

**Historical Interaction  
of China and Vietnam:  
Institutional and  
Cultural Themes**

**Edgar Wickberg**

*Compiler*

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, EAST ASIAN SERIES

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CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

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## Preface

*Edgar Wickberg*

This symposium owes its origin to a panel on Institutional and Cultural Themes in the Historical Interaction of China and Vietnam, which was part of the 1968 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. In view of the considerable interest shown in the panel and the scarcity of published research in English on the subject, most of the participants agreed on the desirability of publishing their papers with minimal revisions at an early date. The contributors to this volume would be the last to claim that these essays represent anything conclusive, either in terms of the subject or their own research and writing. Each of them could do much more. But rather than develop each essay through further research for later publication, we decided to offer the symposium now in this more modest form, prompted particularly by the tremendous research gap in this field. The scarcity of Vietnam specialists has been commented upon more than once in recent years. On the more specific, but obviously important subject of Sino-Vietnamese relations, competent people are even less numerous. Perhaps this publication, besides the information it contains, may serve as an introduction to some of these people and to the kind of research they are doing. It may also indicate the kinds of research problems that exist and the nature of materials available for tackling them. It may even help to recruit others to labor in this important but largely neglected field.

The contributors to this volume, historians all, represent some diversity in background and training. Mr. Whitmore and Mrs. Laffey, both Americans, were trained at Cornell. Mr. Woodside, from Canada, is a Harvard product. Mr. Lam, who holds a Louvain doctorate, brings the special competence and concern of one who lives with the problem he writes about.

Regrettably, in a modest publication of this kind it is impossible to include Chinese characters or diacritical marks on Vietnamese and French words.

Except for internal consistency within each paper, no effort has been made to impose stylistic uniformity. The seemingly contradictory terms "king" and "emperor," in reference to the Vietnamese ruler, are, in fact, compatible. They were kings with respect to China, emperors with respect to Vietnam.

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# Vietnamese Adaptations of Chinese Government Structure in the Fifteenth Century

*John K. Whitmore*

We all know the heavy, indeed we might say integral, influence which the Chinese state and civilization has had upon the development of the Vietnamese state and civilization. In less sophisticated terms, it has been said that Vietnam is merely a lesser, and perhaps slightly cheaper, version of her grandiose northern neighbor—a Smaller Dragon, as it were.

I will naturally contest this view of slavish imitation and will attempt to show that, in terms of her civil government structure, Vietnam did not blindly follow China's lead, though she did, without a doubt, borrow the latter's institutional forms. My position, and a theme which runs through these papers, is that Vietnam used the forms conveniently offered by China to fit and to suit her own purposes.

The period of concern to this paper is the fifteenth century. It begins with the establishment of the new state and government by Le Loi in the 1420's during and following his successful campaign against the occupying Ming forces. However, in order to understand the choice of governmental forms available to Le Loi it is good to look at the form adopted by the earlier Vietnamese governments of the Ly and the Tran dynasties from the eleventh century to the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

In tenth century East Asia, the grand model of government was that of the recently defunct T'ang dynasty.<sup>2</sup> In this model, directly under the Emperor there existed the counsellors and, to a lesser extent, the scholarly secretarial assistants. The counsellors in turn controlled the bureaucracy and its officials, specifically the Six Ministries. I must here make clear the distinction between the counsellors and the officials, as I use these terms. The counsellors might or might not have risen from the official ranks; their attribute is that they possessed a wide, functionally unlimited range of power, especially in terms of policy-making. The latter, that is, members of the bureaucracy at large, were on the other hand functionally limited in their tasks and generally not direct participants in policy formation. They might, however, contribute according to their specific function or submit memorials.

In a very simplified way, we may say that this was the form of government which the Sung dynasty adopted, with some changes of its own.

These changes occurred primarily in the great emphasis placed upon civil and literati control for which this dynasty is noted. At this time, the early eleventh century, the first of Vietnam's major dynasties, the Ly, was established. Its initial form of government, of which we have some record, generally followed the Sung form as it had been adopted by a lesser and earlier Vietnamese dynasty. Emphasis, however, was placed upon the counsellors, for imperial henchmen and relatives received these positions. The bureaucratic element remained undeveloped. Even later in the century, when Chinese Confucian forms were being purposefully adopted, this emphasis on the counsellors did not change, and the bureaucracy retained its insignificant role.<sup>3</sup>

The transfer of power from the Ly to the Tran dynasty in the early thirteenth century occurred at the Court level, and the new dynasty merely stepped into the shoes of the old, without changing the form of government at all. Indeed, a decade later the Tran monarch seems to have placed an even greater stress on the positions of the counsellors. In time, the bureaucratic tentacles did branch out, but the emphasis on the counsellors remained. This is evidenced by the fact that the change of power at the end of the dynasty was again within the group of Imperial counsellors. If there was any change in the pattern, it could be said that there was a tendency in the fourteenth century to shift from the Sung pattern back to the old T'ang form.<sup>4</sup>

By 1400, we might say that there had been a definite borrowing of Chinese governmental forms, but that this borrowing consisted essentially of the positions at the top of the T'ang-style structure, that is, those of the counsellors. The bureaucratic offices gained in extent if not in stature as the previous four centuries passed, but it seems that the government of Vietnam at this time can be more easily termed "aristocratic" or "oligarchic" than "bureaucratic." The change from an oligarchic to a "bureaucratic" government had come to China under the Sung dynasty some centuries earlier; it would come to Vietnam only in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Thus by the 1420's, the traditional Vietnamese pattern of government was a form ideal for oligarchic control in its stress on the role of the counsellors. The Ming occupation in the first quarter of the fifteenth century had little effect on this concept. If anything, it would have sown dislike for any alternative form offered by the Ming, including the great administrative changes undertaken by Ming T'ai-tsu, of which more will be said later. The pre-Ming form, basically that of the T'ang, suited Le Loi's needs well, and in Nguyen Trai, his celebrated civil adviser and a major scholar, we might see an exponent of the old, pure form offered by the T'ang.

Le Loi brought with him to the Throne those men, predominantly his neighbors and kinsmen, who had supported him in ten years of revolt and who had become his senior generals. Gradually, as the victory became more and more apparent, we see these men emerging with the titles of old T'ang counsellors. Once Le Loi had gained the Throne and had established his own state and dynasty, these generals became his major civil advisors. The advisory pattern of the T'ang became an oligarchic pattern for the Vietnamese. The bureaucratic portion of the government was also established, but it remained relatively undeveloped. There is little sign that it had any significant role in the formation of government policy.<sup>5</sup>

At this point, I would like to draw a comparison between the process of institutional development in the early Ming dynasty and that in the early Le dynasty. Both dynasties came to power on the strength of the military leadership of their founders, and, unlike the Sung founder, both these leaders, Le Loi and Ming T'ai-tsu, initially formed their government with the men who had helped to bring them to power. Such attachments are generally personal, and, in these circumstances, we may see the Emperor as surrounded by men who were seeking their just reward for services rendered. The central problem in both these newly formed dynasties soon became one of the establishment of the power of the Throne and the disestablishment of the power of the followers. This problem involved the removal of those elements in the Court who were capable of concentrating power in their own hands and of challenging the central authority of the Throne.

The process whereby this transformation occurred in the Hung-wu period in China took place in the 1370's and 1380's, but is crystalized in what is known as the "Hu Wei-yung affair."<sup>6</sup> By 1380, when the affair broke out, Ming T'ai-tsu had already begun to undercut the independent action and power of the Secretariat. The ministers of the Secretariat were men who had followed T'ai-tsu in his successful challenge to the Mongols. During the affair, and for fourteen years thereafter, T'ai-tsu set loose and maintained a campaign to deprive this "old guard" of the power it held and to insure the penetration of Imperial authority down to the lowest level of government. In 1380, the two prime ministers, one of whom was Hu Wei-yung, were removed and the posts themselves abolished. The government became one of Imperial authority and bureaucratic involvement. In the following decade and a half, the survivors of the "old guard" were purged and executed. T'ai-tsu had achieved his desired transition from powerful counsellors to the autonomy of the Throne.

In Vietnam, following the establishment of the Le dynasty, the problem and the outcome were similar to the Ming case, but the process



differed due to historical accident and human personality.<sup>7</sup> As in the first years of the Hung-wu period, the generals who had helped place the founder on the throne surrounded him as the high ministers. Le Loi, however, died at a relatively young age after only six years of rule. His "old guard" promptly gained the authority left vacant as a young prince ascended the throne. For thirty years this oligarchy survived either as the central power or as a serious threat to the power of the Throne. Le Loi's son attempted to retain the power for himself by displacing the counsellors and relying on the officials, but he soon died in mysterious circumstances. A grandson of Le Loi succeeded his father at the tender age of one, under the regency of his young mother. This Empress Dowager also tried to rely on the officials, but the oligarchic pressure became too great and she finally left the throne to her young son a decade later. The late 1450's saw the complete establishment of the oligarchic power and control within the government held by the counsellors.

This control was strongly threatened in 1459 with the usurpation of the throne by a dispossessed older brother of the young Emperor. The usurper, Nghi Dan, was probably backed by bureaucratic elements. He immediately sought to displace the counsellors from their positions of power and to bring the officials and their functionally specific posts, the Six Ministries in particular, into play as the major arbiters of government policy. Naturally, this Hung-wu-like challenge upset the oligarchy, and, after the failure of one attempted counter coup, the second try succeeded. Nghi Dan died and his government by officials relapsed. A young half-brother was placed on the throne as the Emperor Thanh-tong.

Thanh-tong was the youngest of Le Loi's four grandsons and seems to have been allowed to pursue his own intellectual interests. At the time of his ascension, he was in the process of becoming a confirmed member of the literati and Confucian scholar, trained as he was by officials who had passed the Confucian examinations. With the oligarchy back in power and no doubt feeling rather confident, the young Emperor was allowed to select these officials as his attendants and to use them in high bureaucratic positions. Gradually, with the advice and assistance of his former mentors, Thanh-tong began to undertake from a position of weakness what Ming T'ai-tsu had accomplished from a position of strength—to bring all levels of government under direct Imperial control and to rid the Throne of any threat from the counsellors.

The prime instrument used by the Vietnamese in this task was the Neo-Confucian concept of "Restoration"—to bring "righteousness" back to the government. The tactical and strategic use of this concept was evidently formulated by the Emperor and his bureaucratic entourage in the year following his ascension to the throne. It allowed them to subvert

the strength of the oligarchy in the name of a principle which the counsellors could not openly or legitimately challenge and around which they could be inspired to rally. Gradually, over the following five years, the young Emperor and his scholarly advisors outmaneuvered the oligarchy and emerged with their Confucian platform as the policy-makers of the Vietnamese state.

It is interesting to note that, whether by coincidence or not, the consequent steps taken by Thanh-tong in restructuring his government parallel fairly closely those taken by Ming T'ai-tsu in the previous century.<sup>8</sup> The main point in both cases was, of course, the abolition of the ministerial positions and the upgrading of the bureaucratic offices to the policy level. Surrounding this major change, however, were a number of lesser changes which reinforced it. Both T'ai-tsu and Thanh-tong instituted a Communications Office (T'ung-cheng-ssu) linking the Capital and the provinces as their first step, and restructured the provincial administrative apparatus as a following step. Both then splintered the monolithic authority existing in the administrative and military spheres. Both stressed the proper selection and placement of officials, the maintenance of public communication channels, and the restriction of private means of influencing government action. Both used low-ranking officials to investigate the operation of the various government bureaux. Having removed the counsellors, both came to rely on the scholarly secretarial staff of the Han-lin and other academies for assistance and advice. Finally, both took protective action by establishing a personal guard.

Should we then write off Thanh-tong and his reforms as being merely imitations of the great Ming Emperor and what he had done? I think not. The role of coincidence does fade as the list of parallels lengthens, and we must assume that Thanh-tong had been schooled in the procedure by which T'ai-tsu had achieved his goal. Yet we can see the imaginative application of T'ai-tsu's method in terms of the specific Vietnamese situation. To have followed T'ai-tsu's bloody means to the letter would have torn the state of Dai-Viet apart, as happened after Thanh-tong's death. The goal of each was the same—to strengthen the Throne against potential pockets of power in the Court and administration. Thanh-tong and his scholarly advisers responded to the same problem as T'ai-tsu had and, in all probability with the aid of the Ming historical record, came to follow a path remarkably similar to the Ming since the answer required was similar.

