dừa region  
Ordained in 1860  
Pastor of Phát-Diệm in 1865  
Passed away on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1899<sup>1</sup>

### I. A Biographical Sketch of Phêrô Trần Lục

Phêrô Trần Lục was born in 1825, the fifth year of the reign of Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840). His life overlapped with nine Nguyễn rulers from Minh Mạng to Thành Thái (r.1889-1907). In fact, he was born and baptized under the name Phero or Peter Trần Hữu. His Catholic parents were from peasant stock.<sup>2</sup> When Trần Lục entered the seminary of Vinh-Trị, his superior changed his name

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Phero  
Cha Trần Lục (Sáu)  
Người kiến thiết khu nhà thờ Phát-Diệm  
Sinh năm 1825 tại làng Mỹ Quang, huyện Nga Sơn, tỉnh Thanh Hoá, xứ Kẻ Dừa.  
Chịu chức linh mục năm 1860  
Chính xứ Phát-Diệm năm 1865  
Qua đời ngày 5-7-1899

<sup>2</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six: Curé de Phat-Diem, vice-roi en Annam* (Paris: Librairie Bloud & Gay, [1931]), 18, 78; Armand Olichon, *Father Six: Parish Priest and Viceroy*, trans. Barbara Wall (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1954), 18.



Fig. 5. Trần Lục's tomb in the courtyard between the Phương Đình Bell Tower and Phát-Diệm Cathedral, 2015. Photo by Chánh Nguyễn, S.J.

from Trần Hữu to Trần Triêm because there was already one student with the name Hữu. This change lasted until 1873.<sup>3</sup> In 1873 he successfully mediated a resolution of the conflict between the French and the Vietnamese court that resulting in the return of Hanoi to the Nguyễn rule. The French decorated him with their highest rank of the Legion of Honor. According to his first biographer, Armand Olichon, Tự Đức showed his imperial favor by changing the name of the

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<sup>3</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 27.

pastor of Phát-Diệm from Trần Triêm to Trần Lục (Trần “the Deacon”); this misnomer stayed with him even after his ordination to the priesthood.<sup>4</sup>

Trần’s biography makes an informative case study because his life touched upon the three major developments emphasized in this dissertation—the convergence between Catholics and the embattled Nguyễn military elites under the Tây Sơn period, the divergence from the Nguyễn-Catholic alliance under the Nguyễn absolutist empire state-building, and the reintegration Nguyễn-Catholic at the beginning of the colonial era. By the time of his death, during the reign of Thành Thái, Trần Lục had composed a total of 2,545 verses of Catholic-Confucian moral odes. However, these odes alone yield very little biographical information about Father Trần. Besides poetry, he had succeeded in managing the construction of the Phát-Diệm Cathedral (1871-1899). Therefore, I will use the architecture of Phát-Diệm church and the layout of this religious complex to as a literary device connecting available data from the dynastic records and in missionary correspondence to recount the life and work of Trần Lục.

## II. Thirty Years from Childhood to Adulthood

1875 saw the start of Trần Lục’s project with the raising of the Grotto of the Holy Sepulcher. From a strictly technical aspect, Trần Lục built this grotto first to confirm whether or not the ground was firm enough to be the foundation for future construction on a more massive scale. This step was necessary because the topographical composition of Phát-Diệm is mostly sediment from the Red River, not a choice terrain for heavy structures.<sup>5</sup> Aside from its technical purpose, the grotto signifies a hostile natural and social environment that Trần Lục experienced during his childhood.

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<sup>4</sup> Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 78; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2 (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2008), 559; Trần Lục, *Yết thị cụ Khâm Sai phủ dụ tỉnh Thanh*, ed. Vũ Đăng Khoa, *Từ Hàn cử ngung dịch quốc ngữ* (Ninh Bình: Phát-Diệm Tổng Đường Tàng Bản, 1907), 306.

<sup>5</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 86.



A. The Grotto of the Holy Sepulcher and the unforgiving natural environment of Trần Luc's birthplace—Tonkin

Twelve meters high, and constructed from hand-picked “scholars’ rocks,” the grotto was often used on Christmas Day and during Holy Week for religious processions reenacting the birth of Jesus or his passion and death.<sup>6</sup> These artificial rock mountains also served as the geomantic throne arms for the main church: a feature that was often found in traditional regional structures such as temples and village halls (*dinh*). The grotto alludes to the long history of a human struggle against the turbulent tropical weather and frequent typhoons in this region. The environmental danger has been ingrained in the regional mythos and in the popular religious expression. The Vietnamese folktale of Son-Tinh and Thủy-Tinh tells of the eternal grudge between the spirit of the mountain and the spirit of the water. The story begins with the beautiful princess of the prehistoric Hùng dynasty, My-Nuong. One day, the spirit of the mountain and the spirit of water each came to the King of Hùng to ask him for the princess’s hand in marriage. Both spirits displayed their magical might, and the king was unable to decide who would be the best suitor for his daughter. He then asked the two spirits to return the following day with their wedding gifts. The king decided that whichever spirit brought the better gift would have the princess as his wife. The spirit of the mountain came first with gold, silver, jade, elephant tusks, rare birds and unusual animals. Eventually he won the competition and married My-Nuong. The rejected spirit of the water would forever hold a grudge against the spirit of the mountain. As the tale claims, every year the spirit of water causes a flood and calls on the storms in hopes of kidnapping the princess from her mountain palace. The people, taking sides with the spirit of the

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<sup>6</sup> Tòa Giám Mục Phát-Diêm, *Nhà Thờ Lớn Phát-Diêm* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Hà Nội, 1999), 29-33.

mountain, build levees and dams to protect their princess and fight the forces of the angry water spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The struggle to survive in this poor and perilous region was not just a matter of ancient folklore. There was also very real, as a French soldier observed:

With regards to the necessities for existence in this wet delta, everything is quite rudimentary. From the point of view of comfort, it is just zero: bamboo house, flat dirt floor, straw roof, straw mat for a bed, a few planks of wood as furniture, and a nearby pond as an outhouse! Everything is like the early days of the first appearance of men on earth. The primary occupation is to look for food.<sup>8</sup>

According to dynastic records, from 1831 to 1839 alone, typhoons breached levees in Ninh Bình province four times.<sup>9</sup> Because people constantly lived in the abject poverty and suffered frequently natural disasters, provincial mandarins often appealed to the Huế Court for tax relief.

In 1833, Nguyễn Đăng Giai, the governor of Thanh Hoá, sent an urgent report to the court:

Since the eighth and ninth months of last year, starvation has spread throughout the region. People from other northern provinces have found their way into my district to search for food. People were found dead on the roads. Just from a preliminary inspection of the region, one can already perceive how dire the situation is. I put these migrating people into various minor public projects in exchange for some food and monetary relief for them. However, my region still needs some larger projects such as moats, levees, roads, and bridges. The typhoon destroyed many dams. From my assessment of the situation, we need to dig a canal to relieve the water pressure and the stagnant water in the lowland area. Therefore, on behalf of the starving population, I humbly report to Your Majesty, ask for permission to start the project, and request your assistance, especially rice and money.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lý Tế Xuyên, *Việt Điện U-Linh Tập*, trans. Lê Hữu Mục (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1960), 109-111.

<sup>8</sup> “La vie dans ce delta mouillé et alors mal connu était tout à fait rudimentaire, au regard des nécessités de l’existence. Au point de vue confort, c’était au just zéro. Cagnas en bambous et torchis, plancher de terre battue, toit de latanier; comme lit une natte; comme meubles des planches, et l’étang voisin comme cabinet de toilette! Comme aux premiers jours de l’homme sur la terre, la nourriture était la première préoccupation,” Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 81.

<sup>9</sup> Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Minh Mệnh chính yếu*, vol. 3, trans. Vũ Quang Khanh and Võ Khắc Vân ([Saigon]: Phủ quốc vụ khanh đặc trách văn hóa, 1972) 33, 42, 70; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên* (hereafter *DNTLCB*), *5/Q.clxxxiii* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, Viện sử học, 2007), 129.

<sup>10</sup> “Từ tháng 8, tháng 9 năm ngoái đến nay, dân đói Bắc Kỳ, nhiều người Thanh Hoa kiếm ăn, có kẻ chết ở dọc đường. Tình cảnh ấy, chính mắt trông thấy, thật không đang tâm! Và lại, bày cho làm việc để thay phát chẩn, cũng là một cách cứu đói. Bờ hào ngoài thành và cái cầu đá ở đường cái quan chưa từng xây đắp, cần dùng đá núi khá nhiều. Vậy xin quyền đặt một sở Dường tế lớn, tập hợp các dân xiêu lại, chọn lấy những người khỏe mạnh, thuê đi lấy đá. Và đồn Thủy bảo bị nước sông chảy xói... Vậy xin thuê người làm công luôn thể, cấp cho tiền và gạo để họ có cái nương nhờ,” *DNTLCB*, *3/Q.lxxxviii* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, Viện sử học, 2007), 462.

From the time of this report in 1833 to the construction of the Grotto of the Holy Sepulcher in 1875, ten more major storms, averaging one every four years, ravaged the region, destroyed crops and took many lives. The typhoon of 1867 alone leveled 100,000 houses and temples and left scores of villagers destitute.<sup>11</sup> Trần Lục himself, from the year of his birth in 1825 to his first construction of the Grotto of the Holy Sepulcher in 1875, lived through at least fourteen devastating typhoons and major natural calamities, according to the official records within the dynastic chronicle.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Grotto of the Holy Sepulcher was more than just a visual aid for pious religious activities on a Christmas Day or a Good Friday for the Catholics of Phát-Diệm; it represented the unforgiving environment of a coastal region of Tonkin that Trần Lục called home.

B. The stone lattice of phoenix (*phung*) in the Chapel of Immaculate Heart of Mary and Trần Lục's parents

During Trần Lục's two years (1858-1860) of being exiled in Lạng Sơn, he became ill, and he made a vow to the Virgin Mary, that if he survived, he would build a chapel in her honor.<sup>13</sup> Father Trần Lục fulfilled this vow in 1883 as the first component in the construction of Phát-Diệm campus complex. He also commissioned local artists to create a stone bas-relief of a large phoenix (*phượng*) on the side lattice-screen for the chapel. He elegantly and stylishly translated the Christian theological concept of Mary as the Mother of God and the Bearer of the Word into the East Asian symbols of an imperial phoenix holding in its beak a scroll of classical text bound with silk cloth.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q.*, xxxvi, 1057.

<sup>12</sup> *DNTLCB 10/Q.*, 209-215.

<sup>13</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Nguyễn Hữu Thông, *Mỹ Thuật Huế: Nhìn Từ Góc Độ Ý Nghĩa và Biểu Tượng Trang Trí* (Huế: Nhà Xuất Bản Thuận Hóa, 2001), 99-100, 133-134.



Fig. 6. The stone lattice of phoenix in the Chapel of Immaculate Heart of Mary, undated. After Tòa Giám Mục Phát Diệm, *Phát Diệm Cathedral*, p. 48.

More than just a special vow of Trần Lục to the Virgin Mary or an adoption and a transformation of a highly auspicious East Asian symbol into the Christian message, this stone lattice may also be Trần Lục's reference to the hybrid of Christian-Confucian feminine virtues.<sup>15</sup> In his *Ode to a Young Man (Nịch ái vong ân)*, it does only spell out these seven virtues of an ideal Catholic maiden for a young man to look for, but also attributes these qualities to the Virgin Mary:

One, she has a gentle character.  
Two, both of you share the same temperament.  
Three, how is her faith in the Lord?  
Four, she has a natural tendency to care for others.  
Five, a joyful smile is always ready  
To everybody and to her friends.  
Six, she has to be genuine,  
Humble, malleable, and act with propriety.  
Seven, she has an open mind  
To wisdom, advice, and cultivation of right conducts.

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<sup>15</sup> Léopold Michel Cardière, "Les Motifs de l'art annamite," *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué* 6, no. 1 (Janv-Mars. 1919):98.

Young man, when you notice the one as such,  
Compare her with Our Blessed Mother in your contemplation.  
Pray and meditate,  
Ponder in your heart for a few months.<sup>16</sup>

However, when one peers through the beauty of the phoenix stone lattice screen and verses of idyllic life, one begins to see the harsher reality on the other side of a work of art—the true extent of grinding poverty among Vietnamese peasants. Hunger, cold, illness, and hard labor were the order of the day, as demonstrated in his *Filial Ode (Hiếu Tự Ca)*.<sup>17</sup> Eighty-six percent of the ode praises the selfless sacrifice of the parents for the well-being of their children and even their grandchildren. While no record suggests that either the chapel or the *Filial Ode* was to be dedicated to his mother, Trần Lục certainly held motherhood in high esteem, especially the selflessness of a mother in the midst of poverty. In idealizing the heroic suffering of an impoverished pregnant mother, *Hiếu Tự Ca* describes her agony:

Pity cashless parents,  
No song can speak of their trials!  
Often no food through day,  
No rice no fruit, feet and hands feeble.  
Starving but bearing it,  
The pain will pass, she then moves on.  
A starving child in the womb can't bear,  
Its mother felt the pains, the kicks, and churns,

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16

“Một là tính nó hiền lành  
Hai là tính nó tính mình như in  
Ba là nó có đức tin  
Bốn là tính nó tự nhiên thương người  
Năm là có tính tươi cười  
Hoà với mọi người chúng bạn chị em  
Sáu là có tính tự nhiên  
Khiêm cung nhuần nhã dưới trên tôn nhường.  
Bảy là tính nó sẵn sàng  
Nghe nhờ dạy dỗ về đàng nét na  
Khi mà ta thấy rành làm vậy  
Thì phải lấy Đức Mẹ làm đầu  
Phần riêng mình cũng phải cầu  
Một vài ba tháng cho lâu trong mình.”

Trần Lục, “Nịch ái vong ân,” Nguyễn Gia Đệ and others, eds., *Trần Lục* (Montreal: privately printed, 1996), 631.

<sup>17</sup> Trần Lục, “Hiếu Tự Ca,” Nguyễn Gia Đệ and others, eds., *Trần Lục* (Montreal: privately printed, 1996), 549-583.

Deep pains exhaust like fire,  
Heavy each step, oh poor mother.<sup>18</sup>

This description of daily hardship of a woman peasant resonates with what the English diplomat

Barrow wrote thirty-two years before Trần Lục was born:

In Cochinchina it would appear likewise to the fate of the weaker sex to be doomed to those occupations which require, if not the greatest exertions of bodily strength, at least the most persevering industry. We observed them day after day, and from morning till night, standing in the midst of pools of water, up to the knees, occupied in the transplanting of rice. In fact, all the labours of tillage, and the various employments connected with agriculture, seem to fall to the share of the female peasantry.... They even assist in constructing and keeping in repair their mud-built cottages; they conduct the manufacture of coarse earthen ware vessels; they manage the boats on rivers and in harbours; they bear their articles of produce to market; they draw the cotton wool from the pod, free it from the seeds, spin it into thread, weave it into cloth, dye it of its proper colour, and make it up into dresses for themselves and their families.<sup>19</sup>

The living situation of Trần Lục's family might resemble what Edmund Roberts (1784-1836)

witnessed when this American officer commanded his ship to dock near a Vietnamese fishing village in 1833:

As soon as the boat touches the strand, out rush from their palm-leaf huts, men and women, and naked children and dogs, all having a mangy appearance; being covered with some scorbutic disease, the itch or small-pox, and frequently with white leprous spots. The teeth, even of the children who are seven or eight years old, are of a coal black, the lips and gums are deeply stained with chewing areca, &c., their faces are nasty, their hands unwashed, and their whole persons most offensive to the sight and smell; for the most part the comb has never touched the children's heads, and the whole village may be seen scratching at the same time from head to foot.<sup>20</sup>

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18

“Khốn thay những cha mẹ nghèo  
Kể sao cho xiết lắm nhiều đắng cay!  
Nhiều khi nhịn đói thân ngày,  
Cơm đã không có chân tay rã rời.  
Phải chăng mẹ đói mà thôi,  
Âu là dễ chịu lần hồi cũng xong.  
Khốn thay con đói trong lòng  
Rộn rang giầy đập bên hông rộn ràng.  
Môi mê rũ liệt bang hoàng  
Nặng nề khó nhọc mẹ mang nặng nề,”

Trần Lục, “Hiếu Tự Ca,” 550.

<sup>19</sup> John Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina in the Year 1792 and 1793*, 303.

<sup>20</sup> Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochinchina, Siam, and Muscat: In the U.S. Sloop of War Peacock* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837), 220.

Other foreign visitors also had similar observations as Edmund Roberts did. They even went further to write about their frequent encounters with people suffering from diseases associated with poverty. The English seaman Edward Brown, who was kidnapped by Chinese pirates, escaped and then spent two years from 1857 to 1858 in Vietnam before the Nguyễn government allowed him to leave for Singapore, described his hosts:

My quarters were anything but comfortable. The governor's cottage, which was just inside the prison gates, had but one room, about ten feet square, and, besides the governor and myself, there were twelve soldiers to find accommodation in it. These men were, without any exaggeration, the most loathsome and infectious set of ragamuffins that I had ever seen. . . . I know that I am sinning grievously against good manners, in barely hinting at such things; but I might as well try to write a book on Venice without mentioning the canals, or on China without saying anything about tea, as to chronicle Cochinese manners and customs without touching, ever so delicately, on the topic of their domestic animalculae.<sup>21</sup>

If people with a certain social prestige such as a governor and his entourage had to live in such an unhygienic condition, the commoners' lot must have been worse.

In contrast to the prominent display of the phoenix lattice in the Chapel of Immaculate Heart of Mary, there is no document to explain for the missing of a dragon (*long* or *rồng*), another auspice symbol in East Asian culture to represent the masculine counterpart of the phoenix, in the entire Phát-Diệm campus. Coincidentally, one has no information about Trần Lục's father or much information about Trần Lục's attitude toward fatherhood as his on motherhood. Armand Olichon, Trần Lục's first biographer, only said that the family supplemented their food with fish that the father caught in the swamp.<sup>22</sup> The fatherly figure receives scant attention in the 1,088-line *Hiếu Tự Ca*. Trần Lục dedicated only 7 lines praising fathers in direct contrast to 146 lines specifically expressing admiration for mothers. One may

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Brown, *A Seaman's Narrative of his Adventures during a Captivity among Chinese Pirates, on the Coast of Cochin-China, and afterwards during a Journey on Foot across the Country, in the Years 1857-8* (London: Charles Westerton, 1861), 185-187.

<sup>22</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 18, 78.

only hope that Trần Lục's father were in a better appearance than an unprepossessing fisherman whom the English diplomat John Barrow met in 1793:

A small boat without any sail was overtaken, from which a miserable old wretch was brought away, than whom I never beheld a more piteous object. His eyes were deeply sunk in his head, his face was the colour of an old oaken wainscot, haggard, and wrinkled; and a few clotted locks of grey hair started from under a dirty handkerchief which was bound round his head. His whole dress consisted of a short frock patched with pieces of twenty different sorts and colours, and a pair of ragged trowsers of the petticoat kind.<sup>23</sup>

Based on Barrow's account and of other Europeans, it seems reasonable to conjecture that the majority poor of Vietnam lived in a perilous subsistence living. One can borrow the famous remark of R. H. Tawney to summarize their conditions: "There are districts in which the position of the rural population is that of a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him."<sup>24</sup> Tawney was referring to the living situation of Chinese peasants in the early 1930s, but the quotation suits remarkably well to the case of Trần Lục's family in the 1800s.

### C. The first schooling opportunity in Bạch Bát village

The depiction on the lattice, a phoenix holding in its beak a scroll of classical text bound with silk cloth, can be linked to another virtuous woman, Trần Lục's aunt in Bạch Bát village. This aunt had an important formative role in the next stage of Trần Lục's life. Like the iconic image of that phoenix carrying the classical texts, she offered him the first schooling opportunity at her home village because Trần Lục's parents could not afford to raise him and his siblings.<sup>25</sup> While this charity was most welcome, the experience of separation from his parents at this young

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<sup>23</sup> John Barrow, *A Voyage to CochinChina in the Year 1792 and 1793*, 247.