The final answer to the problem given by Thanh-tong is encompassed in his administrative edict of 1471,<sup>9</sup> a proclamation which supplied the ideal form of the Vietnamese government structure for the following three centuries. To glance at the list of titles used in this structure, one

could easily pass it off as a carbon copy of the Ming structure. It is very similar, for the previously cited reasons of furnishing a similar answer to a similar problem and of the availability and prestige of the Chinese model. Yet if we look at the Vietnamese answer more closely, we find an organically related structure adopted to the Vietnamese situation and going beyond the Ming answer.

In this proclamation, Thanh-tong began, as we have done, by very briefly summarizing Chinese and Vietnamese institutional development. The Han and T'ang government of counsellors could be good, he stated, but it could also be quite bad, since it tended to suppress intelligent action and to cause the formation of cliques. The latter problems had occurred in the early decades of Le rule, he felt, as the Ly and Tran forms were followed. Thanh-tong, on his part, broke with the past and abolished or made honorary the positions of the counsellors. Instead, he placed the policy-forming apparatus firmly in the hands of the bureaucracy, with the Throne as the ultimate authority.

The administrative structure of Vietnam in the latter half of the fifteenth century resulted from a combination of the nature of Vietnam and the nature of the Emperor. First, Vietnam, in reality about the size of a Chinese province, had a separate structure of her own. Thus, the Vietnamese government reached more deeply into the society at large than its Chinese equivalent. It also had fewer officials. Second, Thanh-tong wished to establish a balanced structure completely responsive to his direction all the way down to the district level. In setting up his new structure, Thanh-tong gave consistently lower ranks to his officials than their Ming equivalents held. This appears a consequence of having fewer officials and of using the lower grades of the nine-level system for more significant officials, since the lesser officials did not exist. At the same time, Thanh-tong readjusted the relative positions of the various offices. The Six Ministries received top authority and operated as policy-making organs within their specific functions. They were watched by the six low-ranking Departments and assisted by the six Courts, a Vietnamese innovation. The provincial offices were reordered both in relation to themselves and to their central offices, an even balance resulting among them. The secretarial offices were uplifted and given a position only slightly below the administrative ranks, a decided difference from the Ming structure.<sup>10</sup>

What we behold, then, in our all too simplified examination of the fifteenth century Vietnamese government structure, is that basically its source was China. What we should keep in mind, however, is that the borrowing took place in order to solve the same problems that had plagued the Chinese—first, how to control a state, and then, how to es-

establish the power of the Throne. The Ming answer to the challenge of the counsellors became the Le answer, with a blend of the T'ang secretarial element which Thanh-tong favored. None of the Chinese forms was held as sacred in itself, while all were used inasmuch as they were needed. The Vietnamese felt free to remold them to their own situation.

## Notes

1. The description of the pre-1460 Vietnamese governmental forms comes from Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Luai Chi*, trans. (Hanoi, 1961), II, 6-10.

2. See Robert des Rotours, *Traite des Fonctionnaires et Traite de l'Armee* (Paris, 1932), and J. I. Crump, Jr., "Borrowed" T'ang Titles and Offices in the Yoro Code," in *Occasional Papers*, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2 (1952), 35-58. See Appendix Diagram I.

3. Chu, *op. cit.*, 6-7.

4. *Ibid.*, 7-8.

5. See John K. Whitmore, "The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam," Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1968, chap. 1, and the *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, chap. 10. The copies of the latter used here were the text numbered X-85 of the Toyo Bunko collection in Tokyo and the text in the Durand Collection now held by Yale University. For government structure see Appendix Diagrams II and III following.

6. See Teng Ssu-yu, "Ming T'ai-Tsu's Destructive and Constructive Work," *Chinese Culture* 8, 3 (1967), 14-38, esp. 20-28, and Ed. L. Farmer, "The Dual Capitol System of the Early Ming Dynasty," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1968, for descriptions of the activities of this period.

7. For a detailed description of this process, see Whitmore, *op. cit.* Where the present article is concerned mainly with the source of the general pattern used by the Vietnamese, this dissertation deals entirely with the evolution of the pattern in the Vietnamese scene.

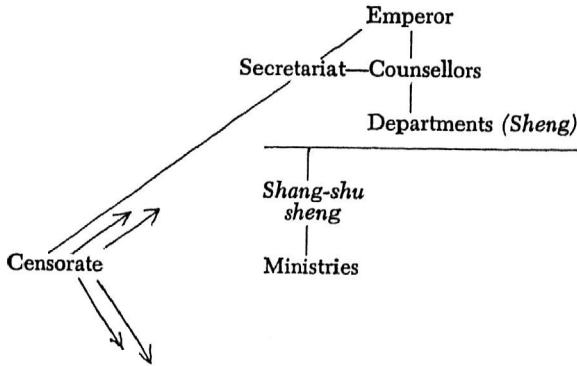
8. Compare Teng, *op. cit.*, and Whitmore, *op. cit.*, chap. 4.

9. See the *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, *op. cit.*, chap. 12, 66-67, and the *Le Trieu Quan Che* (Hanoi, A. 51), 1-3. The author hopes to publish a translation of the latter work. See Appendix Diagram V.

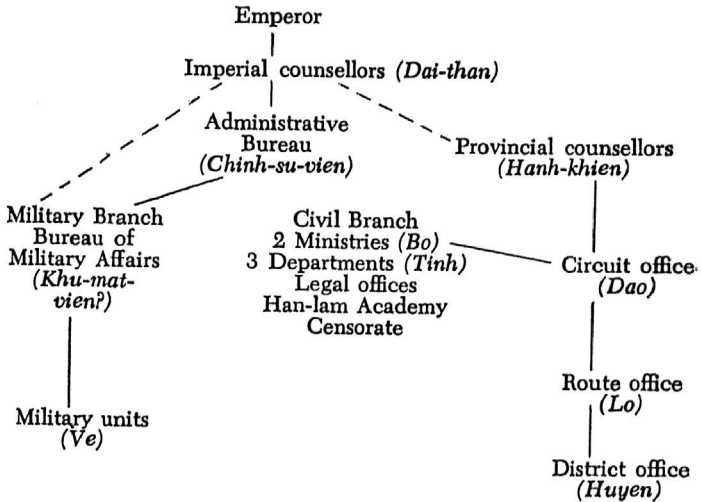
10. For the Vietnamese offices and their ranks, see Le Kim Ngan, *To-chuc Chinh-quyen Trung-uong doi Trieu Le Thanh-tong (1460-1497)* (The Organization of Central Power in the Reign of . . .) (Saigon, 1963). These offices can be compared with the Ming offices listed in Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958), 1-66, and "An Index of Terms and Titles in 'Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty,'" *Ibid.* 23 (1961), 127-151. The Ming studies have both been reprinted in John L. Bishop, ed., *Studies of Governmental Institutions in Chinese History*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies, 23 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 57-124, 125-151. See also and compare Appendix Diagrams IV and V following.

# Diagrams of Government Structure

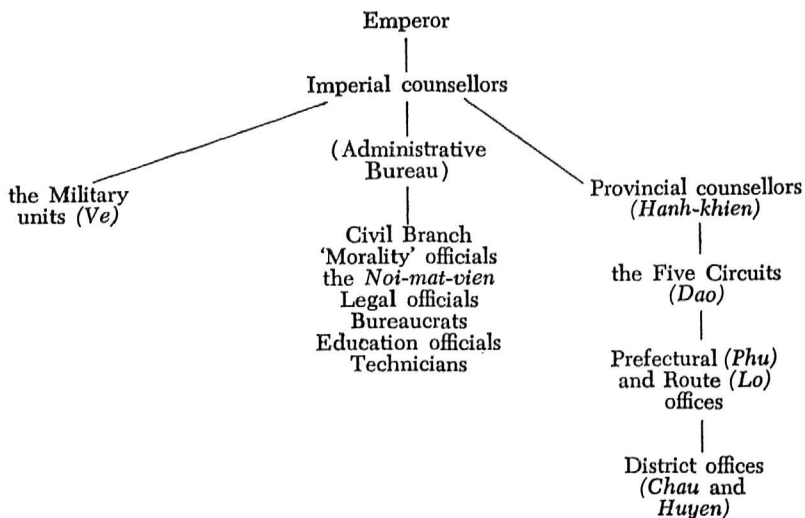
I. The T'ang Model.  
From Des Rotours (1932) and Crump (1952).



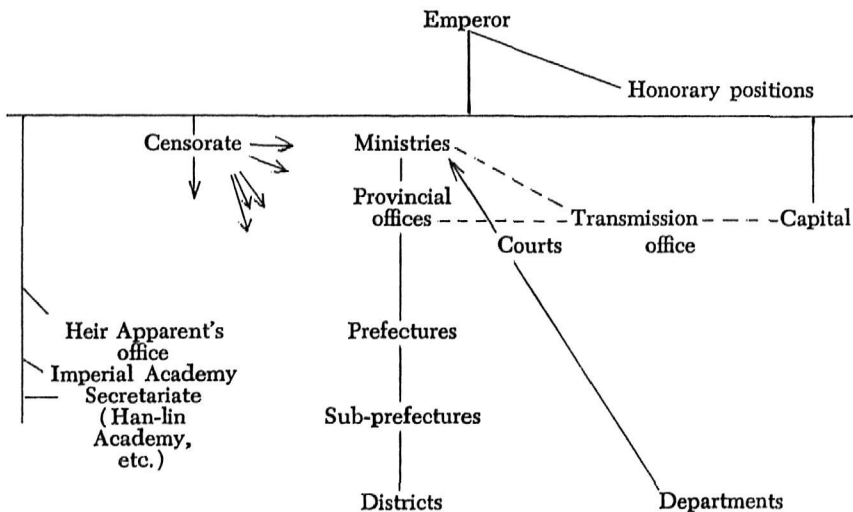
II. Le Loi's Government, ca. 1429.  
From Chu (1961), II, 9-11.



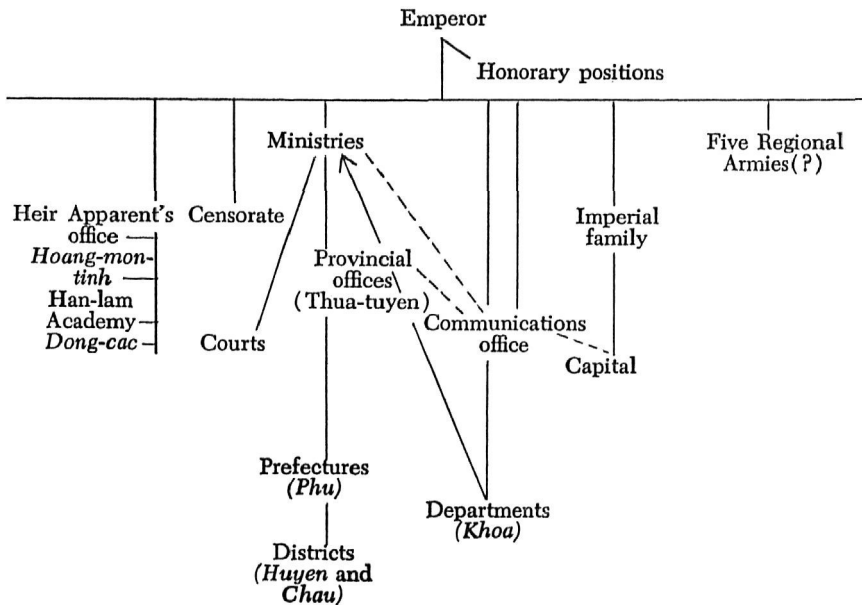
III. Le Nhan-tong's Government, 1456.  
From the *TT*, 11, 92b-93b.



IV. The Ming Model (drawn to scale according to rank of office).  
From Hucker (1958).



V. Le Thanh-tong's Government, 1471 (drawn to scale according to rank of office).  
 From Ngan (1963).



# Vietnamese Buddhism, the Vietnamese Court, and China in the 1800's

*Alexander Woodside*

## *The "Three Religions" in China and Vietnam*

The complexity of the cultural interaction of Chinese and Vietnamese societies was reflected almost as much in Vietnamese religious institutions as it was in civil bureaucratic ones. At no time in Vietnamese history was this reflection more interesting and variegated than in the nineteenth century.