<sup>24</sup> James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 18-19.



age left a vivid pain in his memory that one may sense in these eight lines describing the anguish of a parent:

I feel ashamed to see  
The children of my neighbor can learn, can write.  
My child wears threadbare clothes,  
Though all the same fate share,  
Suffer distress and more distress.  
My child, my flesh, my womb,  
At home, they starve thirst cry,  
Piercing my heart, children I send.<sup>26</sup>

His maternal aunt in Bạch Bát appears to have been of limited means herself, although with a certain level of education. Armand Olichon asserted that this aunt was Trần Lục’s first teacher until the young man turned either fourteen or fifteen.<sup>27</sup> The pastoral manual for priests and the basic rulebook for catechists—*Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên (CĐTX)* and *Bốn luật thầy giảng địa phận Đông Đàng Trong (BLTG)* respectively—support Olichon’s information. *CĐTX* instructs that local priests not admit candidates under fourteen to a minor seminary:

From now on, do not take any students who have not reached a certain level of maturity. These candidates must have some understanding of their own calling. Thus, they must be at least fourteen years old. Test these candidates for two months as I [Bishop Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse] and others suggested before. Make sure of their qualifications and of some sufficient intellectual capacity for further learning.<sup>28</sup>

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“Thẹn lòng thấy con người ta  
Học hành chữ nghĩa văn hoa với đời.  
Con mình đói rách tả tơi  
Cũng là kiếp người, cũng mẹ cũng cha.  
Thiệt tha rất mực thiệt tha,  
Con là khúc ruột rút ra rành rành.  
Ở nhà nhịn đói không đành,  
Phải cho đi ở ruột mình cắt đôi,”

Trần Lục, “Hiếu Tự Ca,” 555.

<sup>27</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> “Từ này về sau đừng chịu đứ đũa nào vào học nhà tràng, khi nó chưa được đủ tuổi mà biết việc mình cho tỏ, cùng hiểu duyên phận mở ra cho mình làm sao: vậy nó phải có ít là 14 tuổi chẵn; mà ta hay là ông khác đã đặt thay vì ta thử xem nó một hai tháng trước đã, cho biết nó có được các điều đã kể trước này cùng đủ trí khôn mà học được chăng,” Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse, *Synodo Sutchuense: Công Đồng Tứ Xuyên (CĐTX)*, trans. Giám mục Bảo Lộc Phanchicô Phước (Puginier) (Địa phận Tây Đàng Ngoài: Ninh Phú Đường, 1873), 57.

Very often aspirants had to go through training to become catechists (*thầy giảng*) first before being selected to enter a major seminary. The rules for selection of candidates in *BLTG* state:

Rule 9: Candidates to be catechists are drawn from the pool of the Latin students. Each year, the Latin school will accept about forty students.

Rule 10: A superior of the Latin school judges if the students have potential for the track to receive Holy Orders, then sets these men on the path to become catechists. This process can be done monthly.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, from the time Trần Lục's parents sent him to live with his aunt to the time a local priest took him in as an apprentice, he must have received some informal schooling with other Catholic children of Bạch Bát, a village known for its predominantly Catholic inhabitants.<sup>30</sup> One may use an observation by the French missionary Joseph Marie Gaillard (1877-1925), on a scene of a village classroom in Tonkin, albeit from 1898, to visualize a school that Trần Lục might have attended sixty years earlier:

Every evening at eight o'clock, provided with a lantern and a stick (in order to protect us from the Annamite dogs, who at night take the most honest folk for thieves), we went to visit the catechism classes held in private houses. It was a touching sight to see—and pleasant to hear on each side of the village—the cadenced singing of the catechists as they alternated questions and answers. The moment we appeared everyone cried out: “Good evening, Father! Good evening, Father!” In truth, they did not cry out, but literally howled.... The drum beat, announced the end of the class hours, and each one returned to his home.<sup>31</sup>

Since Trần Lục grew up under the reign of Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840) and when the persecution was at its height following the suppression of the Phiên An rebellion (1833-1835) then the execution of Fr. Joseph Marchand “Du,” the instruction might also have happened in the evening but without the drum beat or loud chanting of the lessons. Instead, an oppressive atmosphere

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<sup>29</sup> “9. Vốn vào bọn Giáo Tập, là học trò Latinh; nên trường Latinh sẽ lãnh cho đông học trò: mỗi năm chừng 40 học trò mới. 10. Bề trên trường Latinh xét học trò nào không trông ngày sau lên chức thánh, thì sẽ cứ đầu tháng học mà cho vào bọn Giáo Tập,” François-Xavier Van Camelbeke, *Bốn luật thầy giảng địa phận Đông Đàng Trong* (Hong Kong: Imprimerie de Nazareth, 1899) [hereafter *BLTG*], 6.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre André Retord, “Extracts of a Letter from M.M. Retord, Jeantet, Charrier, and Gauthier, Apostolical Missionaries; to the two Committeees of the Institution,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 2 (1839): 533.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Marie Gaillard, “Asiatic Missions: Vicariate Apostolic of Upper Tonkin,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 61 (1898): 404.

must have weighed heavily on Catholic communes.<sup>32</sup> At this time it was a general practice for Christian parents to assign their children security posts along the roads or the entrances to the village to watch for strangers and soldiers.<sup>33</sup> A confrere of Retord, Pierre Rose Dumoulin Borie “Cao” (1808-1838), recounted a story about a certain Kham risking his own life to protect a priest:

A young boy, name Kham, about ten years old, was stopped,[sic] on his way to school, [sic] by two men, who in vain endeavoured by persuasion, by fear, by threats, by inflicting as many as fifteen strokes of the ratan, to make him declare where the priest of the neighbourhood was concealed. “You may,” said the noble-minded child, “even kill me; but I will never answer your question.” The firmness of his answer confounded his persecutors; and of the liberty, which it procured him, the first, use he made, was to relate to his parents what had occurred. The priest, whose name was Dũ, immediately left their house.<sup>34</sup>

It is highly possible that Trần Lục, who was the same age as Kham in Borie’s account, also took turns patrolling the borders of his village with the other Catholic children of Bạch Bát. Their early schooling was not simply chanting and memorizing lessons, but it also provided a training in endurance. Their daily experience often entailed the life-and-death game of sentry. Their first teachers and protectors were peasant Catholic women similar to Trần Lục’s mother and aunt whom he later memorialized in his odes and in the image of the phoenix stone lattice adorning the Chapel of Immaculate Heart of Mary.

#### D. The Chapel of Saint Peter and Trần Lục’s young adulthood

As one steps outside and stands at the front corner of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel, to ones left stands the Chapel of Saint Peter that Trần Lục built in 1896. The intricately carved wooden structure rests on one solid slab of stone which is quite appropriate and

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<sup>32</sup> Pierre André Retord, “Extract of a Letter from Mr. Retord, Missionary Apostolic in Tonquin, to the Directors of the Seminary of Foreign Missions, at Paris,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 1 (1838): 121.

<sup>33</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 17-18.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Rose Dumoulin Borie, “Extract of a Letter from Mr. Borie, Missionary Apostolic in Tonquin, to Professors Aubestic, Villeneuve and Praviche at the Seminaries of Tulle and Limoges,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 1 (1838): 117-118.

thematically proper for a chapel dedicated to the head of the Apostles for whom Trần Lục was named when he was baptized. Like his patron saint, Peter—the rock declared by Jesus Christ upon which to build his Church—Trần Lục’s path to priesthood was built upon a rock of hardship and determination.

After a few years under the tutelage of his aunt, Trần Lục began his formal education at the age of fifteen. As was a customary practice of those days, and as mentioned in the directives of *CDTX*, local priests identified and selected from among the Catholic families of good standing several young men chosen for their enthusiasm in religious matters.<sup>35</sup> Pastors then recruited these boys as altar servers and often financially supported them in their studies of Classical Chinese and some basic elements of Latin. The pastors would keep track of the boys for four to five years and then make recommendations to the bishop for admission to a minor seminary.<sup>36</sup> A certain Father Tiếu of Bạch Bát sensed a possible vocation in Trần Lục and took the young man under his wing for five years.<sup>37</sup> The living arrangement at the so-called rectory likely would have been broadly similar to a description provided by Father Joseph Marie Gaillard (1874-1921) recounted in one of his 1898 letters:

I must now describe an Annamite presbytery—if so it can be called. It is an agglomeration of wooden and thatched houses, sometimes covered in leaves, the Father’s dwelling being in the middle, becoming an Episcopal residence when the Bishop is making his circuit, together with the dwelling of the native priest and two or three other houses of the same style. They serve as refectory, kitchen, study, and class-rooms, for each of our “presbyteries” bring up from ten to twenty children, who are, each day, taught by the parish priest and prepared by him to enter the Mission college.<sup>38</sup>

If a rectory of the late nineteenth century was more like a collection of huts, then the setting for Tran Luc’s mentor in Bạch Bát would be even more primitive in the time of persecution. During

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<sup>35</sup> *CDTX*, 56-57.

<sup>36</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 21-22.

<sup>37</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Marie Gaillard, “Asiatic Missions: Vicariate Apostolic of Upper Tonkin,” 401-402.

these years living under the guardianship of Father Tiếu, Trần Lục and his classmates devoted most of their time studying Latin and moral cases for their future ministry as confessors. Twice a year, Father Tiếu and other clergy in the area administered examinations to assess the progress of their students. *CDTX* elaborates the responsibilities of the local priest in preparing these young men for the seminary:

At your school, engage your students in reading and writing tournaments. Make sure they master their Latin and moral cases. Their daily curriculum includes debates in Latin and discussions on moral cases. Twice a year, students in the region get together to compete and be tested by other priests concerning what they have learned the previous semester. At least once a year or every other year, report to your bishop about your students. In your report, include these areas: academic progress, cultivation of virtues, observation of their behavior, and their personal temperament.<sup>39</sup>

Since most of the seminarian candidates had to pass through a pastoral period as catechists, the 1899 rulebook for catechists, *Bốn Luật Thầy Giảng (BLTG)*, together with *CDTX* gives us particular insight into the priestly training that Trần Lục and his contemporaries received.

In 1845, Trần Lục was admitted to the Vĩnh Trị seminary at the age of twenty. His early years at the minor seminary were quite peaceful because under the reign of Emperor Thiệu Trị (1841-1847), the nation-wide religious persecution went dormant, with only sporadic arrests and executions at the whim of the local mandarins.<sup>40</sup> This period of relatively limited persecution ended with the death of Emperor Thiệu Trị. While the newly enthroned Tự Đức emperor (1847-1883) renewed the persecution policy of his grandfather, Minh Mạng (1820-1840), mandarins in

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<sup>39</sup> “Trong nhà tràng phải làm hết sức cho được giục lòng học trò đua nhau tập viết cho khéo, học chữ và tiếng latin cho thông, cùng học lý đoán và những sự cần khác. Đứng kể sự học, cùng sự cãi lẽ hằng ngày về tiếng latin, hay là lý đoán, còn trong một năm hai lần sẽ đặt đám chung đề cho học trò cãi lẽ, cùng chịu tra xét trước mặt bề trên cùng các thầy cả khác đang đấy, về các sách các bài nó đã học trong sáu tháng trước; mỗi một năm một lần, hay là bất quá hai năm phải thưa cùng đấng vớivò về các học trò, nó học đã khá đã thông dường nào, nó đã đi đàng nhân đức, nó đã giữ nét na làm sao, và tính khí nó thế nào,” *CDTX*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 23-30.

the distant provinces did not perfectly execute the wishes of the Huế Court.<sup>41</sup> According to missionaries, local mandarins did not want to enforce the edicts for various reasons. Others took advantage of the imperial proscription to enrich themselves by keeping Catholics as cash cows. In 1853, a missionary could be ransomed for thirty two taels of silver.<sup>42</sup> Some were more genuinely sympathetic to Catholics for the sake of stability of their provinces which were heavily hit by floods, epidemics, and famine.<sup>43</sup>

Whichever, the quiet tolerance of local mandarins, even after three years into the reign of Tự Đức, allowed Trần Lục to finish his studies at Vĩnh Trị without interruption. Besides devoting regular hours in class, he and his confrères also spent considerable amount of time in the fields doing manual labor. This demanding schedule did not deter Trần Lục from studying Chinese literature on his own. He quickly found that his knowledge of Chinese literature was a very useful key which could open many important doors for him.<sup>44</sup> After he finished his studies, his superiors invited him to join the faculty of Vĩnh Trị seminary. He worked under the supervision of a newly appointed and revered rector, Phaolô Lê Bão Tịnh (1793-1857).<sup>45</sup> After his five-year probation as an instructor at Vĩnh Trị seminary, his superior recommended the young catechist to Bishop Retord for further studies at the major seminary of Kẻ Non.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Jean Paul Galy-Carles, "A Letter from M. Galy, of the Society of Foreign Missions, to Messieurs the Directors of the Seminary of the same Society at Paris," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 19 (1858): 57.

<sup>42</sup> Pierre André Retord, "A Letter from Mgr. Retord, Vicar Apostolic of Western Tong-King, to Messrs. the Members of the Central Councils of the Propagation of the Faith," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 17 (1856): 60.

<sup>43</sup> François Marie Pellerin, "Extract from a Letter of Mgr. Pellerin, Vicar-Apostolic of Northern Cochin-China, to Messieurs the Directors of the Seminary of Foreign Missions at Paris," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 17 (1856): 79; Pierre André Retord, "Extract from a letter of Mgr. Retord, Vicar Apostolic of Western Tong-king, to the Abbé Cheynet, Doctor of Theology, and Pro-Vicar General of the same Vicariate," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 20 (1859): 17; *DNTLCB 7/Q. xi*, 336.

<sup>44</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Pierre André Retord, "A Letter from Mgr. Retord, vicar-apostolic of Western Tong-King, to the Abbé Laurens, curate of Salles, near Lyons," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 19 (1858): 182; Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 30-31.

<sup>46</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 34-35.

For those first thirty years of his life, Trần Lục survived the fiercest persecution under Minh Mạng (1820-1840). He also witnessed quiet but resilient examples of his parents and especially his aunt in Bách Bát in keeping their faith.<sup>47</sup> At Vĩnh Trì, he proved himself to his religious superiors as a young man well-versed in sound doctrine both as a student and then as a catechist. Like the single solid slab of stone of the foundation of his future Chapel of Saint Peter, the experiences of these thirty years prepared him to weather successfully the next wave of persecution under Tự Đức (1848-1883).

### **III. Trần Lục as a Potential Leader in Training**

When one faces the Phát-Diệm complex, three major building structures form a line in the back of the campus: the Chapel of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on the left corner (1883), the Grotto of the Holy Sepulcher in the middle (1875), and the Grotto of Gethsemane on the right corner (1896). During Holy Week, parishioners reenact the passion and death of Jesus, and the procession stops first at the Grotto of the Gethsemane Garden. They select one parishioner in good standing to be Jesus who then acts out the scene of Jesus praying to God the Father: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will” (Mk 14:32-36). The grotto can be used as a narrative device to invoke a contentious period during the 1850s and the 1860s when the diplomatic tension between Vietnam and the European states inevitably pulled Vietnamese Catholics into national politics. French gunboats defiantly entered the ports of Vietnam and demanded the release of imprisoned missionaries and an end to the persecution of Catholics.<sup>48</sup> Trần Lục finished his last stage of priestly training during which he was arrested and exiled as a religious convict.

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<sup>47</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 18-19.

<sup>48</sup> Lê Thanh Cảnh, “Notes pour servir a l’histoire de l’établissement du protectorat français en Annam,” *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué* 15 (3) (Juillet-Septembre 1928): 180-204.

### A. The Grotto of Gethsemane Garden and priestly formation on the run

From 1855, the year of Trần Lục entering Kê Non, to 1860, the year of his ordination, his personal life increasingly intertwined with the national events. The frequent presence of European warships in the early 1850s raised considerable alarm to the Nguyễn Court. The Tự Đức emperor was grimly determined to stamp out all potential subversive collusion between Catholics and Europeans.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps Tự Đức was acutely aware of the reluctance of his subordinates in the provinces to enforce his two earlier edicts in 1848 and 1851.<sup>50</sup> Whichever the case, in the summer of 1854, Tự Đức issued another communiqué to all officials to dispel any doubts about his keen desire to eradicate Catholicism:

Here is a clarification of the proscription against the Gia-tô religion:

First, for those who had mistakenly followed this Gia-tô religion, and come to the authorities to admit your mistake and recant, all will be forgiven. But, if you refuse and when you are turned in by others, any mandarins [who are Catholics] will be stripped of all official status and be sent back to work as runners at their home village. Soldiers and commoners will be punished accordingly to the laws.

Behead any captured Western religious leader. Pillory the head, and cast the body into the river. As for lay Westerners or native leaders, decapitate them immediately. As for other native believers, exile them to frontier provinces but keep them far away from the coast. Reward three hundred taels of silver for capturing a Western religious leader; a hundred for a native religious leader. Those who house and hide Westerners will be punished according to the code of hiding criminals. We furthermore enact, that if in the future any Western leader is discovered by any other person than the mandarins, the whole of the functionaries of the province shall be caned, demoted, but allowed to remain at their posts. As for a native teacher of this religion, a canton chief will receive 100 lashes with a rattan and forfeit his rank. The upper ranking mandarins will be demoted two ranks below their current one.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. ix*, 299; François Marie Pellerin, “Extract from a Letter of Mgr. Pellerin, Vicar-Apostolic of Northern Cochín-China, to Messieurs the Directors of the Seminary of Foreign Missions at Paris,” *Annals the Propagation of the Faith* 17 (1856): 77; Pierre André Retord, “Extract of a Letter from another Letter of the same Prelate to the Abbe Laurent, Curé of Salles,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 16 (1855): 75.

<sup>50</sup> Etienne Vo Duc Hanh, *La place du catholicisme dans les relations entre la France et le Vietnam de 1851 à 1870*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 283-285, 287-288, 293-294; *DNTLCB 7/Q. ii*, 83.

<sup>51</sup> “Định rõ lại điều cấm về theo đạo Gia tô:

Người nào trót đã theo đạo Gia tô, đều cho cứ thực đến thú tội và đổi lại, thì được miễn tội; nếu không tự thú, có người giác ra, là quan lại sẽ phải cách chức, dịch về số đình ở làng chịu sai dịch; là quân dân cũng phải trị tội theo điều luật đáng bị tội.



In 1855 Bishop Retord sensed the rising tide of religious persecution under the new edict and decided that it would be best to shorten the probation period for Trần Lục. The seminarian entered the major seminary of Kê-Non. A letter by the French missionary Jean Paul Galy-Carles (1810-1869) describes the situation at Kê-Non during that time:

The [operation] of Ke-non had been of too serious a nature for us to expect perfect tranquility, hence we take every precaution that prudence dictates. From year's end to year's end, the pupils share the night-watch on guard; during the day, all the labours, all the exercises, are accomplished in a subdued tone of voice; we have no longer any of those boisterous games, no songs, no solemn ceremonies; a simple low Mass is all that we can hope for in the greatest festivals. This is the second time that the splendid solemnities of Holy Week and Easter have passed over imperceptibly, at least externally, like ordinary days. It is like the silent worship of the Catacombs.<sup>52</sup>

While Trần Lục stayed at Kê Non, he must have heard about the raid on Vĩnh Trị village where he had studied then taught for ten years. This episode began when Nguyễn Đình Tân, the prefect of Nghĩa Hưng, who was also a former chief magistrate (*án sát*) of Nghệ An, reported back to the Court in Huế that he had discovered large amounts of grain and construction materials and concluded that the followers of the Jesus Religion (*Gia-Tô*) were preparing a rebellion. This mandarin added that Vĩnh Trị actually was a gathering place for these rebels to practice martial arts. Even though the prefect of Nghĩa Hưng failed to arrest any missionaries in the raid, he received permission from the court to execute thirty-six native ringleaders and exile

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Bắt được tên đạo trưởng người Tây dương thì xử tội chém đầu đem bêu đầu rồi quăng xác xuống sông; bọn con chiên người Tây và đạo trưởng người bản quốc, thì xử trảm ngay; còn bọn con chiên người bản quốc, thì phát văng đi đây ở đồn bảo ven biên giới, mà không phải là vùng biển.

Người nào tố cáo bắt được tên đạo trưởng người Tây dương, thưởng cho 300 lạng bạc; đạo trưởng người bản quốc, thì thưởng 100 lạng.

Người nào chứa giấu đạo trưởng và con chiên người Tây dương, thì tổng lý sẽ xử về điều luật “chứa giấu người có tội;” phủ, huyện xử tội phạt trưng và cách chức; bổ, án, đốc, phủ, thì sẽ phân biệt mà giáng cấp lưu nhiệm. Nếu dung túng đạo trưởng, người bản quốc, thì tổng lý phải xử phạt 100 trưng và bãi dịch; phủ, huyện, phải giáng 2 cấp, cho lưu lại; bổ, án, đốc, phủ, theo thứ tự giảm tội dần xuống. Ngoài ra, đều theo lệ năm Minh Mệnh mà thi hành,” *ĐNTLCB 7/Q. xi*, 334-335.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Paul Galy-Carles, “A Letter from M. Galy, of the Society of Foreign Missions, to Messieurs the Directors of the Seminary of the same Society at Paris,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 19 (1858): 55-56.

the rest.<sup>53</sup> According to the letter written on 24 June 1857, by Bishop Retord, about eight o'clock in the morning of 27 February 1857, soldiers surrounded the village. The bishop and two missionaries were immediately rushed into the underground chamber. After two hours of searching, the soldiers failed to discover the hiding place of the missionaries, but they confiscated many religious artifacts.<sup>54</sup> The soldiers returned five days later with two elephants and two cannons. They razed all the houses and trampled the village fence to the ground. They scattered salt on the fields to prevent future farming and used the elephants to trample the rice fields. Finally, the court orderd that even the memory of Vĩnh Trị be erased by striking its name of the land registry of the empire.<sup>55</sup>

#### B. Scripture lesson from a mentor

In the raid of Vĩnh Trị, while the mandarins could not find any missionaries, but the uncovering of Christian articles was enough to incriminate Phaolô Lê Bảo Tịnh, the registered owner of Vĩnh Trị compound. Governor-general Phan Bá Đạt, who befriended Lê Bảo Tịnh and allowed him to run Vĩnh Trị crypto-seminary under the pretext of operating a medical school, could not protect him from the ever-rising sentiment against Catholics and was forced to place him under house arrest as a means to prevent his execution.<sup>56</sup> In March of that year the Court in Huế overruled Phan's decision and ordered the sixty-four year-old priest be put to death. On 22 March 1857, Phaolô Lê Bảo Tịnh sent out this farewell letter to his students:

May our Lord guard and protect them, and you also, my dear friends; and may He make you advance more and more in virtue. I may with truth observe that the hour of my dissolution is at hand. I have preserved the faith; I have ended my course, and I hope that the just Judge will give the crown of justice, not only to me, but to all those who love His coming. On the point of suffering martyrdom, I write to you these few lines, to testify my

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<sup>53</sup> *DNTCLB 7/Q. xix*, 583.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre André Retord, "A Letter from Mgr. Retord, vicar-apostolic of Western Tong-King, to the Abbé Laurens, curate of Salles, near Lyons," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 19 (1858): 178-185.

<sup>55</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 39-40, 63.

<sup>56</sup> Adrien Launay, *Les trente-cinq vénérables serviteurs de Dieu* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1907), 238-239.

affection for you. Love one another; obey your superiors; observe the rules of the community: by fidelity in small things you gain heaven. After my death, if I should have any power with God, I promise never to forget you.

Adieu.  
P. Tinh, Priest.<sup>57</sup>

This senior priest emulated the style of the New Testament and brought the second letter of the apostle Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 4:6-8) alive in the context of Vietnam in the late nineteenth century. One may surmise that reading this letter could be one of the most powerful and memorable scriptural lessons for Trần Lục during his stay at Kẻ Non seminary. His former mentor was beheaded on 5 April 1857.<sup>58</sup>

A year after the death of Lê Bảo Tịnh, the rector of Kẻ Non major seminary, Bishop Charles Hubert Jeantet “Khiêm” (1792-1866), decided to close the seminary, but before the dispersal, he ordained Trần Lục a deacon in 1858.<sup>59</sup> Immediately after the ordination, Trần Lục and his bishop took refuge in Lan-Mat village.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, this precaution proved futile on July 13, 1858, when soldiers easily surrounded Lan-Mat because this hamlet was located between mountains on one side and a river on the other. Trần Lục entrusted the bishop to his friends and instructed them to run towards the mountains. As a distraction he put on his best soutane and ran towards the riverbank, impersonating the bishop. When the soldiers caught sight of him at the riverbank, they cried out and beat their gongs and drums to claim their reward. The troops guarding the side of the village facing the mountain, too, rushed over to the riverbank in hopes of sharing in the reward for the capture of a bishop. Thus Trần Lục’s sacrifice and the

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<sup>57</sup> Pierre André Retord, “A Letter from Mgr. Retord, vicar-apostolic of Western Tong-King, to the Abbé Laurens, curate of Salles, near Lyons,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 19 (1858): 185.

<sup>58</sup> Pierre André Retord, “A Letter from Mgr. Retord, vicar-apostolic of Western Tong-King, to the Abbé Laurens, curate of Salles, near Lyons,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 19 (1858): 181.

<sup>59</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 47; Pierre André Retord, “Extract from a letter of Mgr. Retord, Vicar Apostolic of Western Tong-king, to the Abbé Cheynet, Doctor of Theology, and Pro-Vicar General of the same Vicariate,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 20 (1859): 34.

<sup>60</sup> Pierre André Retord, “Extract from a Letter of Mgr. Retord, Vicar Apostolic of Western Tong-king, to the Abbé Cheynet, Doctor of Theology, and Pro-Vicar General of the Same Vicariate,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 20 (1859): 35.

soldiers' greed saved Bishop Retord, but it did not take long for the mandarins to realize the mistake.

Trần Lục was sent to Hà-Nội for detention. Missionaries did not leave any information about his arrest, but other European travelers left ample accounts of those notorious trials. The English seaman Edward Brown wrote about his experience:

On the fourteenth morning after my arrival at Hone-cohe, the Quong [*quang* or mandarin] gave orders for me to be brought before him.... There were three other prisoners, waiting to be brought before him. Each of them had placed on his neck, or rather on his shoulders, two bamboos, about fourteen feet long, resembling a ladder, with four staves, one at each end, to fasten the bamboos together, and one at the back and front of the neck, to prevent the prisoner from slipping it off. This instrument is put on them, partly for punishment, and partly to prevent their escape.... I was then conducted to a hut, about fifty yards square, and much higher than any of the others. About twenty feet in front of it, there was a large bamboo screen suspended, in the inside of which I was placed. A row of soldiers was drawn up along each side of the area, with their spears by their sides; and in front of each row were two fellows, with rattans in their hands, ready to administer corporal punishment to any person who should be condemned by the Quong to receive it.<sup>61</sup>

The court scene was enough to strike fear into the heart of any defendant, but the intimidation was not just in the air. It was in the whipping. Brown elaborated the manner of flogging at the trial:

[The mandarin's attendants] first tie the hands fast at the wrists with a piece of small cord; they then drive a wooden peg, about two feet long, half way into the ground; the man's hands are then put over this peg; he is stretched out on the ground, with his face downwards, which straightens his arms, and brings his wrists tightly against the peg; his ankles are then tied together, and another peg driven into the ground between them, which holds the man so firmly, that he cannot even twist himself, or lift his head, without painful exertion. If there are several to be flogged, they are all pegged down in a row in the same manner. A soldier then stands with a rattan about the size of a common cane; and, when the mandarin gives the word "Tan," the soldier answers "Yah," and springs to the side of the man, raises the cane over his head, and brings just the tip of it down on the posteriors, which had previously been laid bare, and springing away about five feet at the same time, to give more force to the blow.... Sometimes this punishment is resorted to in order to make a man confess a crime which he is suspected of having committed. In this

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Brown, *A Seaman's Narrative of the Adventures during a Captivity among Chinese Pirates, on the Coast of Cochin-China*, 135-137.

case, after ten or twenty blows the mandarin may order the soldier to stop, and ask the man if he will confess.<sup>62</sup>

Bishop Retord provided further details of this kind of public flogging: “When one of them receives a stroke, which according to rule, must produce blood.... The executioner proceeds very slowly, in order to afford time to the grand mandarin, between each stroke, to admonish the patient to trample on the cross, it often occupies several hours to give to each his complement of fifty or sixty strokes.”<sup>63</sup> Trần Lục must have taken quite a similar beating because the officials wanted to extract from him the hiding place of missionaries. After six months in prison, the Court of Tự Đức ratified his sentence, and clad in chains, fetters and bamboo yoke the deacon was exiled to Lạng Sơn.<sup>64</sup>

### C. The ordination of a convict

After his arrest in Lan-Mat, now Deacon Trần Lục spent his last two years of priestly formation as a convict in Lạng Sơn Province. Fortunately, earlier Catholic convicts already established a good impression and a favorable rapport with the local authorities. A certain Luong wrote Bishop Retord a year before Trần Lục arrived at Lạng Sơn, and described his own meeting with a local mandarin:

On my arrival at the chief place of the province, the mandarin of civil justice proposed to me to trample underfoot the cross, and on my refusal he was greatly incensed, and called me all sorts of insulting names. I replied to him: “If the king had demanded my head, I would have given it him a hundred times rather than apostatize; and now that I have had a trial, and have submitted to my sentence of exile to a savage land, where I have arrived after a painful and fatiguing journey, how can you suppose that I would abandon my religion, and lose in an instant the merits that I may have obtained by so much trouble and suffering for it?” On another occasion, the mandarin summoned me to his house, and in vain exhorted me to renounce my God. “Well,” said he, “what then is this religion of

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<sup>62</sup> Edward Brown, *A Seaman's Narrative of the Adventures during a Captivity among Chinese Pirates, on the Coast of Cochin-China*, 152-153.

<sup>63</sup> Pierre André Retord, “Extract from a Letter of Mgr. Retord, Vicar Apostolic of Western Tong-King, to the Abbé Cheynet, Doctor of Theology, and Pro-Vicar General of the Same Vicariate,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 20 (1859): 38.

<sup>64</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 41, 47-51; *The Sacred Heart Review* (Boston), 22 December 1900.

the Master of Heaven, and what are your motives for being so strongly attached to it?" I then related to him several passages from the Christian doctrine, adducing in support of that exposition of our faith some of the proofs which establish its divine truth. The magistrate listened to me with attention. When his curiosity was satisfied, he sent me back with the following kind words: "If such is the case, go in peace." Since then he has not troubled me.<sup>65</sup>

It was possible that Trần Lục received the same interrogation when he represented himself to the Lạng Sơn authorities. Nevertheless, his dedication to learning Classical Chinese at Vĩnh Tri seminary paid off handsomely soon after his arrival at Lạng Sơn. Upon his arrival, the same mandarin of Lạng Sơn was amazed both by the respect paid to the thirty three year-old deacon by the Catholic convicts, and by the deacon's surprising command of Chinese literature. In a most unexpected turn of events, the governor asked Trần Lục to teach his children.<sup>66</sup> In December of 1859, from his hiding place Bishop Charles Jeantet contacted Trần Lục with a gift of three silver taels and instructed him to bribe the officials and obtain a travel permit to Kê Trù village for his priestly ordination. One cannot know for sure how the celebration took place, but it could not have been grander than the modest episcopal ordination of Joseph Simon Theurel "Chiêu" (1829-1868), who was ordained nine months before Trần Lục's presbyterial ordination in the same village. Bishop Theurel recounted his own ceremony:

Your very humble servant, scarcely thirty years old, whom [Mgr. Jeantet] consecrated on the 6<sup>th</sup> of last March, Quinquagesima Sunday. Two Annamite priests, in the absence of European confrères, none of whom were able to attend, acted as assistant bishops. We did not display any great pomp. My cross consisted of a bamboo stick, surmounted by a tress of straw folded in gilt paper. No stockings, no gloves procurable. The ceremony was over two hours before sunrise. Such are the circumstances attending the consecration of a bishop of Acantha at Tong-King.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pierre André Retord, "Sequel to the Letter of Mgr. Retord, Vicar-Apostolic of Western Tong-King, to the Abbé Laurens, Curate of Salles," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 19 (1858): 200.

<sup>66</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Theurel, "Extract from a Letter of Mgr. Theurel, Coadjutor of the Vicar Apostolic of Western Tong-King, to M. Denavit, Superior of the Upper Seminary of Lyons," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 21 (1860): 38.

After a short visit to Kẻ Trù village in January of 1860, Trần Lục, now an ordained priest, returned to Lạng Sơn to minister to his exiled Catholic community. The thirty-five year-old priest began his priestly ministry under the threat of an imperial death sentence. From the time of his exile in Lạng Sơn in 1858 to the French-Nguyễn treaty in June 1862, the Church of Tonkin alone lost forty-one priests. Thirty were executed, and eleven died of sickness or hunger.<sup>68</sup> Two among the thirty killed were the pastors of Phát-Diệm, Father Thomas Kỳ (d. 1861) and Father Peter Dũng (d. 1863). It was at the burial site of these two priests that Trần Lục later erected the Grotto of Gethsemane Garden in 1896.

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<sup>68</sup> Society for the Propagation of the Faith, "Missions of Tonquin," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 25 (1864):244.

#### **IV. Problems as the Results of the Disintegration of the Nguyễn Administration in the Second-half of the Nineteenth Century**

In 1898, two years after the construction of the Grotto of Gethsemane Garden, Trần Lục oversaw the construction of Phương Đình Bell Tower, a project that finished three months before his death in July 1899. At the lower level of the Phương Đình bell tower, the rows of stone columns shaped like bamboo support the heavy window lintels. The bamboo theme continues in the church's interior decoration. Trần Lục commissioned artists to carve a stone lattice with a clump of bamboo springing from a mount of rock, its branches springing to divide priest and penitent in the confessional booth. He subtly incorporated both Buddhist and Confucian iconographies into Catholic sacramental setting. In Buddhist art the bamboo clump often stands for a barrier to enlightenment or a jungle of sinners. The image of a bamboo is also cherished by Confucian scholars. Instead of placing an emphasis on the gnarl as in Buddhist iconography, they highlighted the straightness of bamboo as their aspiration for honesty. And, these Confucians interpret an empty space between the knots in its stem as the cultivation of a selfless heart. Just as the bamboo in a fire will explode with a sharp crack which ritually drives off evil influences, a Confucian gentleman will not stay silent in the face of injustice.<sup>69</sup>

##### A. The bamboo lattice and the disintegration of the Nguyễn administration after 1862

The successful adaptation of a local Buddhist symbol and Confucian aspiration into the church of Phát-Diêm mirrors closely what Trần Lục achieved in the second half of his life from 1862 to 1899. After the 1862 First Saigon Peace Treaty and followed by Tự Đức's edict of tolerance, Bishop Jeantet first sent Trần Lục to Thanh Hóa province to regroup the scattered

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<sup>69</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. John Buchanan-Brown (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), 64-66.





Fig. 7. The stone bamboo lattice, 2005. Photo by Lân Ngô, S.J.

Catholics, then to Huế to petition the Court for the re-establishment of Vĩnh Trị village.<sup>70</sup> In 1865 Jeantet assigned him to Phát-Diệm to succeed Father Dũng who had been killed two years earlier.<sup>71</sup> But the imminent threat, however, was far from over. The 1862 amnesty granting religious freedom to Catholics did not put an end to the bloodshed.

#### B. The Lê Văn Phụng rebellion and two militia movements

From 1861 to 1865, a former trainee catechist, Pedro Tạ Văn Phụng or Lê Văn Phụng (d.1865), claimed to be a direct descendant of the Lê and instigated an anti-Nguyễn rebellion.<sup>72</sup> Despite a general policy against involvement in local politics and repeated warnings by bishops not to participate in any insurgency, many Catholics, including two Vietnamese Dominican priests, joined the rebellion.<sup>73</sup> The Lê Văn Phụng Rebellion spread out rapidly from the eastern coastal provinces of Tonkin to the northern highland areas.<sup>74</sup> The high point of this rebellion coincided with the period when Trần Lục was serving his exile sentence in Lạng Sơn. The governor of Lạng Sơn, who had asked Trần Lục to tutor his children, now appealed to him and his Catholic convicts for help. The Catholics managed to protect a section of the citadel and even pushed back the rebels.<sup>75</sup> As a result of his participation in defending the citadel, the governor granted Trần Lục total freedom to visit and minister to the Catholics in the province.<sup>76</sup> From this point forth, Trần Lục changed from being an outcast to a confidant in the Nguyễn ruling circle.

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<sup>70</sup> ĐNTLCB 7/Q. xxvi, 768-772, 780-781; *The Sacred Heart Review* (Boston), 22 December 1900.

<sup>71</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 66-67, 82.

<sup>72</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 2, 269-272.

<sup>73</sup> Surachai Chumsriphan, "Instruction of 1659," in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001): 385; Pierre André Retord, "Extract from a letter of Mgr. Retord, Vicar Apostolic of Western Tong-king, to the Abbé Cheynet, Doctor of Theology, and Pro-Vicar General of the same Vicariate," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 20 (1859): 29; Hilario Alcazar, "Lettre de Mgr Hilario Alcazar à l'Amiral Bonard," in *La place du catholicisme dans les relations entre la France et le Vietnam de 1851 à 1870*, vol. 2, ed. Etienne Vo Duc Hanh (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 186-188; Cao Thế Dung, *Việt Nam Công giáo sử tân biên (1553-2000)*, vol. 3 (Gretna: Co Sở Dân Chúa, 2005), 2075-2088.

<sup>74</sup> ĐNTLCB 7/Q. xxv, 747.

<sup>75</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 66-67.

<sup>76</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 60-62.

Over the next two decades, he was able to capitalize on his political connections to protect Phát-Diệm and its neighboring regions while the whole country spiraled into destruction.

The political and military vicissitudes of this period are well known. From 1867 to 1885, a political maelstrom descended upon the Nguyễn empire. In 1867 the French encroached on the Nguyễn southern territories, captured three more provinces, and claimed the entire six southern provinces as their colony. The local gentry of Tonkin grew impatient with the Court in Huế for making concessions to the French. They launched their own military campaigns, later known as the *Văn Thân*, under the slogan, “Subjugate westerners; kill heretics (*bình tây sát tả*).”<sup>77</sup> Then, in 1873 the French naval officer Francis Garnier (1839-1873) led the first attack and occupation of Hanoi, but the French government later agreed to give Hanoi back the Nguyễn in the 1874 Second Treaty of Saigon. Next, in 1882 the French under the command of Henri Rivière (1827-1883) seized Hanoi a second time. Two years later, in 1884, the French negotiated the Patenotre Treaty which forced the Nguyễn to recognize—the full authority of the French colonial administration over Cochinchina, the French protectorate over Tonkin, and the supervision of the French governor-general over the emperor.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, from the second fall of Hanoi in 1882 to the ratification of the 1884 Patenotre Treaty, the Nguyễn dynasty faced its own succession crises after the death of Tự Đức in 1883. Dục Đức, Tự Đức’s successor, reigned only for three days, and then his two regent-mandarins forced him to take poison. The abdication, then death, of Dục Đức marked the first in a series of six palace coups. A thirty-four year-old uncle of Dục Đức was put on the throne. Nevertheless, the reign of Hiệp Hòa lasted on for five months from July to November 1883. A

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<sup>77</sup> Joseph Theurel, “Annam: Cochin-China and Tonquin,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 29 (1868): 294; *Châu bản triều Tự Đức*, 139; *ĐNTLCB 7/Q. xxxviii*, 1093, 1103.

<sup>78</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam sử lược*, vol. 2 ([Sài-Gòn]: Cơ Sở Xuất Bản Đại Nam, 1971), 311, 362-363.

French bishop at Huế, Marie-Antoine Louis Caspar (1841-1917), wrote about the death of the Hiệp Hòa emperor:

On Friday, the 30<sup>th</sup> November, the mandarins compelled him to abdicate, and obliged him, it is said, to take poison. Others, however, affirm that he was the cause of his own death, and voluntarily drained the fatal cup. The mandarins who put so violent a pressure on Hiep-Hoa had, they affirm, a multitude of complaints... against him and enforce[d] the necessity of an abdication. Among these were... a considerable misappropriation of the royal treasure, in order to pay off long-standing debts; private conduct [amounting to] the crime of incest; systematic opposition to every representation made by the mandarins on the subject of governmental affairs, diplomatic relations with France, etc., etc.: all [these] motives [were] sufficient to deprive the king of his throne, and to force him to descend from it if he opposed them.<sup>79</sup>

Within days after the Hiệp Hòa crisis, the presence of French vessels in Đà Nẵng inflamed anxieties, and the local gentry once again incited the general population to launch a violent attack against Catholic villages. Bishop Caspar reasoned that the two regent-mandarins instigated the new popular persecution in order to distract people from their palace coups. He wrote:

The mandarins spread a decree in every direction that the Missioners and Christians were to be massacred, and war declared against the French. The plan succeeded even beyond their expectations for the panic became so general and the cause of it seemed so plausible, that we were obliged ourselves to seek refuge for a time at the Legation... Still, no absolute security can be anticipated when one thinks of the hatred entertained by the [local gentry-scholar class] against the Europeans, and spreading daily among the masses of the population. Possibly, they will make fresh efforts to shake off the yoke of foreign invasion and endeavour once more to make our Christians suffer the effects of their anger. There is everything to be feared in the first days of a military occupation, especially from pagans who add a (*sic*) hatred of religion to their hatred of the foreigner.<sup>80</sup>

After Hiệp Hòa, the regents placed a fourteen-year-old prince on the throne, Kiến Phước (1883-1884), who died eight months later due to an alleged overdose of medication.<sup>81</sup> The high ranking pro-war mandarins replaced Kiến Phước with a twelve-year-old prince. Though Hàm Nghi

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<sup>79</sup> Marie Antoine Louis Caspar, "Extract from Mgr. Caspar's Letter," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 45 (1884): 138-139.

<sup>80</sup> Marie Antoine Louis Caspar, "Extract from Mgr. Caspar's Letter," 139, 142.

<sup>81</sup> Nguyễn Nhược Thị Bích, "Hạnh Thực Ca," Maurice Duran Han Nom Digital Collection, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Connecticut, last modified April 21, 2015, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:12359>, 16-17.