The coexistence in traditional Chinese society of the three major Chinese religious creeds, Buddhism, Taoism and popular Confucianism, is well known. At the Chinese court, such coexistence was exemplified by rulers like the Ch'ing Yung-cheng emperor (1723-1736), an eclectic who published both collections of Confucian "sacred edicts," in order to regulate the Chinese social and educational order, and scholarly anthologies of the writings of past Ch'an (Zen) masters. In Chinese villages, such coexistence was demonstrated even more sharply, perhaps, by the hundreds of "three religion halls" (*san-chiao-t'ang*) which flourished in provinces like Honan in the eighteenth century and which the Ch'ien-lung emperor attempted to liquidate. In these halls, a gilded statue of the Buddha occupied the central position, but shorter statues of Confucius and Lao-tzu stood on each side.<sup>1</sup>

Buddhism, Taoism and popular Confucianism also coexisted and intermingled as the "three religions" (*tam giao*) in Vietnam. Yet it must not be too quickly assumed that the Vietnamese religious mixture was completely identical to the Chinese one. The Buddhist element was much stronger at least in the original Vietnamese mixture than it was in the Chinese, and the Taoist and popular Confucian elements were weaker. When Buddhism had initially entered Vietnamese society, it had been introduced directly by Indian missionaries from the south. It had not encountered entrenched Taoist and Confucian religious and philosophical practices in Vietnam as it had in China, since Taoism and Confucianism were regarded by Vietnamese at that time as being merely the creeds of their Chinese political oppressors, and of refugee Chinese scholars in Vietnam. In other words, Buddhism had not been initially mistaken for a variation of Taoism in Vietnam as it had been in late Han China.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, strong Vietnamese dynasties seem to have encouraged the evolution of a "three religion" composite creed in the villages, perhaps as a means of permeating Vietnamese Buddhism with a



Sinicizing Confucian influence. The Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris preserves a text which was printed in Vietnam in 1817, entitled "The Veritable Records of the Standard Law of the Three Religions" (*Tam Giao chinh do thuc luc*). It was a book of instructions on rites for the dead, intended for the use of Vietnamese village priests of the Gia-long era and invaluable to social historians. In its preface it insisted that Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism were "three families joined into one, like the legs of a tripod."<sup>3</sup>

More important, after Mahayana Buddhism had consolidated itself in China it succeeded in commanding the allegiance of the Vietnamese, who, being generally under the Chinese cultural spell, were more likely to read scriptures and religious tracts in classical Chinese than in Indian languages. Coming down to the early 1800's, the practical beliefs of ordinary Buddhists in both China and Vietnam often centered upon the same pantheons and similar rituals. They were even organized into the same schools. Vietnamese Buddhists, like their Chinese counterparts, meditated upon the Buddha Amitabha and commonly worshipped his bodhisattva helper, the Goddess of Mercy (Chinese: *Kuan-yin*, Vietnamese: *Quan Am*). Rituals that leading Chinese Buddhists had originally developed were faithfully imported into Vietnam, complete with their Chinese terminology. One of the most popular Buddhist rituals in nineteenth century Vietnam, for example, was the rite for the salvation of the dead entitled the "land and water high mass" (*thuy luc dao tru-ong*). According to legend, this ritual was pioneered by the pious Chinese emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty in the sixth century A.D. When the Vietnamese emperor Minh-mang (1820-1840) ordered performances of this service in Hue temples in the 1830's (for dead soldiers who had served in the dynasty's armies), the performances were carried out in classical Chinese. In sum, Vietnamese patterns of cultural borrowing from China dominated Vietnamese religion to such an impressive extent that modern Vietnamese Buddhists have continued to be unusually sensitive to trends in Chinese Buddhism. One leading historian of the twentieth century Buddhist revival in southern and central Vietnam has declared that the original fountainhead of this revival movement, the famous Saigon Buddhist studies association which was created in 1931, was directly inspired by the Chinese Buddhist renaissance of the 1920's.<sup>4</sup>

The Chinese and Vietnamese religious worlds overlapped so much in the 1700's and early 1800's that many south Chinese priests could emigrate to Vietnam and develop large religious followings there. Ta Nguyen Thieu, the builder of the Temple of the Nation's Grace (*Quoc An Tu*) in Thua Thien province in central Vietnam, acknowledged Chinese Teochiu ancestry. Another late mediaeval Zen patriarch of the Hue area, Giac

Linh, was born in Kwangtung.<sup>5</sup> However, Buddhist thinkers were more rarely recruited from the ranks of eccentric Confucian scholars in Vietnam than they were in China. In Vietnam there were no men like P'eng Shao-sheng, the eighteenth century Chinese doctoral degree-holder whose fatal interest in Wang Yang-ming had eventually led him into Buddhist devotionalism. Wang Yang-ming's ambiguous philosophy had never systematically spread from China to Vietnam. This famous Chinese intellectual bridge between Confucianism and Buddhism was, for the most part, unknown to Vietnamese before the twentieth century.

This does not mean that Confucianism and Buddhism did not successfully merge into one serviceable, syncretic faith in Vietnam as they did in China. In fact, Buddhist and Confucian rites sometimes became so inextricably confused in traditional Vietnamese society that even at the highest level an emperor like Thieu-tri (1841-1847) could publicly confess his ignorance whether certain mourning procedures had been Buddhist or Confucian in origin.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the familist ideology of Confucian social organization strongly affected Vietnamese Buddhist conceptions of the after-life and the ceremonies which these conceptions called for. Villagers were taught to show compassion not only toward the living, but also toward the dead, especially the lost souls (*vong hon*) of the dead. "Lost souls" were particularly the souls of men who had committed sins at the time of their death (*i.e.*, predatory bureaucrats), or the souls of men who lacked living descendants to offer sacrifices for them on the anniversaries of their deaths. The necessity of having a filial posterity was underlined by the religious observances as well as by the Confucian classics. Furthermore, it was believed that wandering souls continued to heed the family relationships—care of children, solicitude for elders—after death. As the brilliant poet Nguyen Du (1765-1820) wrote:

Souls that have gone beyond, and souls that have gone  
astray, who knows where they are now?  
Perhaps they hide by the wayside, or in the bushes.  
Or perhaps they shelter at the source of a stream or  
at the end of the horizon;  
Or perhaps in clumps of grass or in the shadow of a tree,  
Or perhaps, abandoned and friendless, in that country  
inn or on this bridge. . . .  
The souls hear the roosters crowing and look for a  
way to conceal themselves,  
Only when the sun sets do they issue forth in a  
numbed melancholy;  
In tattered clothes, they carry their young, and lead  
their old by the hand. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that Nguyen Du himself was a member of a northern scholar-official family, clearly the concept of an underworld where souls went to receive justice played a stronger role in Vietnamese peasant religion than it did in the religion for the elite. For Vietnam, as for China, it is perhaps more analytically profitable to distinguish between the religious beliefs of these two social levels than it is to make distinctions among the "three religions" of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

But the real point is that the kinship system values of the Confucian elite were absorbed into, and modified by, Vietnamese peasant life and Vietnamese folk religion. The influence of filial piety and considerations of Buddhist compassion combined. Vietnamese village graveyards might contain small open-air shrines (*am chung-sinh*) where the villagers, often led by sorceresses materially supported by the village, conducted services of expiation to free lost souls from suffering. Once a year, in the third month of the summer season, villagers cooked sacrificial soup at these graveyard shrines. The soup was then poured into banyan-leaf containers attached to sticks planted on both sides of the road. The graveyard sorceress, if one existed, would beat a prayer drum, or perform the ritual of rowing the ferry that would bring the souls back across the river Nai-ha to this world again especially for the ceremony. According to village beliefs, during this ceremony for homeless souls the souls themselves would fight among themselves to steal the soup in the banyan leaves. In this way a rural custom developed in Vietnam of invidiously designating people who died without descendants to minister to them as, roughly "thieves of the banyan leaf charity soup" (*cuop chao thi la da*). Their luckless spirits, lacking relatives in this world, had to wait for these annual village graveyard ceremonies before their hunger could be satisfied. In such a schematization of the past, the present and the future, the importance of the family unit and of familial solidarity colored and transcended most of the more purely "Buddhist" elements in the religious world of Vietnamese villagers.

### *Nineteenth Century Court Motives for Religious Control*

In the 1800's much of the Vietnamese civil bureaucracy was, despite some important deviations, a Southeast Asian copy of the Ch'ing civil bureaucracy in China.<sup>8</sup> It was inevitable, given the similarities of religious organization and belief in the two societies, that the Nguyen court in Hue would attempt to imitate Chinese bureaucratic procedures of religious control. In China these procedures had effectively prevented the emergence of ecclesiastical institutions powerful enough to rival the imperial institutional structure, although they had not prevented the emergence of seditious regional sects like the White Lotus rebels. In the 1800's, Vietnamese rulers desired to control Buddhist temples and their

shadowy world of "monks and temple watchmen" (*gioi su sai*) for four reasons.

First of all, during the Vietnamese civil wars of the 1700's, temples had served as the military refuges for enemies of the existing power-holders. The Tay-son Quang-trung emperor had even attempted to suppress many smaller temples. This was understandable: Buddhist monks in central Vietnam often organized militias out of their followers and led them into battle for the Nguyen cause against the Tay-sons. One anti-Tay-son monk in Quang Nghia province even purchased copper and iron and then cast axes and primitive guns in his temple. Tay-son soldiers belatedly surrounded his arsenal-temple only after local copper peddlers had reported his activities to them.<sup>9</sup> After 1802, the Nguyen court feared in turn that sympathizers of the defunct Le dynasty would congregate in Buddhist temples.

It also had a second, more general reason for wishing to control the Buddhist clergy. Obviously, monks and priests were religious specialists. They were experts in managing rituals and authorities in defining doctrine. Their professional specialization made them dominant in a certain sector of Vietnamese life, and thus conferred upon them a social autonomy which regular provincial officials found difficult to challenge. The court was determined to prevent the crystallization among the Buddhists of religious ideas that did not harmonize with more secular bureaucratic institutions.

A third reason which the nineteenth century Vietnamese court had for controlling Buddhist temples was especially significant. As Vietnamese civilization had expanded southward to the Mekong delta in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its pioneers had fallen heir to abandoned Cham and Cambodian temples. Vietnamese settlers took over these non-Vietnamese temples and simply superimposed Vietnamese names upon them. The province of Binh Dinh, in particular, was full of so-called "Viet-Cham" temples. In one instance, that of the Nhan-son temple in Tuy Vien district south of the old Cham capital of Vijaya (Cha Ban), Vietnamese monks draped Vietnamese clothing over two Cham-made stone idols they had found in the temple precincts, casually absorbing them into Vietnamese worship, although the monks were quite unclear which deities the two Cham idols had originally represented.<sup>10</sup> Saigon itself was the site of a former Cambodian town. In 1838 the financial commissioner of Gia Dinh reported that wooden religious idols had driven Confucian-style tablets, representing the city's tutelary deity, out of the official Saigon city temple. This report of the demise of Chinese forms of corporate religion in southern towns greatly alarmed Minh-mang.<sup>11</sup> Here was evidence that the official Sino-Vietnamese religious

conflation of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism was breaking down. As Vietnamese society spread south, Vietnamese Buddhism seemed to be becoming more "Indianized." The Vietnamese court resolved to prevent it from losing its Sino-Vietnamese cultural characteristics. In other words, the court's religious control policy was linked to its effort to Sinicize its southern frontier lands.

The fourth reason the Nguyen court had for circumscribing the spread of Buddhism, institutionally and otherwise, was that Buddhist beliefs offered a not always harmless means of escape to intellectuals fatigued by four decades (since the 1770's) of civil war. In turn, Vietnamese intellectuals who wrote religious sermons in the 1800's very commonly transformed these sermons into palpable social commentaries which did not flatter either the court or its political order.