(1884-1885) ruled only for one year, he was known to lead a failed revolt against the French occupation.<sup>82</sup> During his flight from Huế, Hàm Nghi issued an edict calling for a national uprising, the *Cần Vương*. The *Cần Vương* campaign gave fresh momentum to the *Văn Thân* movement. In order to save the Nguyễn dynasty from collapse, the peace faction at Huế Court asked the imperial consorts to nullify Hàm Nghi and replace him with Đồng Khánh (1885-1888). Thành Thái (1888-1907) succeeded the short reign of Đồng Khánh.

In brief, during the five years after the death of Tự Đức, the Nguyễn had six different boys and men on the throne. The shortest reign was for three days, the longest three years. A lady-in-waiting for the queen mother of Tự Đức, Nguyễn Nhược Thị Bích (1830-1909), lamented the social and political upheaval of these years:

When the world is in the whirlwind,  
The poor are the first drowned in the maelstrom of conflict.<sup>83</sup>

It is very unlikely that this court lady had Catholics in mind when she composed these lines, but in fact, Catholics once again fell victim to the anger and frustration of the gentry. The massacre of Catholics began in the neighboring provinces of Huế and spread quickly to other provinces. The local Church suffered heavily under the *Văn Thân* and *Cần Vương* movements, and 60,000 Catholics were killed.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Nguyễn Nhược Thị Bích, “Hạnh Thục Ca,” Maurice Duran Han Nom Digital Collection, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Connecticut, last modified April 21, 2015, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:12359>.

<sup>83</sup>

“Gặp khi đến lúc ngả nghiêng,  
Người nghèo ắt cũng lụy liên tới mình,”

Nguyễn Nhược Thị Bích, “Hạnh Thục Ca,” 18.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 88; Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 95; Mark McLeod, “Nguyen Trung To: A Catholic Reformer at Emperor Tu-Duc’s Court,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25 (2) (September 1994): 313-330.

## V. Trần Lục as a New Pastor of Phát-Diệm and the Imperial Legate

The second half of Trần Lục's life (1862-1899) not only overlapped but was closely entangled with a highly contentious period of French military advance and domestic outbreaks. His bishop assigned him to be a new pastor of Phát Diệm of Ninh Bình province where it was known as the hotbed of the *Văn Thân*'s indiscriminate violence.<sup>85</sup> Trần Lục also went to Huế to negotiate with the Nguyễn authorities to make reparations to victims of the recent *phân sáp* persecution.<sup>86</sup> He had considerable diplomatic skills and administrative talents in bringing security and stability to his region. He conducted negotiations between opposing factions, using persuasive arguments as well as military tactics, to reestablish order in Ninh Bình and Thanh Hoá. His fame reached beyond the enclave of Phát-Diệm—to the point where the Court of Tự Đức, Đồng Khánh, and Thành Thái commissioned him several times to represent imperial authority in restoring peace and order to regions beset by insurgents.<sup>87</sup> However, after the colonial era, the post-independence historiography has exonerated these insurgents as anti-colonial heroes. What seemed praisedworthy at that time now demands a new interpretation.

### A. Trần Lục: strategist or collaborator?

For those who wish to include Trần Lục among a group of traitorous collaborators, the evidence is extensive and clear. By comparison with violence suffered by Catholics in other regions, Phát-Diệm in particular and Ninh Bình province in general enjoyed relative security, thanks in part to the leadership of Trần Lục, even if more was owed to the heavy presence of the

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<sup>85</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 68-70; Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1875), 66, 71-72; David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1971), 57.

<sup>86</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 66-67; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 556.

<sup>87</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 78; Nguyễn Hữu Độ, "Tờ tâu cho cụ Trần làm quan," in Vũ Đăng Khoa, *Từ hàn cửu ngưng* (Ninh Bình: Phát Diệm Tổng Đường Tăng Bản, 1907), 305; Trần Phúc Long, ed., "Phát Diệm linh địa nhân kiệt," in *Kỷ yếu Phát Diệm, 1891-1991* (Long Beach: Nhà Sách Đức Mẹ Hằng Cứu Giúp, 1992), 28.

French troops.<sup>88</sup> However, as Bishop Puginier complained that the French force was not always willing to give their military protection against the massacre of Catholics for, as he wrote: “In this country, great surprise has been created by this silence on the subject of such enormities, and there is a feeling that France has abandoned us.”<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, Trần Lục appeared to take advantage of the situation and to fend off attacks against his region either by providing intelligence and material support to the French to suppress the insurgents, or, by intimidating the *Văn Thân* militias with a rumor that Catholic missions had the backing of the French navy.<sup>90</sup> His military involvement in the 1880s gave him fame, but it also generated considerable controversy. One of the militias he helped the French-Nguyễn joint force to eliminate was the Ba Đình enclave (1885-1887) under the command of Đinh Công Tráng (1842-1887).<sup>91</sup>

The episode concerned this: in the spring of 1886, new riot erupted in Thanh Hoá province where Ba Đình was the command center for the insurgents.<sup>92</sup> This uprising comprised a grave security concerns to the Nguyễn government. The militia not only terrorized Catholic hamlets, but in two months also captured and executed a total of seven Nguyễn provincial administrators.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, the revolt touched upon the Nguyễn religious sensitivity and its political legitimacy because the Court in Huế always held Thanh Hóa sacred as the birthplace of Nguyễn Kim (1468-1545), the founder of the Nguyễn seigneurial clan.<sup>94</sup> As for Catholics of Thanh Hoá, they were very eager to take up arms to defend themselves and reclaim their

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<sup>88</sup> Paul François Puginier, “Letter from Mgr. Puginier, Vicar-Apostolic of Western Tonquin, to the Directors of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 45 (1884): 185.

<sup>89</sup> Paul François Puginier, “Letter from Mgr. Puginier, Vicar-Apostolic of Western Tonqui,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 46 (1885): 69-70.

<sup>90</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 75-76, 100.

<sup>91</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 57-59.

<sup>92</sup> *ĐNTLCB 9/Q. iii*, 242-243.

<sup>93</sup> *ĐNTLCB 9/Q. iii*, 249; *ĐNTLCB 9/Q. iv*, 263.

<sup>94</sup> Nguyễn Hữu Độ, “Tờ tâu cho cụ Trần làm quan,” 301.

properties lost in the recent *Văn Thân-Cần Vương* movement.<sup>95</sup> And we know from the dynastic official history that more than 2,000 Catholics of Thanh Hoá fled to Phát-Diệm.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, when the Huế Court asked the French to put down the Ba Đình, Trần Lục not only provided intelligence, but also offered 5,000 foot-soldiers and three large Chinese junks to transport the French-Nguyễn troops. The combined forces of French commanders, imperial troops, and Catholic militia finally exterminated the rebels and razed their Ba Đình citadel.<sup>97</sup> Only then were order and stability restored to the region.<sup>98</sup> The French decorated Trần Lục first with *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur* and then *Officier de la Legion d'Honneur* while the Nguyễn court awarded him an honorary post as a minister in the Board of Rites.<sup>99</sup>

#### B. Trần Lục and the first *Văn Thân* movement

However, the involvement of Trần Lục and his Catholic community in the quelling of the 1886 Ba Đình uprising has to be seen in the larger context and of a thirteen-year earlier episode, the Francis Garnier affair in 1873. The affair began when the French navy sponsored an exploration (1866-1868) along the Mekong River to find a suitable commercial route to Yunnan. They aborted the mission in 1868 when they soon discovered the unnavigability of the upper Mekong between Cambodia and Laos.<sup>100</sup> In 1873, Francis Garnier (1839-1873), second in command of the Mekong exploration team, offered his protection to a French merchant, Jean Dupuis (1829-1912), in trading with Yunnan through the Red River.<sup>101</sup> During Garnier's stay at

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<sup>95</sup> Paul François Puginier, "Lettre de Mgr Puginier à Messieurs des Directeurs de l'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi," *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi pour la province de Quebec* 28 (1886): 251.

<sup>96</sup> *DNTLCB 9/Q. iii*, 271.

<sup>97</sup> David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 58-59.

<sup>98</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 101; *DNTLCB 9/Q. vi*, 306.

<sup>99</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 129; Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn, *Đông Khánh, Khai Định chính yếu* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Thời Đại, 2010) 84.

<sup>100</sup> Milton E. Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1997), 36-40.

<sup>101</sup> Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 32; William Mesny, *Tungking* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1884), 108.



Hanoi, he noticed how feeble the Vietnamese defenses were.<sup>102</sup> Thus, he attacked and captured the citadel of Hanoi with help from Chinese mercenaries in November of 1873.<sup>103</sup> Garnier recruited a native army composed of about 12,000 Catholics and non-Catholics from among the disaffected Vietnamese.<sup>104</sup> Within three weeks after the fall of the citadel of Hanoi, the Nguyễn court lost complete control of the neighboring coastal provinces.<sup>105</sup>

Emperor Tự Đức dispatched a team including four mandarins and Bishop Joseph Sohier “Bình” (1818-1876) of Huế to conclude a peace treaty with the French delegation led by Paul Louis Philastre (1837-1902).<sup>106</sup> The imperial envoy arrived and resided at Phát-Diệm until Trần Lục led their entourage to Hanoi on December 17.<sup>107</sup> Trần Lục accepted the role as intermediary between two rival authorities even as the negotiation seemed to fall apart when Garnier died in an ambush on December 21.<sup>108</sup> To prevent a further disruption of public order, Trần Lục led his own Catholic militia to secure and protect all the public granaries in Hanoi and Nam Định from pillage.<sup>109</sup> As for the French, Philastre denounced Garnier’s attack as “odious aggression” and ordered his troops to withdraw from all occupied cities to Hải Phòng.<sup>110</sup> In return, the Huế Court offered a general amnesty to all who were involved in the Garnier incident.<sup>111</sup>

The widespread violence against Catholics, however, continued and further complicated the transitional period after the havoc created by Garnier's campaign. On the same day the French returned the citadel of Nam Định to Nguyễn officials, local gentry leaders led their militia

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<sup>102</sup> Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 43-45.

<sup>103</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xlvii*, 1364-1365, 1367, 1396-1397, 1405-1410; Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 37, 62.

<sup>104</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xlix*, 1427; Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 48.

<sup>105</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xlix*, 1426; Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 51.

<sup>106</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xlix*, 1415, 1421; Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 52, 61, 64.

<sup>107</sup> Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 65; Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 74.

<sup>108</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xlix*, 1425.

<sup>109</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 73-74.

<sup>110</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xlix*, 1427; Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 65.

<sup>111</sup> *DNTLCB 7/Q. xlix*, 1428, 1430.

burning down fourteen neighboring Catholic villages.<sup>112</sup> The central government was no longer able to provide security, but was put in the defensive position itself by the gentry-led militias. An editor of the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* described the situation of Vietnam in an 1875 publication:

After the conclusion of the treaty signed at Saigon by the Annamite ambassadors and the governor of French Cochinchina, Tu-Duc had taken measures with a view of repressing the unheard-of excesses committed by the [*literati*] against the Christians of the province of Nghe-An. He sent troops to disperse the bands of incendiaries, and gave orders to arrest the ringleaders. Thereupon, a feeling of hostility against the king began to manifest itself. The apprehension of interference by France controlled the malcontents for some days; but then, as the ratified treaty had not been executed and France was holding herself in reserve, parties began to be formed and to assume a threatening attitude in Nghe-An. Several mandarins, being very much discontented at seeing the facility with which the king treated with the French, encouraged the incipient insurrection. By the middle of May, insurgents were sufficiently strong to take prisoner three mandarins and [the] eighty-two soldiers sent against them. The soldiers were executed like common criminals, and the mandarins were subjected to the most atrocious treatment.<sup>113</sup>

Nguyễn officials could not protect themselves against these gentry militias, nor could Catholic villages. In other provinces, mandarins passively disapproved of Huế signing treaties with the French and of the concessions given to Catholics. They quietly ignored the order from Huế, and allowed insurgents to go on the rampage. “In obedience to orders received from the capital, the mandarins sent off a body of soldiers, who, as usual under such circumstances, did not make their appearance until the crime had been fully committed,” the missionaries protested.<sup>114</sup> During these years, missionaries reported nothing back to their superiors in Paris but decimation of Catholic hamlets. Paul François Puginier (1835-1892), a bishop of West Tonkin, wrote:

Four Christian settlements have been destroyed by conflagrations; and again we were obliged to send assistance. Thus, I have found it impossible to rebuild the churches that

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<sup>112</sup> John F. Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 287; Henri Cordier, *A Narrative of the Recent Events in Tong-King*, 66.

<sup>113</sup> Society for the Propagation of the Faith, “History of Tong-King,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 36 (1875): 5.

<sup>114</sup> Society for the Propagation of the Faith, “History of Tong-King,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 36 (1875): 6.

were burned down by the literates and the Chinese rebels; nor do I at present know when we can rebuild them. Nearly one hundred Christian congregations have been left without churches. Let us now pass on the northern part of the Mission. It forms the district of Xie [Xa] Doai, which includes six parishes, with a Christian population of about 12,000 souls. In the course of seven years, five of them have been several times ravaged by the Chinese rebels. One of them especially, called Song-Chay (the flowing river), has suffered beyond expression. Of its population of three thousand Christians, there hardly remain more than twelve or thirteen hundred. All the others were massacred by the rebels, or died of hunger. Not merely is it a fact, that not one of the fifteen Christian settlements which formed my parish remains in existence, but there is not even a single family left. All the villages have been burned or pillaged, and their inhabitants killed or dispersed.<sup>115</sup>

Due to the breakdown of the Nguyễn government, some bishops gave Catholics permission to arm themselves. Bishop Jean Denis Gauthier “Ngô Gia Hậu” (1810-1877) accused some mandarins of complicity in turning a blind eye to militia attacks against local converts.

Bishop Gauthier explained himself to the Nguyễn authorities:

The Christians took up arms, not for the purpose of rebelling against the king, but simply to defend their lives against their enemies, to whose mercy they had been given up (sic). Thousands of them had been murdered; what had the mandarins done to hinder those murders, or to save the innocent? It was the mandarins who, by their inertness, had compelled Christians to look after their own safety. If you protected them in an effective way, they would have nothing to do with arms; but, in such a case, begin by making those who have attacked us and have sworn our ruin, lay down their arms; if you do not, you abandon us to certain destruction. If it be your object to exterminate Christians, of what use is hypocrisy? Tell it out [Say it] officially, and we will all go, the Bishop and the Missioners leading the van, to give ourselves up to the executioners; you know that, even in the darkest days of persecution, we never opposed legitimate authority. If such be not your object, protect us, not by words, but by deeds, or we will assuredly defend ourselves.<sup>116</sup>

Other missionaries also chimed in to support the decision for local converts to form their own militia. The French missionary Jean-Pierre Montrouziès (1828-1878) evaluated the dire situation: “Thus the Christians have been obliged to defend themselves. It may excite some surprise that

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<sup>115</sup> Paul François Puginier, “Annam: Extract of a Letter from Mgr. Puginier, Vicar-Apostolic of Western Tong-King, to the Directors of the Seminary of Foreign Missions, Paris,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 37 (1876): 316-317.

<sup>116</sup> Jean Denis Gauthier, “Annam: Western Tong-King and Southern Tong-King,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 36 (1875): 274-275; *DNTLCB* 7/Q. xxxiv, 997; *DNTLCB* 7/Q. xxxviii, 1107-1108.

the Christians took [up] arms. But it must be remembered the question was not of a regular persecution, but of a massacre.”<sup>117</sup> While Nguyễn officials and missionaries acrimoniously hurled accusations at each other, Catholic communes and the Nguyễn officials of Ninh Bình were surprisingly willing to cooperate with each other. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith reported in its 1875 publication:

So impressed were the mandarins of Ninh-Binh (Western Tong-King) with the gravity of the situation, that they had asked the Missioners (sic) to urge the Christians to enroll as many men as possible, and protect the province; placing at the same time arms and ammunition at their disposition. They even went so far as to summon them to defend the citadel. This shows how much the Christians are respected by the mandarins who have any sentiments of patriotism. They are quite convinced that the enemies of the Christians and of the French are also the enemies of the government, and that the king and the Christians may make common cause.<sup>118</sup>

In this report, the author did not mention Trần Lục, but the event itself coincided with the period when Trần Lục was pastor of Phát-Diệm, Ninh Bình province. Based on the additional information from his first biography and a brief mention of this event by Trần Lục about a decade later, one may credit him as a principal player who created a rare oasis of peace and security in his province. According to Armand Olichon, after participating in the diplomatic negotiation for the return of Hanoi in 1873, Trần Lục sensed a new disaster about to happen following the withdrawal orders from Philastre. He then quickly returned to Ninh Bình and made contact with the French navy in Hạ Long Bay for assistance. Even though the French offered no help, Trần Lục spread the rumor that French gunboats and two Chinese junks had joined the Catholics of Phát-Diệm to form a resistance to any form of harassment.<sup>119</sup> The rumor was effective enough to prevent the *Văn Thân* from attacking the Catholics of Phát-Diệm. Armand Olichon also added that the court recognized the contribution of this local priest in keeping peace

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<sup>117</sup>Jean Pierre Mon[t]rouziès, “Annam,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 35 (1874): 283.

<sup>118</sup> Society for the Propagation of the Faith, “History of Tong-King,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 36 (1875): 8-9.

<sup>119</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 75-76

in the region and changed his name from Trần Triêm to Trần Lục or Trần Văn Lục along with an inscription on a medal from the Tự Đức emperor:

Trần Văn Lục, besides being known for his righteousness, has negotiated and restored peace among the non-Catholics and Catholics of Tong-king. We, the emperor and the mandarins of the kingdom, have confidence in him. Favorably receive him!<sup>120</sup>

These two mentions by Armand Olichon concur with a brief but unequivocal evidence found in the “Public Notice from the Imperial Commissioner to Thanh Hóa Province” (*Yết thị cụ Khâm Sai phủ dụ tỉnh Thanh*). It states: “Though I am merely a simple priest, in the past, the Late Emperor Tự Đức once favorably bestowed on me the task of stopping the war and restoring peace.”<sup>121</sup> Though in this public notice does not provide the year when Trần Lục served as the imperial commissioner (*khâm sai*), it dovetails with what Olichon credited the pastor of Phát-Diệm with providing security in Phát-Diệm and its vicinity.

### C. Trần Lục and the *Cần Vương*—the second *Văn Thân* movement

The peace brokered by Trần Lục in Tonkin could not withstand the renewed violence led by the second *Văn Thân* movement. When Emperor Hàm Nghi (1884-1885) fled from Huế and called for a national anti-foreigner uprising (*Cần Vương* movement) in 1885, local leaders and the *literati* turned their anger towards the Catholics and soon destabilized the whole administrative system of the three provinces, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh and Thanh Hóa as they did twelve years earlier after the Francis Garnier affair. Vietnam fell into another period of anarchy. Paul François Puginier (1835-1892), a bishop of West Tonkin, once again appealed to French Catholics for financial help as he had a decade earlier:

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<sup>120</sup> “Tran-Van-Luc a négocié et imposé la paix entre les païens et les chrétiens du Tonkin, et cela par sa seule droiture comme on le sait d’ailleurs. Le roi et tous les mandarins du royaume ont confiance en lui. Respect à ceci!” Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 78; Trương Bá Cần, *Lịch sử phát triển Công Giáo ở Việt Nam*, vol. 2, 559.

<sup>121</sup> “Tôi đây vốn là thầy tu, không tài mưu gì, năm xưa đội ơn Đức giặc anh (vua Tự Đức) trông xuống cũng đã chịu lấy gánh tráp [tập] an,” Trần Lục, “Yết thị cụ Khâm Sai phủ dụ tỉnh Thanh,” in Vũ Đăng Khoa, *Từ hàn cử ngung* (Ninh Bình: Phát-Diệm tổng đường tàng bản, 1907), 306.

It is now ten long months since seven Missioners, a native Priest, [sixty three] catechists, and two hundred Christians were massacred, and more than a hundred Christian settlements were burned down or pillaged in broad day light, after a manner that was as nearly official as could possibly be, and during a period of time extending over more than a week; and yet no justice whatever has been done to us... Emboldened by impunity, our enemies never cease harrassing the neophytes in the devastated parishes.... The poor persecuted creatures have left their mountains, and after a three day journey have reached the plain and thrown themselves on the Mission for protection. In spite of our poverty and the enormous expenses which the ruin of a great part of the parishes of the Mission has entailed, I shall never abandon these unfortunate people, victims of the hatred excited against religion and France. Already I have sent them some assistance, and catechists have been charged to watch over them.<sup>122</sup>

Though Bishop Puginier did not specify where the aforesaid mission Catholic refugees escaped to, one may deduce it to be Trần Lục's Phát-Diệm from another letter from the same bishop:

The unfortunate Christians, hearing of the massacres that had been perpetrated on the preceding days, and seeing themselves in imminent danger of suffering the same fate, were thrown into the greatest consternation. Abandoning their houses and effects, they endeavoured to fly for their lives; but the pagan population, who had been excited against them, barred their passages. Some had to take the sea-way, and others the mountain road, in order to reach the province of Ninh-Binh.<sup>123</sup>

Just as Tự Đức had done before, the court of the new ruler, Đồng Khánh (1886-1888), turned to Trần Lục for help.<sup>124</sup> A minister of the Board of Rites, Nguyễn Hữu Độ (1813-1888), nominated the pastor of Phát-Diệm for the job of imperial legate (*khâm phủ sứ*) to restore order to the two provinces:

I investigated and found that the rebels of two provinces, Nghệ-An and Hà-Tĩnh, were about to spread to Thanh-Hóa Province. They deceptively attracted many followers. The local mandarins appealed to the governors to put down this widespread chaotic situation, but there has been no success. From my humble reflection, I wonder why it is that in Thanh-Hóa, the ancestral home of the Throne, the people have to suffer so much. I cannot allow myself to sit by leisurely and ignore this grave situation. Thus, I requested that the French commander assist us with their soldiers to subdue the insurgents. However, we need a learned and respected local person to accompany the French. Otherwise, the whole project will fall apart. I know a priest, Trần Lục from Phát-Diệm of Ninh-Bình Province.