One celebrated example of such an early nineteenth century socio-religious commentary has since become one of the great tragic masterpieces of Vietnamese literature: Nguyen Du's *Chieu Hon Ca* (Song Summoning Back The Souls of the Dead). It is still chanted by monks today in rural Vietnam at village altars where ceremonies are performed to deliver souls from hell; the fact that Vietnamese peasants still know and sing this poem is, of course, proof of their religious tradition's remarkable continuity. Nguyen Du himself was a northern scholar more loyal to the defunct Le dynasty than to the new Nguyen court. As a Hue official after 1802 he was both unenthusiastic and unassertive, once being publicly rebuked by the young Minh-mang for his "timidity" at imperial audiences.<sup>12</sup> To the many modern Vietnamese scholars who have studied him, the background of this particular poem is immensely controversial. Some have argued that Du was a follower of Theravada rather than of the more common (in Vietnam) Mahayana Buddhism, some have argued that his beliefs about the souls of the dead came from an individual "amalgamation" of the Theravada and Mahayana creeds, and some have even hypothesized that he wrote his poem in the aftermath of a great natural disaster or epidemic. In most of Du's writings, the Buddhist philosophy is actually more implicit than explicit as a "pure" statement of faith.<sup>13</sup>

But no matter how controversial the historical origins of the *Chieu Hon Ca* are, for the purposes of this paper what is important is that the poem is a grim indictment, expressed in Buddhist terms, of what the author saw as being an atomistic, conflict-torn society. In expounding the causes of suffering after death—namely, the cruelties caused by lust and acquisitiveness— Du implied that Vietnam's ruling bureaucratic class was doomed, in a way that the peasantry was not. He described, in turn, the sins and the resulting miseries of the various ranks of the souls of the dead

—rulers, court women, bureaucrats, soldiers, merchants, wandering scholars, sailors. His poem was and is not meant to be read quietly. Instead it was and is chanted, slowly and rhythmically, in order to sound like a dream, in which the life-time social distinctions among the various souls enumerated become progressively more blurred, the more deeply the dream, or poem, takes hold of its listeners. The Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation supplied a framework of thought, common to both scholars and peasants, by which the vices of the ruling elite could be attacked in the 1800's. In a great explosion of social antipathy Du suggested that the new mandarins of the Hue court had earned themselves contemptible reincarnations (*i.e.*, as dogs) because of their endless political aggrandizements. (In Vietnam today, in popular cults, mediums will hum some of the following lines if they consider their questioners to be unduly hostile or guilt-ridden):

So you there, all you people with your tall hats and  
your broad sleeves,  
The power of your vermilion brushes was such that life  
and death rested in your hands.  
Books dealing with government were sheathed in your  
full bag like dangerous weapons. . . .  
The more prosperous you were, the more hatred you accumulated.  
A hundred kinds of ghosts lurk in graves and tombs about you;  
With all your thousands of pieces of gold you cannot  
change yourselves,  
Your entertainment palaces and theaters have crumbled,  
where are they now! . . .  
You have become lost souls, reeling about here and there.  
Carrying such a weight of hatred, do you really think you  
should seek a way to reincarnate yourselves?<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, even in urging peasants to make contributions to village shrines, as gestures of compassion which would help to earn them salvation, Du declared that in the next world the unjust social hierarchy of early nineteenth century Vietnam would be overturned:

Altars for the relief of the poor agree with the  
words of Buddhism.  
What is a donation worth anyway? A bowl of congee,  
a bundle of joss sticks.  
Just call it a piece of cloth and an ingot of gold,  
Helping you to earn travel expenses for your ascent  
to Heaven.

Who arrives there? The superior and the lowly are  
re-seated in rank,  
You should not worry how much you spend in order to  
earn grace. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Hence the Nguyen court was sensitive to the subversive possibilities the most orthodox Confucian intellectuals might discover in the Buddhist outlook at times when socio-economic or even dynastic conditions deteriorated. Social dislocations in Vietnam in the early 1800's seem to have affected all classes of society. Such dislocations obviously cannot be compared with the more extreme social and cultural changes of the early 1900's. These changes nonetheless affected the Vietnamese population more unevenly at first—fragmenting it severely and producing new religious sects which often served the needs of specific social clienteles. Yet the lack of any religious sectarianism in the early 1800's as extensive as the sectarianism of the present century was to be is unimportant. In the dynasty's eyes religion had to be subservient to bureaucratic politics. In no institutional sphere could there be permitted a balance of power between them.

#### *Vietnamese Court Control of Temples and Vietnamese Trade with China*

A fundamental principle which governed the Nguyen court's religious controls was the extension of court interference into the recruitment of Buddhist monks and priests. Theoretically, a man could not become a Buddhist ecclesiastic in nineteenth century Vietnam, exempt from corvee and taxation, unless he secured an "ordination certificate" (*do diep*) from the Board of Rites in Hue. The institution of centrally granted "ordination certificates" (Chinese: *tu-tieh*) was more than 1,000 years old in China. It was, in Vietnam, outwardly just another example of a borrowed Chinese bureaucratic technique. On the other hand, the histories of "ordination certificates" in Ch'ing China and Nguyen Vietnam contained stark divergences.

In Ch'ing China, applicants for such licenses did not have to pass formal religious fitness examinations at Peking; the power to grant or refuse such licenses was essentially decentralized, depending upon the judgment of provincial officials; and in the middle of the 1700's, the Ch'ing court suddenly abolished the licenses completely, on the grounds that they overburdened the bureaucracy. In nineteenth century Vietnam, certificates appear to have been taken more seriously. Applicants for them had to travel to Hue, where they were examined on their piety. If they passed this inspection, they could return to their temples exempt from corvee and taxes. Certificate examinations of this kind appear to have been held in Hue periodically, perhaps every five years. At least the

bureaucratic records for the 1830 and 1835 examinations have survived. The 1830 records show that of 53 candidates for certificates, 12 were found to have had a "fair comprehension" (*sao thong hang*) of Buddhist doctrine, 38 more were placed in the "category of rough comprehension" (*tho thong hang*). The final 3 were denied licenses because of their "deficient comprehension" (*khiem thong hang*). In 1835, 36 candidates were considered excellent and 71 were found to have "rough comprehension." It is worth noting that in 1835, if not in other years, these ecclesiastical tests in Hue were almost as large in scale as the metropolitan examinations for the regular Vietnamese civil service, which that year examined 123 regional degree-holders. Yet hundreds of Vietnamese monks must have ignored the tests.<sup>16</sup>

Members of the Vietnamese Buddhist clergy received official salaries from the court. The head monks (*tru tri*, more literally "resident guardians") of selected temples, for example, received state remuneration roughly equal to that of Grade 8A civil bureaucrats. The numbers of monks and acolytes at the larger temples were fixed by law. The Board of Rites at Hue had to be notified of the backgrounds of new recruits. Temples were endowed by the court with "lands for incense and fire" to maintain Confucian-style cults to dead religious dignitaries. The court conferred names upon temples. It suggested the days for, and the forms of, various temple rituals. After 1837 the Imperial Observatory at Hue even marked the calendars it published and distributed to provincial officials with black circles to indicate the days when animals could not be slaughtered—and when temples could not hold feasts.<sup>17</sup> The court sponsored the construction of new temples. Most of these were built in the vicinity of the dynastic capital, Hue, which is today the heartland of Vietnamese Buddhism, by no accident. Empresses and court eunuchs like Chau Phuc Nang were among the individual court sponsors of central Vietnamese temples. Because the styles and patterns of court patronage of Buddhism were similar in China and Vietnam, so too the geographical distribution of the large temples, which reflected imperial patronage, was similar in both countries in the 1800's. Gazetteers suggest that there were more major official temples in the area around Peking than in the environs of any other city in mid-Ch'ing China, although Hangchow was of course the intellectual center of Ch'ing Buddhism. In the same way, there seem to have been more large temples in Thua Thien province, surrounding Hue, than in any other province in Nguyen Vietnam.

But in the most remarkable feature of the Nguyen court's patronage of Buddhist temples was the relationship of this patronage to Vietnamese diplomatic and commercial interaction with China. The Vietnamese court supplied major Vietnamese temples with everything from their



books of liturgy (which were written in classical Chinese) to their candles. Early nineteenth century records for the Heavenly Lady Temple (*Thien Lao Tu*) in Thua Thien, for example, reveal that it regularly received money, candles, Chinese teas, Chinese paper, and incense from at least three different court agencies: the Imperial Household Department (*Noi vu phu*), the Imperial Military Treasury (*vu kho*), and the Board of Finance. It also received from the court fuel, fodder for its cattle, and provisions with which to feed the poor. Despite a severe inflation in the value of silver in the late 1830's, monks at another temple, the Khai Tuong temple in Gia Dinh, were paid for chanting the sutras on Minh-mang's birthday in 1839 with silver coins.<sup>18</sup>

Many of the religious artifacts which the court showered upon these temples were goods imported from China. The court supplied the temples with their "sutra clothes" (*kinh y*), clothes of purification, with scriptural writings engraved upon them, which priests wrapped about the dead. The court also enabled the temples, and the Buddhist church in general, to maintain their invaluable reputation among Vietnamese villagers for healing the sick and dispensing pharmaceutical aid. It did this by supplying the temples with such popular Chinese imports as the stick-shaped medicinal compound known as "thread incense" (Chinese: *hsien-hsiang*, Vietnamese: *tuyen-huong*), which was made up of white iris root, kaoliang, ginger, fennel, and other ingredients. These religious and pharmaceutical imports were expensive. Buddhist temples in Vietnam had borrowed their standards of worship and their conceptions of religious articles and decorations from China. But these standards and conceptions were difficult to sustain in Southeast Asia without court help. Paper, for example, of the kind used in the temples was not extensively manufactured in Vietnam. Vietnamese temples were too poorly organized by themselves to deal from a position of strength with Chinese traders in Hanoi and Saigon, or to send buying missions to China.

The Vietnamese court came to their rescue with its patronage. It possessed the power and the means to purchase the Chinese teas and drugs and candles and clothing upon which the nineteenth century Vietnamese Buddhist clergy depended. Thus the Vietnamese court's trade with China, both inside and outside the context of Sino-Vietnamese tributary relations, offered a key to the control of temples in Vietnam. Three interested groups, not two, acknowledged vested interests, cultural, political, and economic, in Sino-Vietnamese inter-state relations: the Chinese court, the Vietnamese court, and the Vietnamese Buddhist church. From the Nguyen court's standpoint, bureaucratic control of Vietnamese religion was one potential invisible dividend of diplomatic and commercial relations with China.

## *Two Nineteenth Century Vietnamese Buddhist Traditions*

Naturally such control was exceedingly superficial. Vietnamese villagers would not have accepted for long a religion that was too obviously manipulated by political rulers. Yet Vietnamese Buddhism of the early 1800's has often been considered decadent, in comparison with its significant vigor in other centuries when political power in Vietnam was more diffused. Certainly the Nguyen court attempted to enforce a selective application of religious doctrines within the church, emphasizing those which enhanced its own power, in return for its munificent donations of Chinese religious commodities to the larger temples.

The partial success it achieved was reflected in Vietnamese religious literature of the post-1820 period. This literature was informed by themes that were unmistakably Confucian. In the moving 788-line poem *Truyen Quan Am Thi Kinh* (The Story of Thi Kinh the Goddess of Mercy), for example, a classic which was probably written during the Minh-mang reign and which is still read today in Hanoi and Saigon classrooms, the poet depicted the future Goddess of Mercy in her tenth earthly existence, making her arduous way to divinity. But he showed her suffering tribulations on earth because her talents were greater than those of other people, and had thus become a moral burden to her. In the poem she died after having expended all her strength nursing a child which was not her own, an ethical magnification of normal Confucian familial behavior:

She had just had time to be happy because the child  
    was growing well,  
Who would expect that the silkworm spins all its  
    threads and then becomes aged.  
A yellow wind wafted by in a moment,  
The corn leaves changed their colors and the flower  
    springs wilted.  
She groaned, 'This doctrine [of the Buddha] is high  
    and profound,  
'I am willing to go away to another world that is not  
    this one.  
'When my worldly existence is transformed I will receive  
    a true existence,  
'When I become supernatural I can gather my spirit  
    and take it with me.  
'There's no use fearing or mourning my progress back  
    [to the other world],  
'But thinking of my long relationship with the child  
    only increases my love for it'.

And at the end of the poem, her moment of attainment of divinity was described this way:

Who knows the efficacy of the power of the Buddha?  
Sometimes the country of India [*i.e.*, Heaven, the Buddha's  
homeland] is somewhere unknown but very near.  
In the middle of the sky, a flowery column of clouds  
wove itself together,  
The entire body of the Buddha himself appeared and  
descended from its [cloud] platform. . . .  
The order was given, 'Student disciple Kinh Tam,  
'Fly upward at once to become the Goddess of Mercy!'<sup>19</sup>

For Vietnamese Buddhists of the 1820's and 1830's, if this poem was any index, the Buddha was believed to choose future saints in a way that scarcely differed from the way in which the Vietnamese emperor intuitively discovered hidden "men of talent," and then made them his civil bureaucrats. And for many Vietnamese Buddhist monks of the Nguyen period, the Vietnamese civil bureaucracy itself was much closer than the Heavenly "country of India." The profusion of imported Chinese candles and medicines which filled nineteenth century Vietnamese temples only underscored its proximity.