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<sup>122</sup> Paul François Puginier, "Letter from Mgr. Puginier, Vicar-Apostolic of Western Tonquin." *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 46 (1885): 69-70.

<sup>123</sup> Paul François Puginier, "Letter from Mgr. Puginier, Vicar-Apostolic of Western Tonquin, to the Directors of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith," *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* 45 (1884): 187.

<sup>124</sup> *DNTLCB 9/Q. iii*, 243.

He himself originally was born and raised in Thanh-Hóa. He is a well learned person and with great reputation. People respect, trust and love him. His region is relatively calm because of his leadership.<sup>125</sup>

In this dire situation, Trần Lục received permission from his bishop, and he agreed to serve as the imperial legate for more than a month.<sup>126</sup> In his public notice to the people of Thanh Hóa Province, he tried to persuade the citizens to lay down their arms:

Last year after havoc broke out in the imperial city, many local leaders rightly gathered and formed their own militia units in the name of righteousness. However, in the present situation, the orderly empire has been reestablished as before. From on high, His Imperial Highness, the son of our Late Emperor [Tự Đức], faithfully obeys the Grand Empress Dowager Từ Dụ, who is the mother of our Late Emperor Tự Đức, to take on the imperial responsibility. From below His Highness receives the whole hearted support of the Imperial Family and the Court when he ascends the throne. Thus we now have the legitimate ruler of all the lords and the people according to the Mandate of Heaven; isn't this called righteousness? Therefore, now is the time for you to reside peacefully in your allotted positions and to obey the ruling reign; so why do you still burden yourselves in holding grudges? In addition, the peaceful common folks and the Christian followers are the children of the reigning dynasty; why then is there a division among you like the borders in the rice field and why treat each other like enemies? As a result, both sides suffer losses. Death follows upon death. If revenge is repaid with revenge, then when will be the end of this vicious cycle? In fact, there are malcontent elements in society who want to take advantage of the situation just to create disturbance in the kingdom. At first, they claim to eradicate the Christian followers, but soon they turn to harm the peaceful common folks. Look at the events that already happened in Nghệ-An and Hà-Tĩnh over the last few years; are they not obvious?<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> “Tôi xem như Nghệ Tĩnh hai tỉnh ấy mới rồi quân giặc rấy lên lán sang thêm việc cho tỉnh Thanh, nhiều người phải nó lừa dối, các quan tỉnh bàn vuội quý quan cho được đẹp mà chưa yên được. Bây giờ tôi dám nghĩ: đất tỉnh Thanh là cội rễ nhà nước mà dân sự phải khổ nạn làm vậy, không nên ngồi mà trông. Vì vậy tôi trình quan Pháp súp sai thêm quân đi dẹp, nhưng mà phải có kẻ tỏ trước giới giang đi làm một mà bàn tính, thì mới trông nên việc. Tôi biết có một linh mục Trần Lục ở xứ Phát-Diệm về tỉnh Ninh Bình quê tỉnh Thanh, là người học biết rộng, có tiếng trọng, nhiều người tin và mến, trong tỉnh ấy lúc mới rồi hơi yên một chút thì phần nhiều bởi ông ấy ra công thu xếp” Nguyễn Hữu Độ, “Tờ tâu cho cụ Trần làm quan,” in Vũ Đăng Khoa, *Từ Hàn cử ngung dịch quốc ngữ* (Ninh Bình: Phát-Diệm Tổng Đường Tàng Bản, 1907), 301.

<sup>126</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 99.

<sup>127</sup> “Năm ngoái khi Kinh Thành nhả sự rồi, bây giờ những kẻ thân hào dấy quân gọi là nghĩa cũ (việc phải lẽ) xem ra việc ấy cũng phải, nhưng mà ngày nay bây giờ miếu xã nguyên như trước, Đức Hoàng Thường bởi là con Đức Tiên Đế, trên thì vâng ý bà Từ Dụ Thái Hoàng Thái Hậu (là mẹ vua Tự Đức) dưới thì thuận lòng tôn nhân đình thần là sách đạ[c] tên, có đấng làm chủ trong việc thần và dân, thật là giới trao cho, chớ thì việc này không phải việc nghĩa chính và cả thể ru? Còn sự phải làm trong việc giao thiệp, thì triều đình cất đặt đã đâu có đấy, buổi này là chính buổi phải yên phận mình cho được vâng mệnh triều đình, can gì còn tiếc rẻ làm vậy cho bận mình. Phương chi Bình Giáo đôi bên là con cái triều đình cả, có chi mà phân rẽ nhau như bờ ngăn ruộng, ở vuội nhau như kẻ thù? Rút cục lại đôi bên điều hại cả, xác chết đê lấp nhau rồi lại lộn lại báo thù nhau, không bao giờ rồi. Xui nên những phường làm quàng mượn dịp dấy động. Trước thì nói tiếng giết giáo dân, sau thì cả bình dân cũng hại. Hãy xem gương Nghệ-An Hà-Tĩnh mấy năm nay, việc ra thể nào thì biết,” Trần Lục, “Yết Thị Cụ Khâm Sai Phủ Dụ Tỉnh Thanh,” in Vũ Đăng Khoa, *Từ Hàn Cử Ngung* (Ninh Bình: Phát-Diệm Tổng Đường Tàng Bản, 1907), 305-309.

Trần Lục with a “voidness of heart” like bamboo, sensed the possible criticism and judgment of history regarding his participation in this political position, but he still stepped up to the task. He brought with him his own Catholic militia from Phát-Diệm to secure postal stations, offer amnesty to all factions, and encourage people to return and rebuild their villages. He exercised his role as the imperial legate (*khâm phủ sứ* or *khâm sai*) only for thirty-five days, but he commanded an enormous respect from both the people and his superiors for the rest of his life as illustrated at an ordination of a bishop in Hanoi. His biographer narrated:

The cathedral was filled with an immense and very impatient crowd. Owing to a delay in the ceremony the crowd had become so unruly that the organisers were hard put to it to keep order. The Vicar General himself, who was famous for his broad shoulders and his oratory, went into the pulpit and ordered silence in stentorian tones. But the result was deplorable! His exhortations hardly made any impression even on the people just beneath him. The general hubbub only increased. Someone suggested the Père Six might be asked to intervene. He was conducted to the pulpit. He stood there for a little while in silence, and then raised his hand as if about to speak. On seeing him a great hush spread through the building as if by enchantment. “The Kham-Sai!...the Kham-Sai!” The huge throng feasted its eyes on the beloved sight. Respect, admiration, fear and affection had subdued each and every member of it. By a few words uttered in his small soft voice, the parish priest of Phat-Diem had brought everyone back to a state of recollection. That was all that was needed. The ceremony took place amid calmness and reverence. An old missionary who had been there said: “It was amazing and unforgettable. None of us could pretend to such an ascendancy.”<sup>128</sup>

This episode shows how most the people held Trần Lục in awe. As a matter of fact, according to Olichon, the pastor of Phát-Diệm was the foremost influential Tonkinese power broker because he was one of only three mandarins in Tonkin at that time obtaining the title “Imperial Legate” (*khâm sai*).<sup>129</sup> A few decades later, in 1925, Emperor Khải Định (1916-1925) posthumously conferred on Trần Lục the rank of nobility, *Nam tước Phát-Diệm*.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Armand Olichon, *Father Six: Parish Priest and Viceroy*, trans. Barbara Wall (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1954), 89-90; Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 120-121.

<sup>129</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 122.

<sup>130</sup> Armand Olichon, *Le Père Six*, 136-137.



## VI. Conclusion to Chapter Five

What seemed praiseworthy in the political environment of the late nineteenth century ironically does not fit well with the post-colonial historiography. The Marxist-Leninist promotion of violent political struggle creates two clear non-negotiable categories: heroes and traitors. However, by examining the life of Trần Lục (1825-1899), this chapter attempts to depict the social and political space of nineteenth-century Vietnamese history as multifaceted rather than a simpler binary division. Trần Lục was not alone. Other agents of history in that period interacted, negotiated, and improvised in order to deflect unanticipated threats or to capitalize on unexpected opportunities. In this period, mandarins turned into bandits. Insurgents executed officials. The pro-war faction in Huế Court sought military assistance from the Chinese Black Flag Army; the pro-peace camp recruited the French; both mutually denounced each other. From the Catholic-centered perspective, Trần Lục's collaborations point to a lifetime of consistent effort to serve his faith community and protect the coreligionists entrusted to him. While the Nguyễn government could not maintain order and security within their realm and when the European powers competed with each other to assert their national might, local Catholics united by a shared experience as a persecuted minority emerged as a new and viable national political option.

In November of 1928, a prominent member of the Privy Council and an advisor to the last three Nguyễn emperors visited the tomb of Trần Lục, and dedicated an eight-line poem to the late *khâm sai*-pastor of Phát-Diệm which greatly captures the essence of Trần Lục:

Standing in awe at the tomb and in floods of tears  
His spirit is strong, his presence is palpable.  
His virtue like sweet fragrance covers all corners of the world,  
His fame and work dazzle the horizon.  
Churches, beams, and columns know not rot,  
Stone towers and heaped high ramparts firmly set.

Poetic words echo like music in the chamber for generations to come,  
Loyal and Chaste are mottoes for posterity.<sup>131</sup>

Trần Lục became an iconic representative of the emergence of Vietnamese Catholic nationalism in the late nineteenth century. He inspired the next generation of Catholic leaders such as Nguyễn Hữu Bài (1863-1935) who was the author of the poem just cited.

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“Trước mồ, đứng sững, lụy châu rơi  
Phảng phất thân tình, thấy dạng người.  
Đạo đức thơm lừng năm cõi đất,  
Công danh sáng dậy một phương trời.  
Thánh đường, rường cột, cây không hủ,  
Cửu tháp, tầng thành, đá chẳng rơi.  
Khoát [Khoán] sắt, thơ son, truyền sự nghiệp,  
Trung trinh hai chữ để gương đời,”

Trần Ngọc Thụy, “Sự nghiệp của Cha Trần Lục,” in *Trần Lục*, eds. Nguyễn Gia-Đệ and others (Montreal: privately printed, 1996), 29.

## Conclusion

A common prayer, R.I.P. (*Requiescat in pace*), adorns many tombstones of both Christians and non-Christians. Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine (1741-1799) was not as lucky as Trần Lục (1825-1899) in terms of this peace. His remains were sent back to France, and his stele in Saigon was pulverized. The demolition of the bishop's tomb in 1983 was not the first time that political authorities had attempted to belittle his place in Vietnam's history. In 1836, Minh Mạng instructed the Board of Rites to remove de Béhaine from the list of those whose tombs had been granted imperial land stipends by his father, Gia Long, for their upkeep. Minh Mạng explained: "As for the Frenchman de Béhaine (*Bách Đa Lộc*) and the eunuch Nguyễn Đình Thọ, who had no descendants, along with some other first lieutenants (*cai đội*), they were only low-ranking mandarins without much contribution. They are not worthy to receive the imperial stipend."<sup>1</sup> If such an eminent Nguyễn personage as de Béhaine can be so cavalierly expunged from history, then rank-and-file converts languish in the shadows of still more obscurity. State-sponsored studies rarely mention the names of Vietnamese Catholics unless they committed crimes against the state.<sup>2</sup> Confessional narratives seldom show any interest in Vietnamese Catholics except for a select few in the martyrology. In the light of such neglect, this study has attempted to rewrite the national narrative from the Vietnamese Catholic-centered perspective.

Previous scholarship has extensively examined this period of the history of Vietnam. However, scholars have focused exclusively on the causes underlying the process of French colonization of Vietnam. They have posed questions either to blame the Nguyễn dynasty for

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<sup>1</sup> "Duy có người Tây dương Bách Đa Lộc và thái giám Nguyễn Đình Thọ, đều không có con kế tự, cùng với các cai đội là hạng quan thấp (chức nhỏ, công không có, đều không được dự," Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam thực lục chính biên (ĐNTLCB) 2/Q. clxvii* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, Viện Sử Học), 895-896.

<sup>2</sup> Hue-Tam Ho-Tai, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983, ix.

failing to modernize the country or to associate the Roman Catholic Church with Western imperialism. In both cases, the French occupation has been the point of reference.

In contrast to previous studies, I incorporate not only just French but global history with local histories. I employ this integrative approach in order to avoid exaggerating the local perspective to the point of distorting historical reality. Thus, this dissertation balances local experiences against its larger context both regionally and globally. The first chapter situates the development of Vietnamese Catholicism within its larger web of global forces and developments. Owing to this interplay between local and global context, the study of priestly formation reveals insight also into the prophetic confrontational style of Catholicism in Vietnam that no other researchers have identified. After situating Vietnamese Catholicism within its larger ecclesiastical history of the early modern era, the remaining chapters investigated the emerging political identity of Vietnamese Catholics from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. The transformation from scattered oases of Catholics into a cohesive religio-political entity with considerable ramifications in national politics was not coincidental with the fall of the Nguyễn seigneurial rule, the rise of Nguyễn absolutism, and the disintegration of the Nguyễn dynasty on the eve of the Franco-Spanish invasion. Rather, the “long” nineteenth-century Vietnamese Catholicism was intricately intertwined with the Nguyễn’s fate, the two shaking hands, pointing accusing fingers at each other, and holding hands again. One shaped the other.

From the perspective of local Nguyễn-Catholic tension, this study suggests a new periodization that consists of five different thematic stages. The first stage lasted from the fall of Nguyễn seigneurial rule in the 1770s to the re-establishment of the Nguyễn in Gia Định in the early 1800s. During this thirty-year Nguyễn-Catholic alliance, Catholics made significant inroads

into the Gia Định ruling circle. The next stage spanned the entire reign of Gia Long (r.1802-1820) through the first half of Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840). During this period, the Nguyễn authorities turned Catholics from assets into liabilities. The tension first began to simmer within the inner ruling circle between the Catholic sympathizers in the military camp and the Confucian bureaucrats. The conflict was also implicated in the royal succession in choosing between the bloodline of the late Crown Prince Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh and the new designated Crown Prince Nguyễn Phúc Đảm. As the Nguyễn government sought to create a religio-political uniformity within the realm, the Huế court encountered open resistance from the local converts. Thus, the court singled out Catholic communities as potential sources of rebellion. Such were the cases of Nam Dương Tây (1823), Mông Phụ (1829), Dương Sơn (1831), and Phiên An (1833-1835). Nevertheless, despite the pent-up imperial aversion towards Catholicism, Huế's suspicion still had not erupted into an outright oppression policy.

The third stage comprised thirteen years from the promulgation of Minh Mạng's Ten Moral Maxims (*Thập Điều*) in 1834 to the escalation of French military pressure towards the end of Thiệu Trị (1841-1847). This period overlapped with the rise of the Nguyễn absolutism. The central government wanted to launch a comprehensive campaign of eradicating Catholicism as a showcase to demonstrate its commitment to the Confucian civilizing mission (*giáo hoá*) and thus to prove its political legitimacy to replace the Lê dynasty, especially to the Tonkinese elites. The fourth stage covered the period from the 1847 incident in Khánh Hòa province, involving an abduction of Nguyễn officials by an unidentified European ship, to the 1862 Saigon Peace Treaty. Persecution intensified during this stage. Henceforth, the Nguyễn authorities accused converts and missionaries of colluding with the West. The final stage began with the First Saigon Peace Treaty in 1862 and ended with the establishment of French Indochina near the end of the

nineteenth century. The first peace treaty ushered in a period of reluctant Nguyễn accommodation with Christianity. However, real peace was still a far-away reality for local Catholics. Local gentry incited popular hatred against converts. Widespread grass-roots violence claimed more lives of local converts than any other previous persecution. Thus, during this “long” nineteenth century, from the time of de Béhaine to the end of Trần Lục’s life, Catholics gained national visibility, and they became increasingly aware of their collective religio-political identity as shown in increasing circulation of underground Catholic literature.

The narrative looks significantly different from a Vietnamese Catholic perspective, as this dissertation has shown. For one thing, on the topic of Nguyễn-Catholic alliance, the significance of the 1783 meeting between de Béhaine and Prince Cảnh declines in importance in comparison with the emergence of Catholic role in the Battle of Long Hồ in 1777. Hồ Văn Nghị, Phạm Văn Nhơn, and Tống Phước Đạm, rather than the French missionaries, come to represent the Đàng Trong Catholics’ new local public face. Next, when one compares Gia Long to Minh Mạng, the Nguyễn’s hostility towards Catholicism no longer appears simply as an issue of conflicts over ancestral rituals, but rather emerges as an element in the political intrigues among the inner Gia Định ruling circle, many members of which were active Catholics. Fueled by the internal political purge of the Bangkok meritorious functionaries (*Vọng Các công thần*), the nineteenth-century anti-Catholic persecution differed greatly from the on-again, off-again attacks under the Trịnh and Nguyễn seigneurial rulers. The latter varied with the whim of each individual ruler; the former framed this religio-political sentiment as state ideology: Minh Mạng’s Ten Moral Maxims (*Thập Điều*). However, if confessional histories have often lambasted Minh Mạng as the Nero of the East, then here I consider this period as the age of the Nguyễn absolutism which paralleled with the global political pattern of the early modern period.

Moreover, while the edicts of persecutions aimed to destroy the Church, paradoxically they provided a crucible for the forging of a revolutionary new political entity—Vietnamese Catholic nationalism. According to Benedict Anderson’s theory of nationalism, “print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness,” because of their capacity to reach and create a sense of connectedness with other members without a need for face-to-face contact, their ability to build and sustain a permanent memory, and empowering one group over the others.<sup>3</sup> The promulgation of *Thập Điều* in 1834, the state-sponsored monthly ritual indoctrination of the maxims, subsequent anti-Catholic edicts, and the proliferation of underground Catholic literature had done exactly what print-capitalism did to national movements in other countries. The Nguyễn’s anti-Catholic policy unintentionally created a strong bond of mutual commiseration and shared victimhood among local converts as documented in the Catholic literature of the time.

After the Franco-Spanish invasion, the complete political mayhem quickly solidified this “imagined community” into a political reality as I demonstrated in the biographical chapter on Trần Lục. Locally, Catholics congregated and even armed themselves when the *Văn Thân* and then the *Cần Vương* militias carried out massacres against Christian villages. Nationally, they contacted and learned from each other when the court of Huế destroyed their villages and dispersed them under the drastic *phân sáp* measure. Politically, they sent out delegations to Huế to fight for their rights until the Nguyễn authorities finally agreed that Catholics could practice their religion and receive compensation for their lost properties. In other words, Vietnamese converts might not have consciously seen themselves as a new national entity in the manner of a political party as we understand it today, but they gradually turned into one at both the local and national levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2d ed (New York: Verso, 2006), 6, 44-45.

As a result of this Vietnamese Catholic-centered approach, indigenous Catholic converts no longer will remain on the sidelines of history. But more importantly, this dissertation also challenges the current master narratives of Vietnamese history. Either in textbooks or in popular writing, the opening chapter of Vietnamese history frequently recounts the myth that the *Việt* were born from a union between the dragon father of the Eastern Sea (*Lạc Long Quân*) and the heavenly mother of the high mountain (*Âu Cơ*). The mother gave birth to a sac of one hundred eggs from which came forth the *Việt* people. Thus, all are equal heirs and legitimate children of that dragon father and the mountain goddess. However, this myth has not been faithfully translated into the social and political reality of modern Vietnam. Because since the arrival of Catholicism in Vietnam in the sixteenth century, the master narratives have denied the birthright of many Vietnamese Catholics as equal and legitimate members in their own motherland. Thus, the dynastic narrative has disowned them. The missionary narrative muted them. And, the national narrative incriminated them and still does.



## Appendix A: Vietnamese Dynasties

**Lý Dynasty** (1009-1225)

**Trần Dynasty** (1225-1400)

**Hồ Dynasty** (1400-1407)

**Minh rule** (1407-1428)

**Lê Dynasty** (1428-1527)

**Mạc Dynasty** (1528-1592)

**Restored Lê Dynasty (1592-1788)—Divided Period: Trịnh (Đàng Ngoài) and Nguyễn (Đàng Trong)**

**Nguyễn Đàng Trong** (1600-1777)

Nguyễn Hoàng (Chúa Tiên) (r.1600-1613)

Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên (Chúa Sãi) (r.1613-1635)

Nguyễn Phúc Lan (Chúa Thượng) (1635-1648)

Nguyễn Phúc Tần (Chúa Hiền) (r.1648-1687)

Nguyễn Phúc Trăn (Chúa Nghĩa) (r.1687-1691)

Nguyễn Phúc Chu (Quốc Chúa) (r.1691-1725)

Nguyễn Phúc Trú (r.1725-1738)

Nguyễn Phúc Khoát (r.1738-1765)

Nguyễn Phúc Thuận (r.1765-1777)

Nguyễn Phúc Dương

**Trịnh Đàng Ngoài** (1570-1787)

Trịnh Tùng (r.1570-1620)

Trịnh Tráng (r.1623-1657)

Trịnh Tạc (r.1657-1682)

Trịnh Căn (r.1682-1709)

Trịnh Cương (r.1709-1729)

Trịnh Giang (r.1729-1740)

Trịnh Doanh (r.1740-1767)

Trịnh Sâm (r.1767-1782)

Trịnh Cán (r.1782)

Trịnh Khải (r.1783-1786)

Trịnh Bồng (r.1786-1787)

**Tây Sơn Dynasty** (1788-1802)

The Quang Trung emperor (r.1788-1792)

The Quang Toản emperor (r.1792-1802)

## **Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1945)**

The Gia Long emperor (r.1802-1820)

The Minh Mạng emperor (r.1820-1840)

The Thiệu Trị emperor (r.1841-1847)

The Tự Đức emperor (r.1848-1883)

The Dục Đức emperor (r.1883)

The Hiệp Hoà emperor (r.1883)

The Kiến Phúc emperor (r.1883-1884)

The Hàm Nghi emperor (r.1884-1885)

The Đồng Khánh emperor (r.1885-1888)

The Thành Thái emperor (r.1888-1907)

The Duy Tân emperor (r.1907-1916)

The Khải Định emperor (r.1916-1925)

The Bảo Đại emperor (r.1925-1945)

## Appendix B: Catholic-Nguyễn Chronology

1777	Long-Hồ victory
1783	Catholic-Nguyễn hideout in Phú-Quốc Island
1786-1789	Béhaine and Prince Cảnh's diplomatic mission to the court of Versailles
1804	Gia Long's <i>Giáp Tý</i> Religious Ordinance
1823	The Nam-Dương-Tây case, Quảng Trị province
1825	Minh Mạng's first secret instruction against Catholicism
1830	The Mông Phụ case (1828-1830)
1831	The Dương Sơn case
1832	The 1832 <i>Nhâm Thìn</i> Edict
1834	Minh Mạng's <i>Thập Điều</i>
1835	The suppression of the Phiên An Rebellion (1833-1835)
1836	The 1836 <i>Bính Thân</i> Edit—Death sentence for captured missionaries
1838	Jean-Louis Taberd's <i>Dictionarium Anamitico-Latinum</i>
1839	The 1839 <i>Kỷ Hợi</i> Edit—Proscription against Catholicism
1841	Gò Thị Synod
1861	<i>Phân sáp</i> Edit
1862	The First Saigon Peace Treaty ( <i>Hoà ước Nhâm Tuất</i> )
1874	The Second Saigon Peace Treaty ( <i>Hoà ước Giáp Tuất</i> ) Scholar-gentry ( <i>Văn Thân</i> ) militia movement
1885	<i>Cần Vương</i> militia movement

### Appendix C: Notable Converts in Catholic-Nguyễn History

<p><b>Nguyễn Phúc Ánh</b> (1762-1820)/<b>Gia Long</b> (r.1802-1820)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tống Phước Đạm (?-d.1794)</li> <li>• Phaolô Hồ Văn Nghị (ordained 1775-d.1810)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Minh Mạng</b> (r.1820-1840)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phạm Văn Nhơn/Nhân (1744-1815)</li> <li>• Trần Văn Học (?-d.1821)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tự Đức</b> (r.1848-1883)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micae Hồ Đình Hy (1808-1857)</li> <li>• Pedro Lê [Tạ] Văn Phụng (?-1865)</li> <li>• Nguyễn Trường Tộ (1830-1871)</li> <li>• Đặng Đức Tuấn (1806-1874)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Thành Thái</b> (r.1888-1907)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jean-Baptiste Pétrus Trương Vĩnh Ký (1837-1898)</li> <li>• Phêrô Trần Lục (1825-1899)</li> <li>• Paulus Huỳnh Tịnh Của (1834-1907)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bảo Đại</b> (r.1925-1945)/<b>Nguyễn Phước Vĩnh Thụy</b> (1913-1997)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ngô Đình Khả (1857-1923)</li> <li>• Nguyễn Hữu Bài (1863-1935)</li> <li>• Bishop Nguyễn Bá Tòng (1868-1949)</li> <li>• Ngô Đình Diệm (1901-1963)</li> <li>• Ngô Đình Nhu (1910-1963)</li> <li>• Empress Nam Phương (1914-1963)</li> <li>• Bishop Lê Hữu Từ (1896-1967)</li> <li>• Bishop Ngô Đình Thục (1897-1984)</li> </ul>

### Appendix D: Notable Missionaries in Catholic-Nguyễn History

<p><b>Nguyễn Phúc Ánh/Gia Long</b> (r.1802-1820)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Julien Faulet (1741-1783)</li> <li>• Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine (1741-1799)</li> <li>• Jacques Liot (1751-1811)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Minh Mạng</b> (r.1820-1840)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jean Labartette (1744-1823)</li> <li>• Jean-Jacques Guérard (1761-1823)</li> <li>• Pierre Eyot (1762-1827)</li> <li>• Pierre-Jacques Lemonnier de la Bissachère (1763-1830)</li> <li>• François-Isidore Gagelin “Kính” (1799-1833)</li> <li>• Joseph Marchand “Du”(1803-1835)</li> <li>• Jean Charles Cornay “Tân” (1809-1837)</li> <li>• Ignatius Delgado “Hy” (1761-1838)</li> <li>• Dominicus Henarès “Xuân”(1765-1838)</li> <li>• Joseph Fernandez “Hiền” (1775-1838)</li> <li>• François Jaccard “Phan” (1799-1838)</li> <li>• Pierre Rose Dumoulin Borie “Cao” (1808-1838)</li> <li>• Jean-Louis Taberd “Tù” (1794-1840)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Tự Đức</b> (r.1847-1883)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Augustin Schoeffler “Đông”(1822-1851)</li> <li>• Jean Louis Bonnard “Hương”(1824-1852)</li> <li>• Guillaume Clément Masson (1801-1853)</li> <li>• Maria Diaz Sanjurjo “An” (1818-1857)</li> <li>• Pierre André Retord “Liêu” (1803-1858)</li> <li>• Garcia Sampedro “Xuyên” (1821-1858)</li> <li>• Pierre François Neron “Bắc” (1818-1860)</li> <li>• Étienne Théodore Cuénot “Thẻ” (1802-1861)</li> <li>• Berrio Ochoa “Vinh” (1827-1861)</li> <li>• Jean Théophile Vénard “Ven” (1829-1861)</li> <li>• Petrus Almato “Bình” (1830-1861)</li> <li>• Jerónimo Hermostilla “Liêm”/“Trùm Vọng” (1800-1861)</li> <li>• Charles Jeantet “Khiêm” (1792-1866)</li> <li>• Jean Denis Gauthier “Ngô Gia Hậu” (1810-1877)</li> <li>• Paul François Puginier “Phước” (1835-1892)</li> </ul>
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## Appendix E: Tờ Tâu Cho Cụ Trần Làm Quan

Đồng Khánh nguyên niên tam nguyệt sơ tam nhật, quan quận vĩnh lại Nguyễn công Hữu  
Độ tâu xin cho cụ Trần làm Khâm sai tuyên phủ sứ mà rằng:

Tôi xem như Nghệ Tĩnh hai tỉnh ấy mới rồi quân giặc rầy lên lán sang thêm việc cho tỉnh  
Thanh, nhiều người phải nó lừa dối, các quan tỉnh bàn vuổi quý quan cho được đẹp mà chưa yên  
được. Bây giờ tôi dám nghĩ: đất tỉnh Thanh là cội rễ nhà nước mà dân sự phải khôn nạm làm  
vậy. Không nên ngồi mà trông.

Vì vậy tôi trình quan Pháp sứ sai thêm quân đi dẹp, nhưng mà phải có kẻ thổ trước giới  
giang đi làm một mà bàn tính, thì mới trông nên việc. Tôi biết có một linh mục Trần Lục ở xứ  
Phát-Diệm về tỉnh Ninh-Bình quê tỉnh Thanh, là người học biết rộng, có tiếng trọng, nhiều người  
tin và mến, trong tỉnh ấy hơi yên một chút thì phần nhiều bởi ông ấy ra công thu xếp. Tôi nghĩ  
rằng cũng nên bàn vuổi quý quan mà sai đi hiểu tráp, để cho yên dân, song le ông ấy chỉ chăm  
việc giảng giáo, không để lòng đến sự tiếng tăm ở đời, chối mãi không chịu đi, chỉ vì buổi này  
dân ba tỉnh ấy còn nôn nao sợ lại sinh nhiều điều trát ngại, tôi lấy làm sốt ruột lắm. Ông ấy ở  
Phát-Diệm bấy lâu vừa ý người ta lắm.

Tôi ép phải làm: có lẽ trông cho bớt việc và khỏi lo sợ: xin cho ông ấy làm quan Lễ bộ  
tham tri sung khâm sai tuyên phủ sứ và cấp cho một ấn quan phòng, một ấn Kiểm cái (trong ấn  
quan phòng, khắc bảy chữ: Khâm Sai Tuyên Phủ Sứ Quan Phòng, trong ấn tiêu Kiểm khắc bốn  
chữ: Khâm Sai Tuyên Phủ) đi làm một vuổi quan quân Đại Pháp, đến ba tỉnh ấy để bàn tính, nên  
hiểu nên tráp tùy ấy, cho có quyền phép bảo người ta tin, thì dân sự cũng có thể yên được. Việc  
này tôi tư thương quan Đại Pháp thượng thư Ba Tô chuyển trình quan Đô Thống, thì y các quan  
cũng vậy.

Tôi trót đã làm tờ quyền Khâm cấp và khắc giao các ấn rồi lại làm tờ luân tư cho ba tỉnh ấy ứng tiếp cho được kịp việc. Sự tôi chọn người làm vậy cũng là vì việc chung nhà nước, cốt cho nên việc, nên cả dám tâu lên, chớ xuống chỉ để tuân biện.

Cần Tấu.

*Phụng châu phê rằng: “Kẻ dưng người hiền, thì được phần thưởng trọng. Người giữ được lòng ấy, phải lắm. May mà chóng được việc: thật là chỉ người hiền biết người hiền, cũng thể tin được--Phải Kính đấy.”*

### **The Petition for the Appointment of Sir Trần to a Mandarin Post<sup>1</sup>**

In the first year of Emperor Đồng-Khánh, on the third day of the third month, your servant, the first rank mandarin,<sup>2</sup> Nguyễn Hữu Độ, humbly begs for Sir Trần to be assigned as the imperial commissioner with the task of restoring peace and order.<sup>3</sup>

I investigated and found that the rebels of two provinces, Nghệ-An and Hà-Tĩnh, were about to spread to Thanh-Hóa Province. They deceptively attracted many followers. The local mandarins appealed to the governors to put down this widespread chaotic situation, but there is no success. From my humble reflection, I wonder why it is that Thanh-Hóa, the ancestral home of the Throne, the people have to suffer so much. I cannot allow myself to sit by leisurely and ignore this grave situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Nguyễn Hữu Độ, “Tờ Tâu Cho Cụ Trần Làm Quan,” in Vũ Đăng Khoa, *Từ Hàn Cữu Ngung Dịch Quốc Ngữ* (Ninh Bình: Phát Diệm Tổng Đường Tàng Bản, 1907), 301-305.

<sup>2</sup> I substitute “Vinh Lộc Đại Phu” for “Quan Quận Vĩnh lại” as the closest equivalent that I can find in *Từ Điển Chức Quang Việt Nam* (TĐCQVN). “Vinh Lộc Đại Phu” is the honorific title for the first rank mandarin. Đỗ Văn Ninh, *Từ Điển Chức Quang Việt Nam* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Thanh Niên, 2001), 822-823.

<sup>3</sup> “Tuyên Phủ Sứ” and “Khâm Sai Đại Thân”  
Đỗ Văn Ninh, 355, 805-806.



Thus, I requested that the French commander assist us with their soldiers to subdue the insurgents. However, we need a learned and respected local person to accompany the French. Otherwise, the whole project will fall apart. I know a priest, Trần Lục from Phát Diệm of Ninh-Binh Province. He himself originally was born and raised in Thanh-Hóa. He is a well learned person and with great reputation. People respect, trust and love him. His province is relatively calm because of his managerial contributions. I already discussed with the governors about inviting him to join us to help the people, however, he devotes himself completely to the work of his religion. He pays no attention to this-worldly fame, thus he consistently refuses to join our administration. Nevertheless, the chaotic situation of the three mentioned provinces brings so much fear and terror to the people. I am concerned that this situation may breed further complications. The one from Phát-Diệm has won the hearts of many people.

Perhaps in lessening the burden of the task and the trepidation for him, I am forced to propose to promote him into the mandarin rank under the auspices of the Board of Rites. His official status is that of the ad-hoc imperial commissioner with two official seals: the larger one clearly indicated the nature of his temporary assignment and another smaller one. The larger one is engraved with seven characters: “*Khâm Sai Tuyên Phủ Sứ Quan Phòng*” [An Official Seal of the Imperial Commissioner for Pacification and Restoration of Order]; the smaller one is engraved with four characters: “*Khâm Sai Tuyên Phủ*” [Imperial Commissioner of Pacification and Restoration].<sup>4</sup> He will accompany the French troops to investigate the situation and then exercise the power of censorship if the situation calls him to do so. He will be invested with the authority to command the obedience of the people. Only in this fashion may we hope to restore

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<sup>4</sup> “Quan Lễ Bộ tham tri sung khâm sai tuyên phủ sứ”  
Ibid., 396-397, 651.

“Ấn Quang Phòng” is an official seal with the shape half of the regular seal to indicate a temporary assignment.  
Ibid., 533.

order and security to the whole affair. I have officially discussed this with the Resident-General Paul Bert (?),<sup>5</sup> and already made a report to the commander general. They all concurred with this suggestion. Under the duress of time and the urgency of the situation, I already drafted the summoning document, fashioned his official seals and the imperial public notice for those three provinces.

The sole reason for this petition is merely the well being of the empire and the earnest desire to speedily resolve the matter. Thus, I audaciously send up to Your Majesty this request. I am respectfully waiting for your command.

Respectfully Reporting,

*The imperial reply: "The one who promotes a wise person is worthy to receive reward. You are that very person. May the task be accomplished: it takes a wise person to know a wise person. I entrust the whole affair to you. All respectfully obey."*

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<sup>5</sup> Đại Pháp Thượng Thư Ba-Tô



Fig. 8. Nguyễn Hữu Độ, undated. After Nguyễn Thế Anh, *Monarchie et Fait Colonial au Viêt-Nam*, p. 98.

## Appendix F: Yết Thị Quan Khâm Sai Ra Cho Tỉnh Thanh<sup>6</sup>

Gia lễ bộ tham tri, sung Khâm sai tuyên phủ sứ linh mục Trần làm tờ hiểu thị Thanh Hoá tỉnh thân hào sĩ thứ rằng:

Năm ngoài khi Kinh Thành nhả sự rồi, bấy giờ những kẻ thân hào dấy quân gọi là nghĩa cũ (việc phải lẽ) xem ra việc ấy cũng phải, nhưng mà ngày nay bấy giờ miếu xã nguyên như trước, Đức Hoàng Thượng bởi là con Đức Tiên Đế, trên thì vâng ý bà Từ-Dụ Thái Hoàng Thái Hậu (là mẹ vua Tự Đức) dưới thì thuận lòng tôn nhân đình thần làm sách đặt (sic) tên, có đáng làm chủ trong việc thần và dân, thật là gởi trao cho, chớ thì việc này không phải việc nghĩa chính và cả thể ru?

Còn sự phải làm trong việc giao thiệp, thì triều đình cất đặt đã đâu có đấy, buổi này là chính buổi phải yên phận mình cho được vâng mệnh triều đình, can gì còn tiếc rẻ làm vậy cho bạn mình. Phương chi Bình Giáo đôi bên là con cái triều đình cả, có chi mà phân rẽ nhau như bò ngựa ruộng, ở vuôi nhau như kẻ thù? Rút cục lại đôi bên điều hại cả, xác chết đê lấp nhau rồi lại lộn lại báo thù nhau, không bao giờ rồi.

Xui nên những phường làm quàng mượn dịp dấy động. Trước thì nói tiếng giết giáo dân, sau thì cả bình dân cũng hại. Hãy xem gương Nghệ-An Hà-Tĩnh mấy năm nay, việc ra thể nào thì biết.

Tôi đây vốn là thầy tu, không tài mưu gì, năm xưa đội ơn Đức Giục Anh (Vua Tự Đức) trông xuống cũng đã chịu lấy gánh tráp an, rầy vâng ơn Đức Hoàng Thượng ban sắc dụ cho lại vâng lấy chức Khâm Sai Tuyên Phủ. Nghĩ mình tài hèn gánh nặng, mà chịu lấy tiếng gièm pha,

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<sup>6</sup> Trần Lục, “Yết Thị Quan Khâm Sai Ra Cho Tỉnh Thanh,” in Vũ Đãng Khoa, *Từ Hàn Cửu Ngung Dịch Quốc Ngữ* (Ninh Bình: Phát Diệm Tổng Đường Tàng Bản, 1907), 305-309.

chối mãi không được, phải gắng gượng chịu lấy việc, chỉ lo làm việc bậc mình không nên, nên phải hết lòng lả on cho xứng.

Trong hàng tỉnh chẳng kì bậc người nào, phải biết ý triều đình cho tôi chức này, để tính đàng yên dân mà thôi. Xin ai ai phải bỏ lòng ngờ ghét nhau cho sạch, những nơi nào bằng yên thì càng thêm lòng thương yêu giúp đỡ nhau, nơi nào đã phải tàn phá, thì phải bảo nhau về mà làm ăn. Bao nhiêu kẻ trót đã hòa tập nhau làm quàng, thì chẳng kì ai thủ ai tòng, hẹn cho hai tháng, phải ra thú, tôi sẽ liệu cho không can gì sót. Nếu ai còn giữ ý mình, âu là tôi không thể nín mà để hại dân mãi đâu. Việc này đã bàn với các quan tỉnh thì cũng một lòng như vậy, nên làm tờ này cho mọi người hiểu biết.

Đồng Khánh Nguyên Niên Tứ Nguyệt Sơ Tam Nhật

### **The Public Notice from His Excellency, the Royal Commissioner, to the Province of Thanh**

With the consent of the Board of Rites, the Imperial Commissioner of Pacification and Restoration, Reverend Trần Lục, issues this public notice to the local leaders, the scholars, and the people of Thanh-Hóa:

Last year after the havoc broke out in the imperial city, many local leaders rightly gathered and formed their own militia units in the name of righteousness. However, in the present situation, the orderly empire has been reestablished like before. From on high, His Imperial Highness, the son of our Late Emperor [Tự-Đức], faithfully obeys the Grand Empress Dowager Từ-Dụ, who is the mother of our Late Emperor Tự-Đức, to take on the imperial responsibility. From below His Highness receives the whole-hearted support of the Imperial

Family and the Court when he ascends the throne. Thus we now have the legitimate ruler of all the lords and the people according to the Mandate of Heaven; isn't this called righteousness?

Moreover, as for the diplomatic affairs, the Court has already settled and resolved all the tensions. Therefore now is the time for you to reside peacefully in your allotted positions and to obey the ruling reign, why do you still burden yourselves in holding grudges? In addition, the peaceful common folks and the Christian followers are the children of the reigning dynasty; why then is there a division among you like the borders in the rice field and why treat each other like enemies? As a result, both sides suffer losses. Death falls upon death. If revenge is repaid with revenge, then when will be the end of this vicious cycle?

In fact, there are malcontent elements in society who want to take advantage of the situation just to create disturbance in the kingdom. At first, they claim to eradicate the Christian followers, but soon they turn to harm the peaceful common folks. Look at the events which already happened in Nghệ-An and Hà-Tĩnh over the last few years, are they not obvious?