Lesser Vietnamese Buddhist monks of the nineteenth century often participated in rebel movements against Hue. Most of the higher clergy, however, tried to ensure social cohesion. They tried to make their church coextensive with Vietnamese society, to bring everyone within the means of grace. In doing so they repaid the court for its patronage with full support of the court's authoritarian patterns of political order. They so closely attached their own future to the future of the Nguyen empire and its structure that they became spectacular victims of its downfall, when French Roman Catholic colonialism came to Vietnam and court patronage disappeared.

In fact, it is remarkable how small a role Buddhist ecclesiastics played in the leadership of rebellions against the Nguyen court, despite the fact that the nineteenth century (like the eighteenth century) was an era of many small-scale and some large-scale upheavals. The causes of these upheavals were diverse and have been poorly studied. Landlordism, unchecked even on paper before the 1830's, was particularly oppressive in provinces like Binh Dinh, and generally helped to prevent either the court or individual peasant villages from maintaining satisfactory living standards. Loyalty to the overthrown Le dynasty, coinciding with resentment of the southern militarists who served as provincial administrators in northern centers like Hanoi well into the 1830's, gave northerners incen-

tives to rebel against Hue. The social structure also facilitated at least minor rural disorders. These disorders stemmed in part from a lack of multiple loyalties in traditional Vietnamese society. That is, Vietnamese peasants, loyal to their native villages, were inclined to war with as much as cooperate with neighboring villages. The rigorous virilocal marital residence patterns of Vietnamese society guaranteed that the men born in one village would further remain there after marriage, rather than being distributed among other villages to which they would also have to extend their loyalty. This hardly reduced inter-village conflict and the tenacious rural sense of village autonomy, although it is fallacious to over-emphasize the "closed" nature of the villages. At all events, rebels in Vietnam in the 1800's were of many culture groups: Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, Moi, Meo, Man, Nung. From the 1820's to the 1860's they were drawn from an impressively wide social range: peasants (Phan Ba Vanh), militarists (Le Van Khoi), scholar-poets (Cao Ba Quat), and princes (Hong Tap in Hue in 1864). Yet it is almost easier to find prominent Vietnamese Christian rebels in the 1800's—like Quan Thu, the general who commanded Le Duy Phung's armies in the armed Le dynasty restorationist movement of the early 1860's—than it is to find famous Vietnamese Buddhist clergy rebels.

Once or twice, Buddhist monks and nuns even served as spies for Nguyen provincial officials, as in Son Tay in the 1840's.<sup>20</sup> This is an extreme instance. Northern Buddhist temples did serve as havens, as the dynasty feared they would, for members of defeated Le restorationist revolts. It is a measure of the importance of this function in nineteenth century rebellions (but perhaps also of the relative poverty of Buddhist participation in other ways) that contemporary Vietnamese Buddhist nationalists have dramatized this temple-as-a-refuge theme in their historical political tradition. One famous nineteenth century woman whose husband's revolt collapsed in 1862 became a nun in a Bac Ninh temple. (Many Vietnamese village temples had associations of elderly or widowed women—known as *hoi Chu Ba*—which did good deeds under the temples' auspices. Each year one of the women in turn was chosen *ba Truong*, "nun elder.") When this particular woman was in her eighties she frightened away bandits attempting to force open the temple gate at night by hurling a stone mortar for pounding rice over the wall, a remarkable feat for an elderly woman. As one contemporary writer recently wrote, in 1966, in an important Saigon Buddhist journal: "Many beautiful stories about her received circulation, and even the history books of the Nguyen court showed an inclination to admire her. . . . Only when she had lived to the age of ninety years did she return to the realm of the Buddha."<sup>21</sup>

Today, Vietnamese Buddhists can look back upon two nineteenth century political traditions. One is the tradition of visionary rural revolts, led by alienated village monks whom the court had neglected. The second is the tradition of a culturally uniform, Sino-Vietnamese integration of the Vietnamese religious and political orders, accepted by the higher priests in return for comprehensive state patronage, which in turn depended upon Vietnamese relations with China. These two traditions merged after the fall of the Nguyen kingdom into a common anti-colonial reaction.

## Notes

1. *Ch'in-ting Ta Ch'ing hui-tien shih-li* (Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of the Imperial Ch'ing), 1899 edition, 501: 17b-18. I am indebted to Mr. Holmes Welch of Harvard University for having read (and given me good advice upon) the first draft of this paper.
2. Le Van Sieu, *Van minh Viet Nam* (Vietnamese Civilization), (Saigon: 1955), 79-81.
3. *Tam Giao chinh do thuc luc* (The Veritable Records of the Standard Law of the Three Religions), 1b. The text is No. A-33 of the collection of Sino-Vietnamese texts of the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.
4. Tue Giac, *Viet Nam Phat Giao tranh dau su* (A History of Vietnamese Buddhism's Struggle), (Saigon: 1964), 74.
5. Biographies of these ecclesiastics appear in the *Dai Nam nhât thong chi* (Gazetteer of Imperial Vietnam) (1909 edition), 3:41.
6. *Dai Nam thuc luc chinh bien, de tam ky* (Primary Compilation of the Veritable Records of the Third Reign of Imperial Vietnam), 6:26.
7. Translated from the *quoc ngu* text supplied in Pham Van Dieu, *Viet Nam van hoc giang binh* (Critical Lectures on Vietnamese Literature), (Saigon: 1961), 74.
8. I discuss both the copy and its deviations in *Vietnam and the Chinese Institutional Model: Nguyen Emperors and their Civil Bureaucracy, 1802-1847* (forthcoming).
9. *Dai Nam nhât thong chi, op. cit.*, 6: 46.
10. *Ibid.*, 9: 27b-28.
11. *Dai Nam thuc luc chinh bien, de nhi ky*, 194: 35ff.
12. *Ibid.*, 4: 16b-17.
13. Cf. Cao Huy Dinh, "Triet Ly Dao Phat trong Truyen Kieu" ("The Buddhist Philosophy in 'The Story of Kieu'"), in *Ky Niem 200 Nam Nam Sinh Nguyen Du 1765-1965* (The Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Nguyen Du), (Hanoi: 1967), 286-304.
14. Translated from the *quoc ngu* text in Dieu, *Viet Nam van hoc giang binh, op. cit.*, 64.
15. *Ibid.*, 78.
16. *Kham dinh Dai Nam hoi dien su le* (Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam), 123: 8b-9b.
17. *Dai Nam thuc luc chinh bien, de nhi ky, op. cit.*, 179: 5.
18. *Kham dinh Dai Nam hoi dien su le, op. cit.*, 123: 1ff; 123: 15b.
19. Translated from the *quoc ngu* texts in Pham The Ngu, *Viet Nam van hoc su gian uoc tan bien: van hoc lich su: Viet Van* (A New Concise History of Vietnamese Literature: Non-Sinic Literature of Successive Courts), (Saigon: 1963), 316-317.
20. Kieu Oanh Mau, *Ban trieu ban nghich liet truyen* (Official Biographies of Rebels of This Dynasty), translated into modern Vietnamese by Tran Khai Van, (Saigon: 1963 version), 95.
21. Nam Kim, "Vo Ba Cai Vang" ("The Wife of Cai Vang"), *Duoc Tue* (The Light of Knowledge), (Saigon, November 19, 1966), 17, 32.

# The Content of the Sino-Vietnamese Tributary Relationship in the Late 19th Century

*Ella Laffey*

During the nineteenth century, in addition to suffering invasion and defeat herself at the hands of the Western powers, China saw her tributary states one by one pulled out of the Chinese family of nations and assigned new places—as protectorates, colonies, or simply more or less reluctant participants—in the new international order brought to East Asia by the West. Although by the end of the century China herself had entered this wider, European-dominated international family, a good deal of her diplomacy in the meantime was directed toward keeping Western intrusion in East Asia to a minimum. Where her surrounding tributary states were the object of Western attentions, the accustomed tool which lay ready to hand for Chinese statesmen was the tributary system, and Ch'ing diplomacy, never addicted to innovation, did show itself reasonably flexible in its attempts to utilize the traditional system in meeting this challenge to the established Sinocentric international order. For instance, China used her position as suzerain in different ways in the cases of Korea and of Vietnam in the 1860's and 1870's, a point which will be taken up later.

The tributary system was based not only on Chinese material superiority, but on the Chinese conviction of their own cultural superiority to the non-Han peoples around them. The wealth and high culture of China could not help but exercise a strong attraction for less fortunate peoples on the periphery; the problem, therefore, was not how to avoid contact, but how to structure such contacts for the benefit and security of China. As the tributary system evolved, the major components came to be the formal recognition of China's superior position, as indicated by the tributary state's adoption of the Chinese calendar, and the receipt of a patent of appointment and an official seal from the Chinese emperor by newly enthroned monarchs of the tributary states and thereafter periodic affirmation of their junior status by the dispatch of tribute-bearing missions to the Chinese capital. In return, China accorded the tributaries official recognition of their position within the Chinese world-order by sending emissaries to new tributary kings bearing the patent and seal. She also provided material or moral support to her tributaries in times of crisis. Depending on the situation, it could range from a message of sympathy from the Chinese emperor on the occasion of a natural catas-

trophe to the dispatch of Chinese troops to the aid of the recognized ruler of the tributary against either internal or external threats.<sup>1</sup>

As Lloyd Eastman has pointed out, Chinese officials "held two concepts of the tributary relationship that were not wholly harmonious."<sup>2</sup> On the one hand they stressed the moral aspects of the tributary system and the benefits which accrued to the tributaries themselves, once they had decided to "come and be transformed" (*lai-hua*). As concrete manifestations of the imperial benevolence, the Chinese state paid for the keep and transportation of the periodic tribute missions after their arrival at the proper point of entry and for their entertainment at the capital, and generally awarded gifts of at least equal value to the proffered tribute to the members of the mission and to their ruler.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand the Chinese also held a much more practical view of the value of the tributaries. They were regarded as buffer states between China and more intractable peoples beyond them. Although the rhetoric of benevolence was retained, as the numbers and intractability of such outer peoples steadily increased during the nineteenth century, there was a marked multiplication of statements like the following:

The border provinces are China's gates; the tributary states (*wai-fan*) are China's walls. We build the walls to protect the gates, and protect the gates to secure the house. If the walls fall, the gates are endangered; if the gates are endangered, the house is shaken.<sup>4</sup>

Not all of the walls, however, were endangered in the same way. In the case of Korea in the 1860's and 1870's the interest of several powers—the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan and Russia—in Korean affairs led at least Li Hung-chang and some of the members of the Tsungli Yamen to envisage the possibility of protecting the Koreans from exclusive domination by any one country (the one they had most prominently in mind was Japan) by encouraging its tributary to conclude treaties establishing diplomatic and commercial relations with several of them.<sup>5</sup> The Koreans flatly refused until 1876, and there was little the Chinese could do about it without unilaterally reading Korea out of the ranks of the tributary states, thereby nullifying the tributary system not only in terms of its function but also in terms of the Confucian values incorporated into that system.<sup>6</sup>

In Vietnam, the danger had a different specific shape and the Chinese response, still well within the boundaries of tradition, differed also. Although stagnant and poor, Korea seemed relatively stable internally. In contrast, Vietnam in the 1860's and 1870's seemed headed for a condition of chronic disorder in the northern provinces closest to the Chinese bor-

der, a condition which had been aggravated by the flight into Tonkin of large numbers of ex-Taiping rebels, secret society members, and other disorderly elements who had been pushed out of south China by the Ch'ing mopping-up campaigns against the Taipings. Vietnamese officials in the north also had to cope with periodic difficulties with non-Vietnamese tribespeople and with a persistent loyalist nostalgia for the former ruling dynasty, the Le, which more than once in the nineteenth century boiled over in insurrections on behalf of a Le pretender. In addition to creating difficulties for the government of a recognized tributary, this state of affairs threatened the tranquillity of China's own frontier areas in the south, since both the Chinese bandit groups and some of the tribespeople had contacts on the Chinese side of the border.<sup>7</sup>

The external threat to Vietnam had a slightly different configuration also. In place of the several states which were eyeing the possibilities of the Korean situation, a single western nation, France, had actually taken possession of three provinces in Cochinchina in 1862 and of three adjoining provinces in 1867. As an ominous hint that French ambitions might encompass more than just a foothold in Cochinchina, the treaty of 1862 between France and Vietnam included a clause that Vietnam would not cede any part of its territory to a foreign power without French consent.<sup>8</sup> The French move into Cambodia in 1864 provided further evidence, were any necessary, that the most pressing danger to Vietnam's continued existence within the tributary system was likely to come from France.