I am merely a simple priest, though in the past the Late Emperor Tự Đức favorably bestowed on me the task of restoring peace; now with a decree, His Imperial Highness grants me a mandarin post, the Imperial Commissioner of Pacification and Restoration. Knowing my limitation but with a grave responsibility and being aware of my vulnerability to criticism, I refused but without success. Thus, I have to put in extra effort to bear this task with trepidation. I will have to exhaust myself to repay the imperial favors on me.

All the leaders of the province take note that it is the imperial desire to give me this position solely for the sake of the people's wellbeing. I beg that everybody cleanses himself from all suspicion and hatred toward each other. As for peaceful regions, increase your care and support for one another. As for regions already suffering destruction, encourage each other to

return your home villages to restart your life. As for those who mistakenly followed the rebellious path, whether as a leader or as a follower, within two months come to report to me. Within my jurisdiction, I will extend the amnesty to each of you. Nevertheless, the ones who continue to rely on your own strength, I will not be able to restrain myself as you keep bringing harm upon the people.

With consultation, all the high officers of the province share the same heart and mind with me. Therefore, I issue this notice for all to know.

In the First Reigning Year of *Đông-Khánh*, on the third of the fourth month

## Appendix G: Tờ Cự Lớn Tấu Về Các Việc Tỉnh Thanh

Gia lễ bộ tham tri hàm, sung Khâm Sai Tuyên Phủ Sứ, thần Trần Lục cẩn tâu về sự đang xảy ra và việc đang làm miền tỉnh Thanh. Vậy trước tháng này tôi đến tỉnh Hà Nội gặp quan cần chính là Nguyễn Hữu Độ làm tờ Khâm cấp sai đi Thanh, Nghệ, Tĩnh, cho được phủ (dỗ) trấn (đẹp).

Bấy giờ tôi nghĩ mình không gánh nổi việc, thì chối mãi mà không được phải về nhà sắm sửa các cái phải dùng, chợt nghe rằng: Người Nghệ Tĩnh thường đến giáp đất Thanh: là Yên Mô, Kim Sơn về hạt Ninh Bình, nó đi cách nhiệm và lừa dối người ta, thì tôi còn ở lại hội những người thân hào đến mà khuyên bảo, rồi liền đem quân (200) và đầy tớ (60 tên) đi, lại tư tờ lấy một đội lính cơ Ninh Bình theo ý Khâm cấp.

Ngày 28 đến tỉnh Thanh, gặp quan tỉnh có kể truyện và tôi cho người đi do về nói, thì các huyện hạt tỉnh Thanh là Ngọc Sơn, Nông Cống, Đông Sơn, Quảng Xương, còn nhiều giặc, mà đảng chạy trạm thì ngăn trở, tương giặc thì đóng đồn (trong làng Thanh Đồng, làng Ôn, lâm ở đất rừng huyện Nông-Cống) hội quân ở đấy, (có người cạo đầu cạo răng giả như quân Khách) nó đánh tiếng toan lấn sang An-Định, Thọ-Xuân, Quảng Hóa để tìm lối thông ra rừng Ninh-Bình và Sơn (Tây) Hưng (Hoá).

Tôi bàn vuổi quan tỉnh những lẽ nên tiểu nên phụ. Khi ấy các quan rằng: “Lâu nay thì quý quan cầm quyền sai quan, còn quân tỉnh thì biết một sự dỗ bảo và sai người đi do thám mà thôi. Khi đến việc phải sai quan quân đi dẹp giặc đóng đồn, thì khí giới lại xấu, nên khi thì thua giặc, khi thì chạy trốn, quân giặc nó lấn được thật là cam tội vuổi vua.”

Tôi liền đến vuổi Pháp quan (chưởng binh, công sứ) mà bàn đem Pháp binh rải đồn đảng quan báo và các ngạch đảng kiểm (việc này đã sai đi dần dần, để tiện cho tôi đem quân giáo dững



xứ tôi đang ở Thanh Hóa (ngày tháng hai khi có việc, thì tôi đang ở tỉnh Thanh, quan tỉnh bàn vuôi tôi đem quân giáo dũng vào liệu việc ấy tôi liền gọi được bao người. Bây giờ tôi nghĩ rằng phủ Hà là đất trọng vọng, lại có kho tàng đầy, mà có kẻ nói đặt những tiếng quấy quả, tôi lấy 200 quân ấy đem đi tuần trấn và bảo ban người ta, còn để 400 lại rải đồn quanh tỉnh, tháng hai tháng ba tỉnh quên cấp lương). Lại lớp này tôi đem ba bốn trăm quân dũng đi các hạt phủ huyện để tiền phủ tùy đây. Bây giờ giáp mặt quan chương binh năm [khuyên (?) unreadable word] kể truyện quan nguyên súy bảo rằng: “Giặc tỉnh Thanh bởi người ta ức hiếp, thì hãy đông cho một tháng bảo ra thú, hết hạn mà không chịu thú sẽ đánh và việc đồn triệt đã có Pháp binh, còn binh dũng tôi hãy cho về.” Bấy nhiêu nhờ tôi vì điều ấy đi bàn vuôi quan tỉnh bãi bớt quân về, còn để lại 50 tên (công sứ từ tỉnh cấp lương từng ngày) lại bàn vuôi Pháp quan sai quân bảo hộ để tôi sai người đi hiểu thị (khi tôi mới đến tỉnh Thanh Hóa thì làm tờ hiểu thị khắp cả tỉnh) đem niềm yết mọi nơi.

Từ bây giờ những kẻ sai đi về nói rằng: “Đâu người ta thấy Pháp binh thì trốn hết, khi gặp một hai người già hay là con trẻ mà khéo dỗ nó thì mới thấy lý trưởng hay là đàn ông ra nhận tờ yết thị, rằng quân giặc bây giờ thì tan đi rồi, quan quân về khỏi, thì nó lại càng dữ hơn, muốn ra thú mà sợ nó chưa dám đi.” Bấy giờ gửi tờ thú cách nhiệm về trình, xem nhờ nhẽ trong tờ cũng đáng thương.

Tôi lại được tin rằng: đã lâu nay quân giặc cũng khi đi năm ba trăm người, mà đòi của ăn, bắt phu. Làng nào không theo thì nó đốt nhà bắt vợ con. Khi nào Pháp binh kéo đến, thì nó đem đồ lễ mừng, làm phu khiêng gánh, cũng khi thì quăng gậy giao làm như bình dân, thì Pháp binh bảo: Không có giặc, nhưng mà về rồi thì nó lại tụ họp như trước mà hại dân hơn nữa. Đã dò thật tin rằng: chúng nó dùng một hai đứa làm đầu mượn tiếng khởi nghĩa (nhiều lần bắt được tờ giặc, tờ nào cũng rằng: cần về việc vua, mà có ẩn cả) mà quân gia thì là nó bắt phải theo chẳng khác gì

qua họp chợ. Tôi tính việc làm cho yên đi chẳng khó gì, song le mình không có quyền sai quân, mà giặc đang hung lắm.

Độ này lúa sắp chín mà giặc chưa yên, dân xiêu không về được, đã phải giặc lấy hết của cải, sẽ phải nó gặt cả lúa, có khi dân sự chết đói. Tôi trên thì tưởng sự vua đăm ngày lo nghĩ, dưới sót dân lấy gì nuôi nhau nóng ruột không nhẽ ngồi mà nhìn, nghĩ đi nghĩ lại rằng: nếu không làm cho giặc nó vỡ tổ, thì không lẽ nào dẹp đi được.

Tôi vuốt quan tỉnh đã đôi ba khi cứ thật mà bàn cùng giải lẽ ra và tính sự phải làm, viết ra từng khoản trình Pháp quan bấy giờ quan chương binh mới nghe, thì tôi mới lấy thêm 30 tên thủ dưng (cả thầy 100, và quân tỉnh phải theo quan năm đi cho đến đất Thanh-Đông-Ồn-Lâm để dẹp giặc (công việc thể nào xin tâu tờ khác) còn các việc khác thì xin chờ xem làm sao, sẽ tâu. Tôi đã sai người đi hiểu tráp các hạt về phủ Hà, huyện Sơn, huyện Lộc, huyện Hoàng, huyện Mĩ, phủ Quảng, phủ Thiệu (Hoàng, Mĩ hai huyện khi hữu sự thì một hai kẻ hay sinh việc, quá nghe giặc dù dè, khi bắt được thì ở tỉnh trót đã chính pháp, có kẻ còn để giam tra) cứ tờ báo về đã yên rồi (có tờ các phủ huyện thân hào tổng lý cung đonan về trình) nhân khi tôi bàn vuốt quan tỉnh rằng: Từ này về sau bao nhiêu kẻ đã bắt được và chịu thú thì bàn vuốt Pháp quan đông tha, để kẻ khác biết mà ra thú, thì trông chóng yên được.

Tôi thì bàn và giải lẽ ra, chờ khi hết hạn quan nguyên súp ra, mà Pháp quan tính làm sao thì tôi sẽ tùy điều mà nói, hoặc là có lả ơn lại được một chút. Tôi đến nơi làm việc bậc mình đã hơn nửa tháng mà chẳng làm được một chức nào thì sợ hãi lắm, nên cả dám kể các ruyên do tâu lên trông Đức Hoàng Thượng soi thấu.

Lại ngày tháng hai tên Phạm Thúc Trân làm đầu mừng Ngọc Lặc về phủ Thiệu đến nơi tôi thú, xin thật lòng chịu lụy, tôi đã sai lên khuyên bảo các mạng rừng = là châu Thường Xuân, châu Lang-Chánh, châu Quan, Hóa bây giờ thưa lại rằng = những châu ấy có nơi phải giặc

Khách quấy lăm (bởi tên cai Mao khi trước thuê nó, từ khi cai Mao phải trốn sang xứ Trịnh-Vạn rồi, chúng nó còn qua lại đây kiếm ăn) xem ra cũng không nên nghề nông gì, dân sự các châu bây giờ cũng đã yên dần dần. Vì đảng còn ngăn trở, các làng mừng chưa thể xuống thú được. Lại ngày 19 tháng 3 nó gặp Lê Văn Thuyết đi, có đem 50 tên quân (đeo thẻ cả) gánh ba gánh đi qua làng Điền Thượng (về huyện Cẩm Thủy, tổng Điền Lu) khi gặp Pháp binh thì Văn-Thuyết đi lánh vào nhà Cầm Bá Thước một đêm, sau lại theo đảng rừng mà đi.

Bấy nhiêu điều tờ tâu này xin chạy ngựa cho chóng nên kể vào đây.

Cẩn Tấu

Đề ngày 22 tháng 4 Đồng Khánh nguyên niên-- Thần Trần Lục (ấn tích)

*Đến ngày mồng 4 tháng 6, thần (bày tâu) Nguyễn Văn Dụ, thần Hoàng Hữu Vĩ, thần Hoàng Hữu Thương, Tôn Thất Phan phụng chỉ:*

*Cứ tờ tâu thì các lân mộ quân nên tiến nên phủ được cả, người có lòng làm vậy Trẫm đã biết rồi.*

*Còn điều kể sự tên nghịch Thuyết đi qua đất Trịnh-Vạn tỉnh Thanh như có thật vậy, thì sự thông vuôi tên Mao Không Không. Mới rồi chính mình Trẫm đem quân đi đến tỉnh Quảng-Trị, chẳng kể kì ngày nào. Đi lần cho đến tỉnh Thanh cho hẳn, người vuôi tỉnh thần (quan tỉnh) bàn cùng Pháp quan, bây giờ đã hết hạn, nên tùy đây mà dẹp và sai cho nhiều binh dưng đi đón các ngách. Sao cho đem được tên đầu giặc ấy đến án, cho sạch quang đảng trạm, để xứng đáng sự đã phó thác cho.*

*Các điều biết rồi, lại cứ giao ngựa trạm lục ra ngay, cứ vậy mà làm. Phải vâng kính như vậy.*

## The Report of His Excellency on the Affairs of Thanh Province<sup>7</sup>

With the consent of the Board of Rites, your servant, the Imperial Commissioner of Pacification and Restoration, Trần Lục, humbly reports on the affairs of Thanh Province. Last month, I traveled to Hà-Nội to meet His Supreme Excellency,<sup>8</sup> Nguyễn Hữu ĐỘ, to draft the imperial decree in commissioning me to Thanh, Nghệ, and Tĩnh Provinces. The decree entrusts me with two tasks: to persuade and to pacify.

At that time, I felt that I was unable to bear this task. When my refusal to take on this responsibility failed, I went home to make necessary preparations. Immediately, people reported to me that the people of Nghệ and Tĩnh Provinces often ventured to the bordering region of Thanh Province: Yên Mô and Kim Sơn of the Ninh Bình District. They went about with secrecy and deceived the people with their plots. Thus, after I gathered and instructed the local leaders of my region, I departed with two hundred soldiers and sixty conscripts. I also sent out the request to take on another unit of soldiers from Ninh-Bình as implied in your imperial order.

On the twenty-eighth, at my arrival to Thanh Province, I gathered information from the report of the provincial governor and data from spies. Ngọc-Sơn, Nông-Cống, Đông-Sơn, and Quảng-Xương Districts are infested with insurgents. Moreover, they obstructed the official postal routes. The leaders of the insurgents encamped in Thanh-Đông Village, Ổn Village, and in the neighboring forest of Nông-Cống District. (Some of them shaved their heads pretending to be Chinese militia). Rumor has it that they intend to invade to An-Định, Thọ-Xuân, and Quảng-Hóa

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<sup>7</sup> Trần Lục, “Tờ Cự Lớn Tấu Về Các Việc Tỉnh Thanh,” in Vũ Đăng Khoa, *Từ Hàn Cửu Ngung Dịch Quốc Ngữ* (Ninh Bình: Phát Diệm Tổng Đường Tàng Bản, 1907), 309-322.

<sup>8</sup> Càn Chính Điện Đại Học Sĩ: the honorific title for the first rank minister. Đỗ Văn Ninh, 120-121.

in order to create a line of communication in the mountains and link Ninh-Bình, Sơn Tây, and Hung-Hóa together.

I discussed with the governor whom we should eliminate and whom we should persuade. Then, many mandarins said: “Up until now, the high ministers of the court ordered the subalterns, the local mandarins only know either to issue further instruction or to send out spies to gather further information. As for commanding the army to eliminate the camps of insurgents, we have no means because of our ill-equipped weapons. That is why sometimes the insurgents overcame us, and we had to flee from them. This is how the rebels managed to get the upper hand. It is indeed our grave failure to the imperial trust.”

I had to go to the French officers and propose to them to post their soldiers at our postal and inspection stops (as for this proposal, right now it is gradually implemented). This will allow a greater flexibility for my Catholic soldiers, who are my parishioners and accompany me to Thanh-Hóa. (For instance, one day in the second month, there was an incident, and I was at Thanh. The governor asked me to employ my Christian unit to take care of that incident. I see the critical role of the town of Hà and its granaries. When I heard the rumor about the threat toward that town, I brought with me my two hundred soldiers to patrol the area and to pacify the unsettled atmosphere. I left the other four hundred soldiers with the governor. By the way, as for the second and third months, the province forgot to pay their salaries). Also among this unit, I often bring about three hundred to four hundred of them with me to patrol the areas. It depends on the situation, but I want to make sure to have readily available the necessary means either to eliminate or to persuade. When I met the fifth ranking military officer, he told me about the instruction of the grand commanding general: “Many of the rebels of Thanh were forced into that path. Give them one month to come to report to us. At the end of that grace period, we then

attack. As for the eradication of their camp, we will have the French to do the job. As for the Catholic militia, they can return to their home.” Because of that, I checked with the governor before I dismissed the soldiers. Only 50 of them continued to stay with me (The province administration pays them daily.)

As for an extra security measure, I also asked the French officer to allot their soldiers to accompany us as we traveled and proclaimed the imperial decree in the province. (When I had just arrived in Thanh-Hóa Province, I immediately posted the public notice everywhere in the province.) These people came back with the report: “Whenever the people saw the French, they all ran away. The only chance is to find one or two older people or the children. When we talked with them respectfully and gently, only then would a chief of the hamlet dare to come out to receive the public notice. The rebels are all dispersed at this moment. But, when the imperial army departed from here [a village], they [the insurgents] came back with a vengeance. Many people wanted to come back and to report to the authority, but because of fear they dared not to do anything.” Even now, when they send back the report to profess their loyalty to the authority, they have to do it secretly. I cannot help but stir with pity whenever I read their report.

I also received news that the rebels moved in a group of three to five hundred men and that they extorted provisions and labor conscripts from the villagers. If any villager refuses their demand, they will torch the house and take away his wife and children. In another situation, when the French army arrived, the rebels themselves brought out welcoming gifts, volunteered their help, hid their weapons, and mixed in with the villagers. So, the French concluded: “There are no rebels!” However, when the French went away, they regrouped and vexed the people further. After a careful investigation I believe that these groups selected one or two as their leaders in the name of righteous resistance. (On our many interceptions of their communications,

every document always bears a stamp, “Imperial Affairs, Expedite!” or a resemblance of an official seal.) Nevertheless, their military discipline merely apes the gathering of the market crowd. I think to take care of this matter is not that difficult; however, I have no real authority to command the army; and the rebels are very aggressive.

Now it is also a harvest time, but we have yet to overcome the insurgents. The people are in fear and dare not to return. On top of that, the rebels took and destroyed their properties; now the rebels are about to steal their crops. This only leads to starvation. For me, I exhaust myself everyday in thinking of the imperial given responsibility. I am equally troubled in worrying for the people and especially how they are going to feed themselves. I cannot just sit and watch. I discern and weigh all the factors. I think if we do not destroy the very nest of the insurgents, then the pacification and restoration project will never be achieved.

The governor and I planned and examined the situation from all angles. We frankly put forth all the different options and consequences. After that I carefully put down on paper our plan and showed them to the French officers, only then did their commander agree to listen. And then I took thirty more soldiers with me (The total is one hundred men). In addition to the provincial troops who were already assigned to the military mandarin of fifth rank. Everything is fine right now. (How this task has been done will be reported in a different time.) I have to wait for the results in other affairs before making another report. I ordered my people to investigate and gather further information on the towns of Hà, Quảng, and Thiệu and the districts of Sơn, Lộc, Hoàng, and Mĩ (When the havoc broke out, Hoàng and Mĩ are the two districts where two men listened to the deception of the rebels and had caused much trouble. They were arrested. One of them repented and submitted to authority. Another man is still under arrest and waits for further investigation). Some districts already submitted reports. These areas appear to be under

control. (I include here those reports from the local leaders of these towns and districts as well as from many other canton chiefs and the village headmen.)

I suggest to the governor that from now on, if those arrested submit to our authority, then we should advise the French officers to let them go. By this action of ours, many others will follow the example. Only in this manner may peace and order be quickly restored.

I see my tasks here are to consult and elucidate difficult circumstances. I long for the quick arrival of the Great Commander General who will release me from this task. As for the French officers, it depends on their plans, and then I will try to intervene appropriately. All the things that I try to accomplish are my efforts to pay back the bestowed imperial favors on me. I have taken on this responsibility for more than half of a month, but nothing much has been accomplished. This has caused me much trepidation. Therefore, I thoroughly report all the factors to Your Majesty to examine.

Moreover, one day of the second month, Phạm Phúc Trân, the head of the Ngọc-Lặc tribe, came to Thiệu Town where I take residence to declare his loyalty and submission. I instructed him to go back to other mountain tribes and persuade other leaders namely: Thường Xuân, Lang-Chánh, Quan, and Hóa. He responded that those regions are infested with Chinese mercenaries. (This is because one of our former sergeants, Mao, hired these mercenaries. Since Mao had fled to Laos, they often came back to extort food from the people.) In general, they would not be able to cause much of a threat. People in these mountainous areas gradually become more stable. It must be because of the distance that they were unable to come to us to pledge their loyalty. In addition, on the 19th of the third month, he [Phạm Phúc Trân] met Lê Văn Thuyết with fifty soldiers (All of them wore official insignias.) They transported with them three bundles of cargo towards Điền Thượng Village (in the Điền Lư Deanery of Cẩm Thủy



District). When Văn-Thuyết saw the French troops, he hid overnight at the residence of Cầm Bá Thước. After that, they continued to use the mountainous route to travel.

These are the various things to be reported. I ask for permission to use the imperial equestrian postal system in order to deliver the report quickly to you.