In 1862 the Chinese were too preoccupied with their own problems arising from military defeat and internal rebellion to be much concerned about Vietnamese affairs, no matter how disturbing developments there might be. In fact, the Chinese pacification of their own disturbed areas in the south had contributed to an increase in the numbers of trouble-makers present in Tonkin. The mopping-up campaigns against Taiping remnants and local bandits conducted by Feng Tzu-ts'ai in 1867 were carried out without much attention to the problems created for the Vietnamese by pushing such groups across the border into Tonkin; in 1868 the Vietnamese king had to ask for Chinese aid in suppressing them. In August, 1869 Feng Tzu-ts'ai defeated the major rebel band, led by Wu Ya-chung, at Lang-son (Liang-shan), but apparently did not make a persistent attempt to pursue and destroy the fragments into which Wu's beaten forces dissolved.<sup>9</sup> Given the difficult nature of the terrain in this part of north Vietnam, it might have seemed not worth the trouble and particularly the expense to pursue the remnants of Wu's forces. However several of the bandit groups which became prominent in the 1870's seem to have been originally connected with Wu Ya-chung, including the Black Flag Army of Liu Yung-fu, which dominated the upper course of the



Red River, and the Yellow Flag Army of Huang Ch'ung-ying, based at Ha-giang (Ho-yang) on the Clear River fairly close to the border of the Chinese province of Yunnan.<sup>10</sup> In the subsequent bandit-suppression campaigns they conducted in Tonkin in the 1870's the Chinese forces seem to have made more persistent and systematic efforts to pursue the bandits and rebels back to their base camps and to destroy the camps themselves.<sup>11</sup>

This combination of severe internal disorders in large parts of north Vietnam close to the Chinese border and the clear—if still largely potential—threat from France seems to have impressed upon both the Chinese and the Vietnamese the need to indicate clearly that the tributary system was still governing their relations with each other. The Vietnamese sent missions to Peking in 1869, 1871, 1873 and 1877.<sup>12</sup> On their part, the Chinese maintained garrisons at strategic points in northern Tonkin and were prompt in the dispatch of field forces into Vietnam when larger-scale disturbances and risings occurred. If one includes the campaigns of 1868-69, in the fifteen years between 1865 and 1880 the Chinese sent three major military expeditions into Vietnam at the request of the Vietnamese king to assist in putting down disorders in Tonkin.

This was not a new pattern in Sino-Vietnamese relations. Since the rebellion which had freed Vietnam from direct Chinese administration in the tenth century, Vietnam had remained independent of China except for a period of twenty years, from 1407 to 1427, during the early Ming dynasty.<sup>13</sup> Relations with China, with some interruptions, were conducted within the framework of the tributary system. Chinese troops made several reappearances on Vietnamese soil after Vietnam became independent; sometimes they came as would-be conquerors, as Sung armies did several times in the eleventh century,<sup>14</sup> and sometimes they came to the aid of the tributary state itself or to that of the Chinese-recognized tributary ruler.<sup>15</sup> With the exception of an abortive Chinese expedition to restore the Le in 1788 and minor disputes over boundaries and the use made of bases on the Tonkin coast by pirates raiding Chinese coastal trade, Sino-Vietnamese relations during the Ch'ing dynasty were conducted comfortably within the tributary system.<sup>16</sup> During this period the Chinese responded several times to requests from their tributary to assist in maintenance of internal order. Such requests were forwarded to Peking through the officials of Liangkwan; in the 1870's the governor of Kwangsi was the usual initial recipient, and he then forwarded them to the governor-general at Canton for transmission to Peking.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of increasing French expansion into Indo-china, the second and third of the major bandit-suppression campaigns are particularly significant because they were brought to their conclusions after the

signing of the treaty of 15 March, 1874 between France and Vietnam, a treaty which the French flattered themselves had provided the legal basis for the establishment of a French protectorate over Vietnam. The March treaty, and a commercial treaty signed in August, had been negotiated in the liquidation of the Dupuis-Garnier attempt to take Tonkin for France in 1873. Preoccupied with its internal and European situations after the shattering French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, the Paris government had no desire to become involved in military adventures in the Far East. The acts of Dupuis and Garnier in taking Hanoi and several forts in the delta of the Red River for France were repudiated, but the agreements which the French negotiators obtained nonetheless provided the legal bases for French claims and actions in the 1880's.<sup>18</sup>

The most important provisions in this respect were Articles II, III and XII of the March treaty. Article II recognized the "complete independence" of the Vietnamese king vis-a-vis "toute puissance étrangère" and promised French aid in the maintenance of internal order, defense against outside attack, and the suppression of piracy.<sup>19</sup> This ignored the Chinese claim of suzerainty, but the following article indicated French caution about raising this question directly in 1874. In effect, Article III tried to have it both ways on the delicate question of Sino-Vietnamese relations. It begins "En reconnaissance de cette protection, Sa Majesté le Roi de L'Annam s'engage à conformer sa politique extérieure à celle de la France et à ne rien changer à ses relations diplomatiques actuelles. . . ." While the initial words denied any special relationship with China, "et à ne rien changer à ses relations diplomatiques actuelles. . ." could have been construed as sanctioning at least the ritual aspects of the traditional bonds between China and Vietnam.<sup>20</sup> Article XII opened the Red River to foreign commerce between the Chinese province of Yunnan and the sea.<sup>21</sup> The Rivière expedition of 1882 was ostensibly to suppress piracy on the Red River which hindered the exploration and navigation of its upper course.

While the French were negotiating the final form of the treaties of 1874, the Chinese were preparing to dispatch troops to Tonkin to deal with a particularly serious bandit insurrection. The occasion for what was to become the second major bandit suppression campaign in the period 1865-1880 was a rising which had begun early in 1874, but which assumed major proportions and directly involved the security of the Chinese frontier when Huang Ch'ung-ying, the chief of the Yellow Flags, led over 1,000 men into the K'ai-hua and Meng-tzu districts of Yunnan and stirred up the Yao tribes there before withdrawing back into Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> When Huang had begun activities in the summer, Liu Ch'ang-yu,

the governor of Kwangsi, had forwarded to Peking a request by the Vietnamese king to increase the Chinese troops stationed at forts in the Vietnamese provinces of Cao-bang (Kao-p'ing) and Lang-son. The request was granted, but the edict sanctioning the reinforcement of the Chinese garrisons in Vietnam also stipulated that the responsible Chinese officials were to be sure that the Chinese frontier was secured.<sup>23</sup> After the October raid into Yunnan, Peking ordered the authorities of all provinces bordering on Vietnam—Yunnan, Kwangsi and Kwangtung—to collect information about the strength and movements of the rebels and to organize strong local border defenses, while the main responsibility for field operations against the rebels was given to Kwangsi.<sup>24</sup> Huang Ch'ung-ying had in the meantime established relations with other bandit groups in Cao-bang and Lang-son and with the White Miao tribes, thus stirring up the entire central third of the Sino-Vietnamese border.<sup>25</sup>

The Kwangsi field forces were divided into two independent but co-operating wings. The left route army operated in Lang-son and the eastern part of Cao-bang, under the command of Liu Yu-ch'eng; apparently their most determined opponents in this area were the Miao tribesmen who had joined Huang's revolt. The right route army moved more directly on Huang's base at Ha-giang, proceeding through and pacifying en route the western part of Cao-bang; this force was commanded by the Brigade Commander and Expectant Taotai Chao Wo.<sup>26</sup> Vietnamese officers and troops accompanied both forces—although the Chinese sources give more prominence to the aid which they received from loyal tribespeople than to the contributions of the regular Vietnamese troops—and the Black Flag Army of Liu Yung-fu, now a Vietnamese military official, moved to cut off the retreat of Liu's former fellow-bandit from the west and south.<sup>27</sup>

Although some of Huang's bandit allies were successful in evading the combined Sino-Vietnamese forces and lived to continue to trouble northern Tonkin, the back of the rebellion was broken by the late fall of 1875. The Chinese field forces then withdrew, although not before Chinese suspicions about possible contacts between the rebels and the French had been aroused.<sup>28</sup>

The sporadic peace of the border areas was broken again by a major outbreak barely five years later, and a third major expedition was sent into Vietnam to put down a rebellion by a cashiered Chinese military official, Li Yang-ts'ai. By virtue of possessing the same surname as a former Vietnamese dynasty, Li claimed descent from that house and the right to the Vietnamese throne. Li first entered Tonkin with about 4,000 men, but had quickly joined forces with the everpresent bandits, swelling the rebel forces to over 20,000 men. Liu K'un-i, the governor-general of

Liangkwang, ordered Feng Tzu-ts'ai to take charge of the campaign, but in order to lose no time while Feng organized his forces the Brigade Commander Chao Wo, the commander of the right route army in the campaign against Huang Ch'ung-ying, was ordered to take the field immediately.<sup>29</sup> Both Li Yang-ts'ai and Chao were fighting on familiar ground. Li had been an officer with the left route army in that campaign,<sup>30</sup> and since when possible he stayed fairly close to the area of the left route army's operations in Lang-son and eastern Cao-bang, he might have had an edge over Chao (who had commanded the right wing in western Cao-bang and Ha-giang) in this respect. While conducting operations pending Feng Tzu-ts'ai's arrival, Chao was also instructed to co-operate with Liu Yung-fu and his Black Flags.<sup>31</sup> Liu K'un-i seemed to have no particular doubts about the Chinese ability to put down the rebellion eventually, but he cautioned the throne that the real danger to China might come from Vietnamese weakness and impatience: if Vietnam thought the Chinese were not acting quickly enough, she might turn to the French.<sup>32</sup>

To the refrain of Feng Tzu-ts'ai's constant complaints about the Vietnamese as allies—he alleged they had withdrawn their own forces as soon as the major Chinese forces arrived and had compounded this lack of co-operation in the field by being unwilling to supply provisions to his troops<sup>33</sup>—the Chinese again fulfilled one of their functions as suzerain by helping their vassal cope with this new internal outbreak. To underline the Chinese role, Li Yang-ts'ai was taken to Kweilin, the capital of Kwangsi, for execution, and later his head was sent back to Tonkin for exposure in various cities. Appropriate placards were posted to accompany the public display of the head.<sup>34</sup> Contrary to the general impression that the French then and later interpreted the tributary relationship as one which was merely “*nominale et fictive*,”<sup>35</sup> amounting to only a “respect moral,”<sup>36</sup> at least some of the French were taken aback by the Chinese fulfillment of their claims to a special relationship with Vietnam.<sup>37</sup>

It has not been the purpose of this article to uncover new and hitherto unsuspected resources of vitality and creativity in the traditional Chinese approach to foreign relations; the entire international order in East Asia was in the process of transformation under great pressure from outside, and the Chinese could do little more than conduct a piecemeal holding operation given their unwillingness or inability to take a course similar to that chosen by Japan. Nor does this article aim to exalt the motives involved in this willing shouldering of the burdens of suzerainty; high-minded statements about China's duty to succor the weak were always mixed with more practical formulations about the buffer role of the adjacent tributary states. Chinese statesmen could and did blend the two

elements inextricably in their analyses and proposals concerning Vietnam, and there is no reason to doubt their basic sincerity in either case.

However, two general points about Sino-Vietnamese relations in the period just before the French conquest of Vietnam do emerge. The first is that at least some Chinese statesmen after the experiences of 1860 were able to assess with a fairly cold eye sources of danger to the traditional Chinese international order and to use selectively the aspects of the traditional order which they felt most appropriate to a given problem. The form this took in Vietnam was the prompt fulfillment of the obligation to help the recognized vassal maintain internal tranquillity; the form it took in Korea was different.<sup>38</sup> Had the threat from France not existed, the Chinese would probably have taken part in the campaigns against Huang Ch'ung-ying and Li Yang-ts'ai anyway. Previous expeditions had been sent to Vietnam in the absence of external threats, and China also had an obvious interest in the tranquillity of the border areas. China's policy in Vietnam in the 1860's and 1870's did not represent a new departure; it was rather a selection from a range of possible traditional responses which were sanctioned not only "legally" but historically as well as a policy which had ample precedents in prior Chinese practice in Vietnam. The policy therefore *was* the old policy, but French interest in Vietnam gave the diligent application of the old policy a higher priority. This was reflected in the close watch kept on matters in Tonkin by the southern officials, by the promptness of the Chinese response to appeals from the Vietnamese, and by an impatience in Peking with pleas from the provincial officials of lack of funds as an excuse for tardy action or non-action.<sup>39</sup>

The second point is that the French had little excuse, in the case of Vietnam, for a facile categorization of the tributary relationship as "nominale et fictive" at a time when under a mutually felt threat the relations between the two Asian states were closer and more functional than they had been at any previous time during the Nguyen dynasty. French policy makers had ample evidence at their disposal that the Chinese were willing to dispatch more than notes of protest when it was a question of the southern border. It might also be noted that in the last analysis the French themselves did not think up a significantly different justification for their own military expedition into Tonkin which led to the French acquisition of all of Vietnam than the one which the Chinese had utilized in the 1860's and 1870's. Basing itself on the treaty of March, 1874, the ostensible purpose of the Riviere expedition to Hanoi in 1882 was, after all, the suppression of piracy—a form of internal disorder—on the Red River.

The content of the Sino-Vietnamese tributary relationship in the 1860's

and 1870's was not significantly different from its traditional content. The difficulty lay in the fact that to Western eyes it had no real content at all, or at least it would not fit into the various categories of relationships between states which the West had established on the basis of the European experience. It was not until the 1880's that that eminent realist Li Hung-chang was willing to discuss the actual partition of Tonkin into French and Chinese spheres along lines which Europeans might have been willing to recognize as having "real" content, but by this time this kind of settlement for north Vietnam was no longer possible. During the 1860's and 1870's Chinese statesmen could well have considered that they had demonstrated that the ties between themselves and Vietnam were not "nominal et fictive," but the relationship itself was part of a system whose entire structure and values were passing out of existence. In the 1880's the Vietnamese fought to maintain their independence of France; the Chinese cause by comparison was less clear—they waged war in defense of a system which was already an anachronism. The statesmen of nineteenth century China should not, however, be dismissed as naive on this account—if the Chinese were the only people who had ever fought for an anachronism they would indeed be unique.

## Notes

1. Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *China's Entrance into the Family of Nations: The Diplomatic Phase 1858-1880* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 4.

2. Lloyd E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins, China's Search for a Policy During the Sino-French Controversy 1880-1885* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 35.

3. John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 26-30; see John K. Fairbank and Ssu-yu Teng, *Ch'ing Administration: Three Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 107-218 for a detailed treatment of the Ch'ing tributary system.

4. Eastman, *op. cit.*, 38. The author of the quotation was Liu Ch'ang-yu, who had had a good deal of administrative experience in the southern border provinces. Liu was made governor of Kwangsi in 1860, governor-general of Liangkwan in 1862, then served almost a decade in north and central China, returning south in June, 1871, as governor of Kwangtung, again served as governor of Kwangsi, and in 1876 became governor-general of Yunnan and Kweichow, a post he held until his retirement in 1883. His biography is in A. W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 515-516. However, the biography of Liu Ch'ang-yu in the *Ch'ing Shih* (Official History of the Ch'ing Dynasty) edited by the Military History Bureau, Ministry of National Defense, Republic of China (Taipei, 1961), 4802-4804 gives a clearer picture of how large a part of the career of this civil official in nineteenth century China was concerned with military matters, chiefly rebel suppression. In this respect he seems representative of several high officials in the southern provinces in the 1870's and early 1880's who rose to prominence during the great rebellions and whose experience was thereafter utilized extensively in the various provinces of the uneasy south and southwest. Another such official was Ts'en Yu-ying. S. Y. Teng has pointed out that Liu Ch'ang-yu's return to active service as governor of Kwangtung in 1871 after four years of semi-retirement was a "degraded appointment" after the posts Liu had held in the early 1860's. Teng attributes this to Liu's being one of the Chinese regional officials who had risen to power during the Taiping Rebellion and whose careers were adversely affected by the attempt of the court to reassert control from the center after the crisis was past. S. Y. Teng, "Some new light on the Nien Movement and its effect on the fall of the Manchu dynasty," *Symposium on Chinese Studies Commemorating the Golden Jubilee of the University of Hong Kong 1911-1961* (Hong Kong, 1968), III, 64. I do not believe this invalidates my point that the experience of Liu and other officials recommended them for a series of high offices in the disturbed South.

5. In this necessarily brief summary of the differences between the Korean and the Vietnamese cases in the 1860's and 1870's, distinctions between the positions of Li Hung-chang and of the Tsungli Yamen are considered as a matter of degree and not of kind. During 1874 it was the Yamen which passed on to Korea a report that France and the United States might assist Japan if Japan mounted an expedition against Korea and called Korea's attention to the possibility of isolating the Japanese by establishing trade relations with the Western powers. As a Korean scholar has noted, given the usual conventions of Sino-Korean diplomatic usage this amounted to a "euphemistic" order. Ch'oe Yong-ho, "Sino-Korean Relations, 1866-1876: A Study of Korea's Tributary Relationship to China," *Journal of Asiatic Studies* (Seoul) 9, 1 (March, 1966), 154-156. In 1876 Li and the Yamen agreed that the Koreans should receive a projected Japanese mission with courtesy, but the message to Korea did not "counsel" them to do so, as Li had advised.

*Ibid.*, 167-171. Frederick Foo Chien, *The Opening of Korea, A Study of Chinese Diplomacy, 1876-1885* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1967), 36, also notes that in 1876 Li and the Yamen had similar attitudes regarding the Japanese-Korean dispute.

6. Mary C. Wright, "The Adaptability of Ch'ing Diplomacy: The Case of Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* XVII, 3 (May, 1958), 381. In the case of the 1874 communication noted above, the Korean response was to call for more stringent enforcement of the exclusion regulations and to ask China to explain Korea's position to the foreigners. Ch'oe, *op. cit.*, 155-156.

7. For example, the Yao tribesmen of Yunnan were extensively involved in Huang Ch'ung-ying's rising in 1874-75. Kuo Ting-i, et al., eds., *Chung Fa Yueh-nan ch'iao-she tang* (Tsungli Yamen archives relating to relations between China, France and Vietnam), 7 vols. (Taipei, 1962) (hereafter cited as YNT), memorial of Ts'en Yu-ying, governor of Yunnan to the Tsungli Yamen, 18 April, 1875 (KH 1/3/13).

8. Article 4 of the Treaty. For the text of the treaty, see Georges Taboulet, *La Geste française en Indochine* (Paris, 1956), 474-76. Article 4 is on page 476.

9. For the career of Feng Tzu-ts'ai see Feng's biography in Hummel, *op. cit.*, 244-46; also see the memorial by Feng in *Huang-ch'ao hsu wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao*, compiled by Liu Chin-tsoo (Taipei, 1965 reprint of the 1936 Commercial Press edition), 9533. For the identification of Wu Ya-chung as the main leader in the disorders of 1867, see the T'ung Chih Shih Lu, chuan 204, 12a (Taiwan, 1964 continuous pagination edition, 4650).

10. Jean Dupuis, the merchant-adventurer involved in the 1873 attempt to acquire Tonkin, asserts this categorically. Dupuis had visited the camps of both the Black and the Yellow Flags on several occasions, so presumably he had first-hand information about relations between them. J. Dupuis, *Les origines de la question du Tonkin* (Paris, 1896), 95-96. It should be pointed out, however, that other statements in this section of the book are questionable. Liu Yung-fu himself confirmed his association with Wu. *Liu Yung-fu li-shih ts'ao* (Draft history of Liu Yung-fu), Lo Hsiang-lin, ed. (Taipei, 1957 reprint of 1936 edition), 57.

11. YNT I, *op. cit.*, 13-17, document 7. Liu Ch'ang-yu to the Grand Council.

12. The missions of 1869, 1871 and 1877 are listed in Fairbank and Teng, *op. cit.*, 169. For the mission of 1873, see Henri Cordier, *Histoire des Relations de la Chine avec les Puissances Occidentales, 1869-1900* (Paris, 1901-1902), II, 287. Sino-Vietnamese relations during the early 1880's are beyond the scope of the present article, but in 1882 there was a revealing episode in the relations between the two states. When the Vietnamese ambassadors went to Peking in that year they took with them the royal seal, the calendar, and the deed of investiture. The Vietnamese ruler, Tu Duc, instructed the ambassadors to return these items to China if China refused to aid Vietnam. Truong Buu Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900* (New Haven, 1967), 20.

13. The Ming intervention began on the pretext of restoring a member of the deposed dynasty to the throne, but rapidly transformed itself into an attempt to reincorporate Vietnam into China. See A. B. Woodside, "Early Ming Expansionism (1406-1427): China's Abortive Conquest of Vietnam," *Papers on China* 17 (December, 1963), 1-37.

14. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam, histoire et civilisation* (Paris, 1955), 158-163.

15. For example in 1788. *Ibid.*, 306-309.

16. *Ch'ing Shih*, *op. cit.*, 5754; Laai Yi-faai, "The Part Played by the Pirates of Kwangtung and Kwangsi Provinces in the Taiping Insurrection," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, 1949), 4.

17. YNT I, *op. cit.*, 91, 92, document 58. The Vietnamese king requested both the governor of Kwangsi and the governor-general of Liangk'wang to forward his appeal. He also mentioned hopefully that the very eminent officials Li (Hung-chang) and T'so (Tsung-t'ang) might not disdain coming so far to help settle problems in the border areas. *Ibid.*, 92.

18. Taboulet, *op. cit.*, 678-754, has a chapter of documents relating to the Dupuis-Garnier affair, including the texts of the treaties. Francis Garnier did not survive the affair, but Jean Dupuis, who did, later wrote a series of books and pamphlets attempting to justify it. The immediate background for a good many of them was Dupuis' long attempt to receive compensation from the French National Assembly for his expenses in acquiring gunboats, weapons, and men for the conquest of Tonkin.

19. *Ibid.*, 743-44.

20. *Ibid.*, 744.

21. *Ibid.*, 746.

22. YNT, I, *op. cit.*, 1.

23. *Ibid.*, 13, dcmt. 7.

24. *Ibid.*, 18, dcmt. 8.

25. *Ibid.*, 13, dcmt. 7.

26. There is a marked continuity of personnel from one crisis to another on the Vietnamese border. Chao Wo led field forces in Vietnam in 1874-75 against Huang Ch'ung-ying, in 1879 against Li Yang-ts'ai, and in the 1880's against the French. For an account of his conduct in the last instance, see Shu Shih-cheng, *Chung-Fa wai-chiao shih* (A history of Sino-French Relations) (Shanghai, 1928), 43. Li Yang-ts'ai, who led a revolt in 1879, was an officer with the Chinese forces in 1875. YNT I, *op. cit.*, 87, dcmt. 56. Hsu Yen-hsu, who led the first Kwangsi troops into Tonkin in 1883, was sent along with Chao Wo to investigate and report on the situation regarding Huang's rising in 1874, but was recalled to deal with another local rebellion. *Ibid.*, 13, dcmt. 7. Feng Tzu-ts'ai campaigned in Vietnam in 1868 and 1869, again in 1879, and against the French. Liu Yung-fu entered Tonkin as a bandit, was recognized as a leader of irregular forces and then as a Vietnamese official for cooperating in the suppression of other bandit groups, and fought against Garnier and Dupuis, Huang Ch'ung-ying, Li Yang-ts'ai and the French. There are other examples as well. One of the effects of this continuity was the formation of antipathies and friendships in the earlier campaigns which affected cooperation among Chinese personnel in the field in the 1880's; for example, Feng Tzu-ts'ai in 1879 already held a very low opinion of Chao's competence.

27. The most detailed account of the arrangements for the campaign and of their general context is *Ibid.*, 13-17.

28. *Ibid.*, I, dcmt. 1, memorial from Ts'en Yu-ying; *Ibid.*, 18, dcmt. 8, edict; 23, dcmt. 18, memorial from Liu Ch'ang-yu. This suspicion draws some additional support from Dupuis' accounts of the extreme cordiality of his relations with the Yellow Flags. Dupuis, *op. cit.*, 159.