Humbly Reporting,

Written on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of the first year of Đồng-Khánh reign

Your servant, Trần Lục

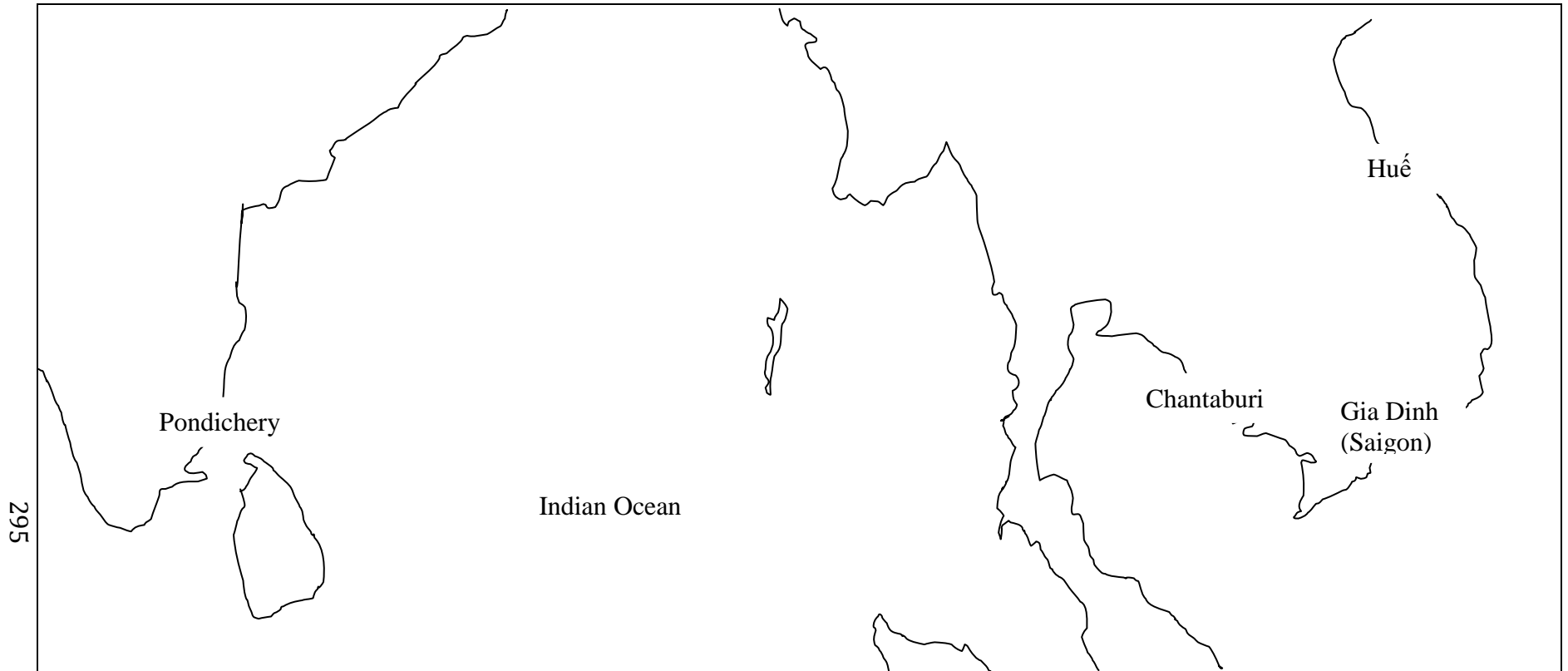
*On the 4<sup>th</sup> of the 6<sup>th</sup> month, we (your servants), Nguyễn Văn Dụ, Hoàng Hữu Vĩ, Hoàng Hữu Thương, Tôn Thất Phan, humbly followed the comments of Your Majesty:*

*According to the report, you are given permission to recruit more soldiers for the purpose of either eliminating the insurgents or persuading the rebels with our might. I know that you have put all your heart and mind into the given task.*

*As for the report on the criminal Thuyết who went over to Laos passing through Thanh Province, it is a sound report. He and Mao work together. Recently, with no delay I myself led the troops to Quảng-Trị to pursue these rebels. But then, they must have already reached to Thanh Province. You and the governor must draw up a plan with the French officers since the period of amnesty is over. Thus, use your judgment depending on the situation, and then eliminate all insurgents. Employ as many brave soldiers as you can to post at all the important routes. You need to bring the head of that criminal to justice by all necessary means and remove all obstacles that hinder our postal system.*

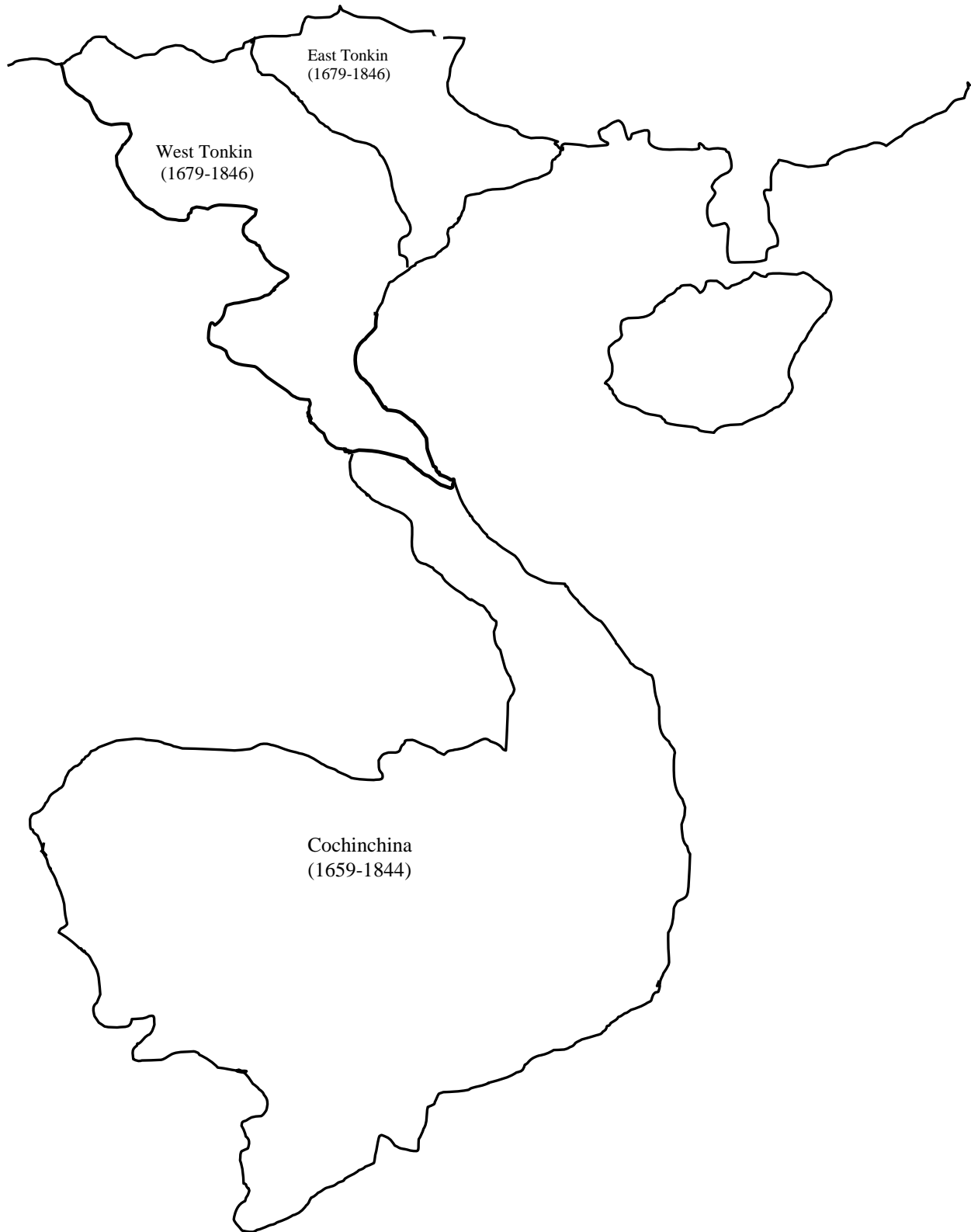
*Do not disappoint my trust in you. Any further information, immediately send to us via the equestrian service.*

*Humbly follow!*

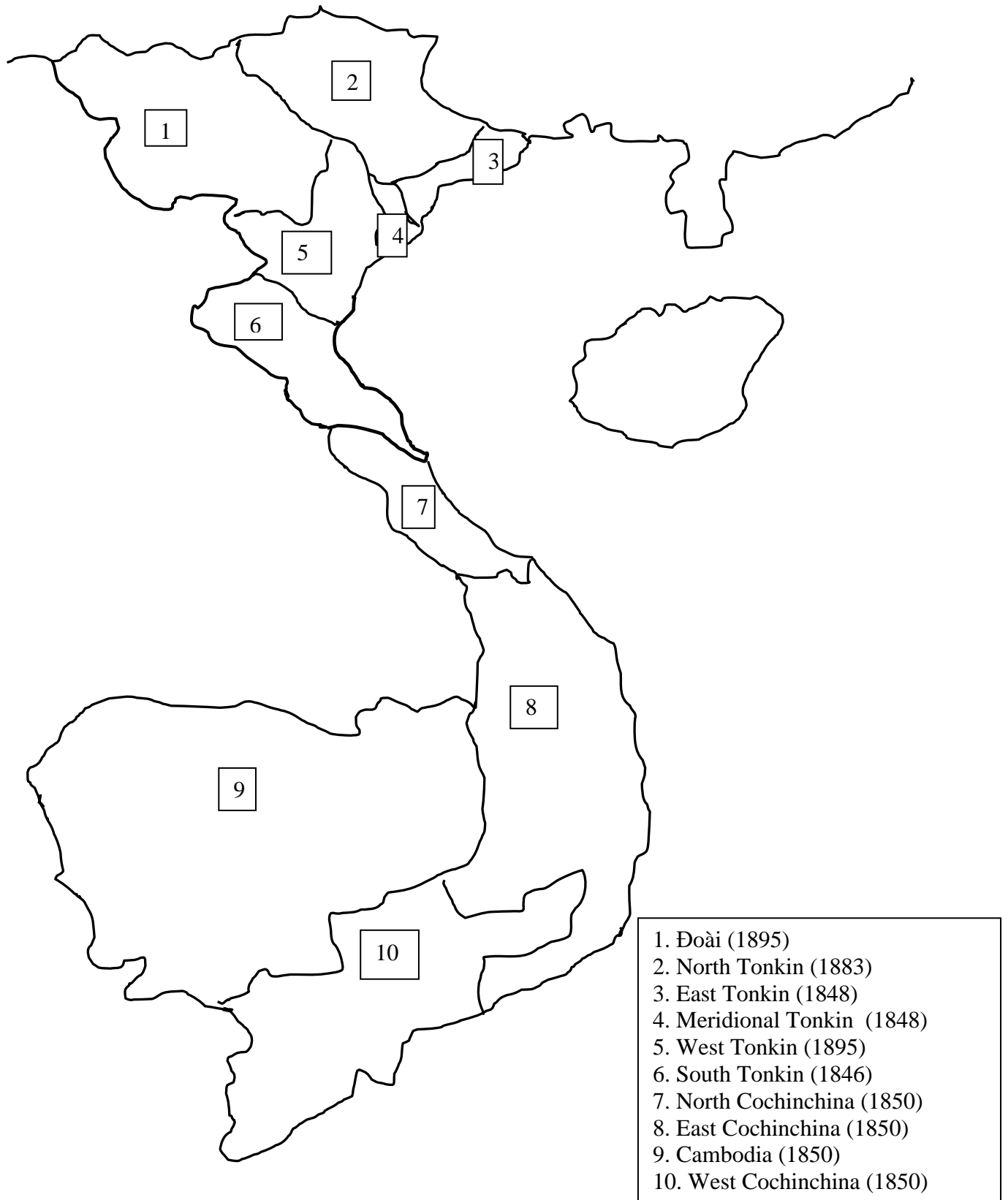


Appendix H: Vietnamese Catholic Colonies in Southeast Asia in the Nineteenth Century

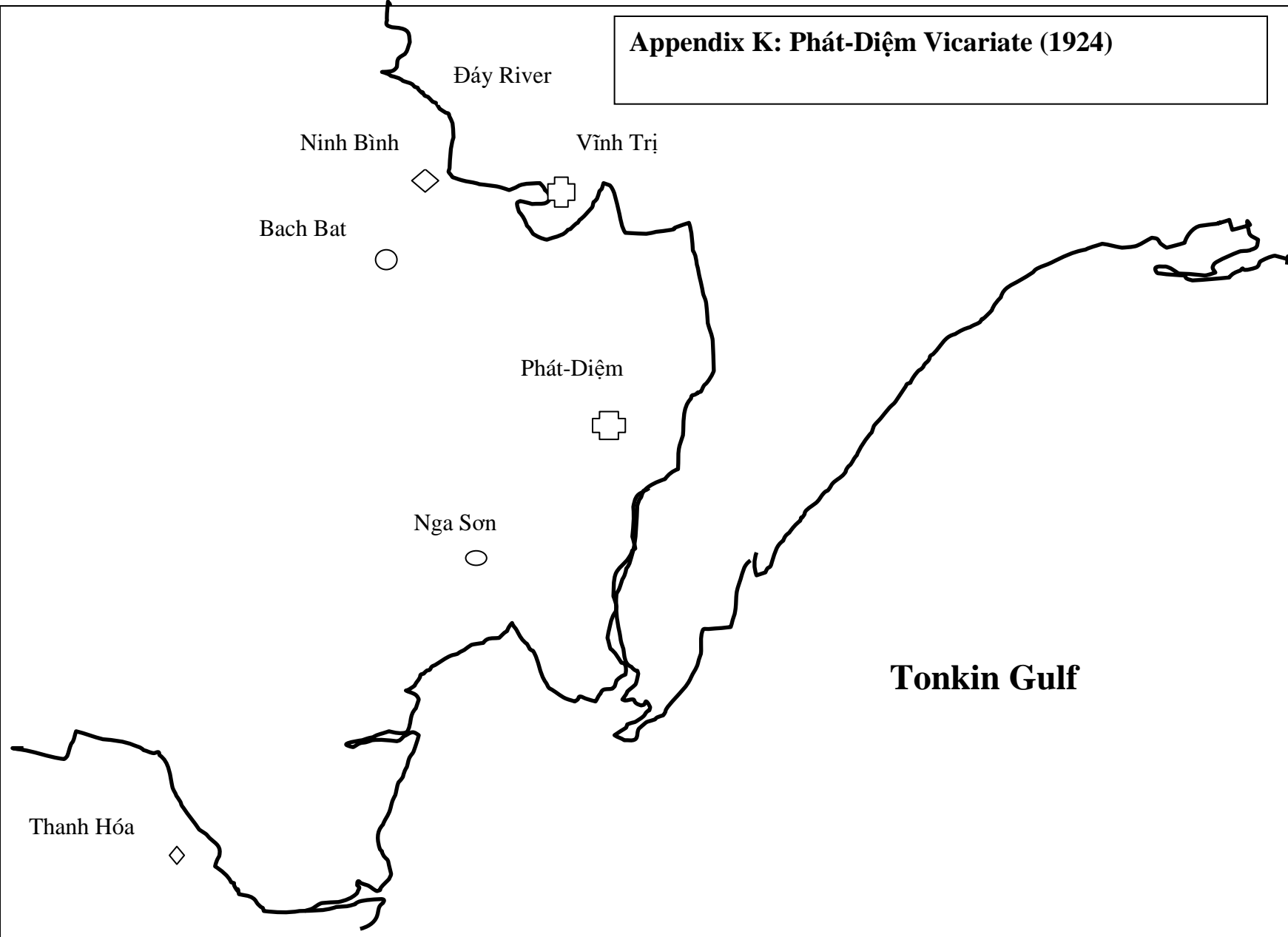
Appendix I: Indochina Missions (1670s-1840s)



Appendix J: Indochina Missions in the Early Twentieth Century



**Appendix K: Phát-Diệm Vicariate (1924)**



## GLOSSARY

Bài vị	Spirit tablet
Ban trực tả	Left Banner (military)
Bộ Công	The Board of Works
Bộ Hình	The Board of Punishments
Bộ Lại	The Board of Appointments
Bộ Lễ	The Board of Rites
Bộ chính	Province finance administrator
Bồn đạo	Coreligionist
Cai cơ	Captain
Cai đội	First lieutenant
<i>Châu bản</i>	<i>Vermilion Records</i>
Chức việc	Village official
Công thần	Meritorious ministers
Cơ mật viện	Secret Council
Doanh	Military department
<i>Đại Nam liệt truyện</i>	<i>Imperial biographies</i>
<i>Đại Nam thực lục</i>	<i>Veritable Records</i>
Độc công Nội vụ phủ	The overseer of the royal citadel's Board of Works
Đồn điền	Military settlement
Đức thầy	Bishop
Giám mục đại diện tông tòa	Apostolic vicar
Giám quân Trung dinh	Commander of the Central Banner
Giáo hoá	Confucian civilizing mission
Hiệp tổng trấn	Assistant governor-general
Họ	Subparish ( <i>congrégation</i> )
Hội đồng giám mục Việt Nam	Vietnamese Episcopal Conference
Huyện	District
<i>Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ</i>	<i>Repertoire of Institutions and Regulations</i>
Khâm sai	Imperial commissioner
Lục-bát	Six-eight meter
Lý trưởng	Village head
Nha lại	District clerk
Ông đội	a company commander
Ông trùm	Churchwarden
Phó tướng tả quân	Assistant general of the Left Banner
Phó vệ úy	Lieutenant-colonel
Phủ	Prefecture
Quan	Ligature
Quốc sử quán	the Official History Office
Quốc tử giám	The Royal Academy
Suất đội	Sergeant major
Tả quân	Left Division
Thái bộc tự khanh	Intendant of the imperial treasury

Thầy cả	Father
Tiểu Tây	India
Tỉnh	Province
Tổng	Canton
Tổng đốc	General-governor
Tri huyện	District magistrate
Tuần phủ	Governor
Trấn	Protectorate/military prefecture
Trung hưng	Restoration
Viện Đô Sát	The Royal censorate
Vọng Các công thần	Bangkok meritorious ministers
Xã	Village
Xử lăng trì	death by slicing

Apostolic vicar	Giám mục đại diện tông toà
Assistant governor-general	Hiệp tổng trấn
Bangkok meritorious ministers	Vọng Các công thần
Bishop	Đức thầy
The Board of Appointments	Bộ Lại
The Board of Punishments	Bộ Hình
The Board of Rites	Bộ Lễ
The Board of Works	Bộ Công
Canton	Tổng
Captain	Cai cơ
Churchwarden	Ông trùm
Commander of the Central Banner	Giám quân Trung dinh
Confucian civilizing mission	Giáo hoá
Coreligionist	Bổn đạo
District	Huyện
District clerk	Nha lại
District magistrate	Tri huyện
Father	Thầy cả
First lieutenant	Cai đội
General-governor	Tổng đốc
Governor	Tuần phủ
<i>Imperial Biographies</i>	<i>Đại Nam liệt truyện</i>
Imperial commissioner	Khâm sai
India	Tiểu Tây
Intendant of the imperial treasury	Thái bộc tự khanh
Left Division	Tả quân
Left Banner	Ban trực tả
Lieutenant-colonel	Phó vệ úy
Ligature	Quan
Meritorious ministers	Công thần



Military department	Doanh
Military settlement	Đồn điền
The Official History Office	Quốc sử quán
Overseer of the royal citadel's Board of Works	Đốc công Nội vụ phủ
Prefecture	Phủ
Protectorate/military prefecture	Trấn
Province	Tỉnh
Province finance administrator	Bố chính
<i>Repertoire of Institutions and Regulations</i>	<i>Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ</i>
Restoration	Trung hưng
Royal Academy	Quốc tử giám
Royal censorate	Viện Đô Sát
Secret Council	Cơ mật viện
Sergeant major	Suất đội
Six Provinces	Lục tỉnh
Six-eight meter	Lục-bát
Spirit tablet	Bài vị
Subparish ( <i>congrégation</i> )	họ
<i>Veritable Records</i>	<i>Đại Nam thực lục</i>
<i>Vermilion Records</i>	<i>Châu bản</i>
Vietnamese Episcopal Conference	Hội đồng giám mục Việt Nam
Village	Xã
Village head	Lý trưởng
Village official	Chức việc

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### Abbreviations

<i>Annales de l'Association de la propagation de la foi</i>	APF
<i>Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué</i>	BAVH
<i>Châu bản triều Tự Đức (1848-1883)</i>	CBTTĐ
<i>Đại Nam liệt truyện</i>	ĐNLT
<i>Đại Nam thực lục chính biên</i>	ĐNTLCB
<i>Gia Định thung chí</i>	GĐTC
<i>Hoàng Việt luật lệ (Luật Gia Long)</i>	HVLL
<i>Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ</i>	KĐĐNHĐSL
<i>Lettres édifiantes et curieuses</i>	LEC
<i>Minh Mệnh chính yếu</i>	MMCY
<i>Nouvelles lettres édifiantes</i>	NLE
<i>Quốc sử di biên</i>	QSDB
<i>Quốc triều chánh biên toát yếu</i>	QTCBTY
<i>Sử ký Đại Nam Việt quốc triều</i>	SKĐNVQT
<i>Từ Hàn cử ngung</i>	THCN

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