29. YNT, I, *op. cit.*, 85. Also see Cordier, II, *op. cit.*, 288-290.

30. YNT, I, *op. cit.*, 16.  
 31. *Ibid.*, 85.  
 32. *Ibid.*  
 33. *Ibid.*, 115-116.  
 34. Cordier, II, *op. cit.*, 289.  
 35. Cho Huan Lai, *Les origines du conflit franco-chinois a propos du Tonkin jusqu'en 1883* (Paris, 1935), 77.  
 36. *Ibid.*, 80. Cho Huan Lai devotes pages 77-80 to a brief survey of French interpretations of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship.  
 37. Cordier, II, *op. cit.*, 290, has an excerpt from a communication from the Minister of Marine to the governor of Cochinchina suggesting the governor call the attention of the Vietnamese government to the injury done by the Chinese to the rights acquired by France by the treaty of 1874. Other interpretations were even stronger about the amount of damage sustained by the French claims. In a dispatch from Patenotre, charge at Peking, to Waddington in the Ministry of Foreign Relations, Patenotre reported on the rebellion of Li Yang-ts'ai and enclosed a translation from the Peking Gazette of 4 January, 1880 which announced that Li's head would be exposed in Tonkin. Patenotre then pointed out how French claims in Vietnam were being weakened: "L'affectation que la Cour de Peking met a rappeler les liens de vassalite que nous nous flattions d'avoir brises merite de fixer notre serieuse attention. En reclamant a deux reprises differents les bons offices du Tsong-li Yamen en faveur de Mgr. Rivel et de M. L'Abbe Deguette, nous avons ete malheureusement amenes a reconnaitre, d'une facon generale, les droits de suzerainete que la Chine peut encore conserver sur ses anciens vassaux, alors que nous avions tout interet a laisser cette question dans l'ombre . . ." Patenotre also referred to his dispatch of 2 December, 1879 where he had called attention to the seeming disinterest of the Cochinchinese authorities in questions concerning Tonkin: (this policy) "a en quelque sorte legitime les entreprises du Gouvernement chinois, et si le Cabinet de Peking etait mis aujourd'hui en demeure de s'expliquer sur ses pretentions a l'egard du Tonkin, il lui serait facile, en s'appuyant sur l'histoire de ces derniers annees, de justifier de la realite de son protectorat, alors que nous n'aurions a lui opposer que de steriles protocoles." Archives des Affaires Etrangeres, Chine, vol. 58 (1880), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris. In his valuable work on the formulation of Chinese policy in the 1880's cited above, Lloyd Eastman oversimplifies this question slightly on page 40: "The majority of Frenchmen in the 1870's and early 1880's were blithely unmindful of the importance that the Chinese attached to a strategically significant tributary, and were complacent that Chinese pretensions to sovereignty over Vietnam had no validity." This assumes that the "majority of Frenchmen" were interested in and were a significant factor in the formulation of foreign policy in the Third Republic, which in fact they were only by virtue of their reluctance to support long drawn-out wars overseas. They were no more indifferent to the local situation in East Asia than they were to the local situation elsewhere. The point is that whatever the majority of the citizenry might have believed, there is evidence that the policy makers of the Third Republic, at least in those sections most intimately concerned with French expansion in East Asia, were neither unmindful, indifferent, nor uninformed, as the above citations of governmental correspondence indicate.  
 38. It should be noted that in the case of Korea China also maintained her claims of a special relationship until they were settled by armed conflict.  
 39. Yunnan, which was in fact an extremely poor province, constantly pleaded poverty and asked to be relieved of the burden of sending troops into Vietnam. See for example the memorial by Ts'en Yu-ying quoted in YNT I, *op. cit.*, 28-29, dcmt. 21.



# Comments and Generalities on Sino-Vietnamese Relations

*Truong Buu Lam*

It is a commonplace to say that Vietnam entertained, throughout her history, such close relationships with China as to become a satellite in the Chinese cultural orbit. Nevertheless, Southeast Asian social scientists still claim, in opposition to their East Asian colleagues, that Vietnam belongs to Southeast Asia since she shares with the other countries of this area certain geographical, linguistic and cultural features. The latter similarities seem, however, largely buried in the prehistoric past. They play but minor roles in the course of Vietnamese history, in which one can only see China and things Chinese. In terms of history, Vietnam, no less than Korea, properly belongs to the realm of East Asian culture and civilization. From the Bronze Age down to the present, Vietnam has evolved within the Chinese world order, with Chinese cultural patterns and Chinese political institutions. One might argue, as has been done for Indianized countries, that Sinicization was only an attribute of the court and the educated elite—the “Great Tradition”—whereas the Vietnamese people—bearers of the “Little Tradition”—retained their distinctive values, whatever they may be. The argument certainly has its merits, but few scholars can successfully isolate this “distinctive” Vietnamese identity. Some see it in the organization of the village: Vietnamese villages differ from their Chinese counterparts in that they are not structured along principles of clan membership; others in the remains of folklore and folk literature. Still, these evidences of an earlier culture hardly cancel the glaring extent of the Sinicization of Vietnamese society, particularly of its governmental institutions.

This being said, I yet do not fully agree with Mr. Whitmore’s view of the situation, as expounded in his paper, in which he tries to show “that, in terms of her civil government structures, Vietnam did not blindly follow China’s lead, though she did, without a doubt, borrow the latter’s institutional reforms.” The paper likens Le-Thanh-Tong’s (1460-1497) governmental reforms to those which took place about a hundred years earlier in China under Ming T’ai-tsu (1368-1398). Both emperors were confronted with the problem of curbing the power of the oligarchy which surrounded the throne and of redistributing that power to the bureaucracy to achieve what the author calls, a “desired transition from powerful counsellors to the autonomy of the Throne.” A thorough comparison of the two series of reforms suggests the conclusion that the Vietnamese

solution to the problem was strikingly similar to its Chinese precedent. The author consequently categorically rejects the possibility of coincidence: "as the list of parallels lengthens, and we must assume that Thanh-tong had been schooled in the procedure by which T'ai-tsu had achieved his goal."

I must say that the arguments the author presents and the list of parallels he draws are convincing. Furthermore, nobody knows the period of Vietnamese history in question better than Mr. Whitmore. What I would like to discuss are not his facts as much as his interpretation of them. Mr. Whitmore, it seems to me, fails to consider the dynamic quality inherent in political structures. The Vietnamese state was launched on a model plainly borrowed from China. Once set in motion, that model, like a machine, evolved automatically along a determinate path. It was therefore to be expected that similar stresses should develop in both the Chinese and Vietnamese systems and that similar responses should be devised to counter them.

Le-Thanh-Tong's forerunner, Le-Loi (1428-1432), acceded to power after an armed struggle against the Chinese administration which had established itself on Vietnamese soil for more than twenty years. Once on the throne, Le-Loi could not neglect to reward his comrades-in-arms with high political positions at Court. This dispensing of favors resulted inevitably in a form of oligarchic government. Within that oligarchy, factions were soon constituted. It was one of these factions that brought Le-Thanh-Tong to the throne in 1460. Le-Thanh-Tong remained in power long enough and the internal situation of the country became secure enough that he could decide to make the moves necessary to consolidate the royal power. In this undertaking, the king, in good common sense, enlisted the help of the bureaucrats, whom he could count upon to rejoice over the downfall of political appointees. It is true that Ming T'ai-tsu had done much the same thing in China. But if Le-Thanh-Tong borrowed from him at all, it was only to dress up a solution which did not itself have to be borrowed. The process of change, it seems to me, functions according to specific dynamics which strictly limit its direction. In the case under observation, I do believe that Le-Thanh-Tong would not have acted differently had he been unaware of Ming T'ai-tsu's precedent.

Next, I would like to examine a question which is, I admit, incidental to Mr. Whitmore's paper but important, nevertheless, in its own right. Mr. Whitmore thinks that the shift from oligarchic to bureaucratic government, which had come to China under the Sung dynasty, arrived in Vietnam—which followed the example of China—no earlier than the second half of the 15th century. My reading of Vietnamese history suggests a different interpretation. I have the impression that bureaucratic gov-

ernment must have been in vogue in Vietnam before the time assigned to it by Mr. Whitmore. I think the general trend in the evolution toward bureaucratic government in Vietnam appears quite clearly in the first few hundred years after independence.

Following the Trung sisters' rebellion (40-43 A.D.), the Han authorities, through the Ma-Yuan expedition, established a systematic administration over what was then Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> Although they directly administered Vietnam, yet the Chinese had to rely heavily on local chieftains—that is those who had not taken refuge in the mountains and who agreed to collaborate—to implement their rule. The power and influence of these chieftains remained undisturbed enough that, whenever the central authority in China weakened, they were able to foment anti-Chinese uprisings. The numerous rebellions which dot the Chinese span of Vietnamese history attest to their strength. Starting with the end of the 9th century several of these chieftains, taking advantage of the disturbances in China following the downfall of the T'ang dynasty and during the period of the Five Dynasties and the Ten Kingdoms, openly revolted against the colonizer.<sup>2</sup> After the death in 944 of Ngo-Quyen, the Father of Independence, Vietnam was in fact divided among such chieftains until 968, when one of their number, Dinh-Bo-Linh, managed to impose his authority over the rest with well-known harsh measures.

Independence from China could not have been maintained in the Dinh dynasty without strong armed forces, and the internal order of the country could not have been realized without the presence of an elite. Dinh-Bo-Linh came to power with a well-trained army; as for the civil service, he appealed to the Buddhist community. Like their European counterparts in the Middle Ages, the Buddhist monks were men of learning, and their pagodas the very depositories of culture. They were furthermore found most willing to contribute to the affairs of state.<sup>3</sup>

History has it that Dinh-Bo-Linh set up civilian and military hierarchical structures.<sup>4</sup> The army, nevertheless, remained the predominant power in the country, so much so that, soon after Dinh-Bo-Linh's death, and while his sons were fighting to the death over the Throne, the army proclaimed its own Commander-in-Chief, Le-Hoan, king. That was the first military *coup d'etat* in Vietnamese history.

The Le dynasty, although very short-lived (980-1009), somewhat curbed the dominance of the army. The only organized group on which the royal power could lean in order to do this was the Buddhist community.<sup>5</sup> The Buddhists, as they had in the Dinh dynasty, continued to administer the government of the country.<sup>6</sup> As with the army, they in turn met with such success that in 1009, in collaboration with high officials of the court, Monk Van-Hanh executed a *coup d'etat* against the

ruling dynasty in favour of Ly-Cong-Uan, a man who had been entirely brought up in the shadows of the monks' robes.<sup>7</sup>

It was the Ly dynasty (1010-1225) that introduced, at the very least, the foundations of a bureaucratic government into Vietnam. At the same time, it reorganized the army. Ly-Thuong-Kiet, the Commander-in-Chief, led the army in successful campaigns against the Cham and the Sung. He remained his entire life a loyal servant of the ruling dynasty. Already tamed, the armed forces became a completely docile tool under the subsequent Tran dynasty. The Tran rulers neutralized their power by appointing members of the royal family to all high military positions: Tran-Hung-Dao, Tran-Quang-Khai, Tran-Khanh-Du, Tran-Nhat-Duat, Pham-Ngu-Lao (a son-in-law of the first).

The Buddhists, who had hitherto equipped the whole administration with their own men—the civil servants were chosen from candidates presented by the monks—also saw their power slowly eroded by the institution of the mandarin examinations established in 1075.<sup>9</sup> At first the new Confucian examinations were held alongside the “three religions” examinations, in which candidates were tested not only in Confucianism, but also in their knowledge of Buddhism and Taoism. Through the latter channel, the Buddhists continued to place some of their men in governmental positions until 1247, when the last of the “three religions” examinations seems to have been held.<sup>10</sup>

To recapitulate, the problems the Vietnamese authorities encountered came from two sources: the army and the Buddhist community. The army staged a coup as did the Buddhists. The Ly dynasty, which had come to power by the grace of the Buddhists, tried to break their dominance by opening up governmental positions to other than Buddhist candidates. By the time of the Tran dynasty, the bureaucratic machinery had become a tradition.

When the Tran (1225-1400) succeeded the Ly in 1225, they inherited a civil service pretty well staffed with scholars recruited through the examinations. The holders of the Six Ministries at Court exerted influence both in the shaping of policy and in the control of the central and regional administrations. In addition to the ministers, there were, of course, a score of other officials who also participated actively in the political life at Court.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, if, as Mr. Whitmore asserts in his paper, bureaucratic government appeared in China under the Sung (960-1126), we would expect it to surface in Vietnam before the 15th century. I shall try to show that I am not contradicting my earlier remarks here. I maintain that Le-Thanh-Tong, in his reforms, was simply seeking to balance off power between his “counsellors” and “bureaucrats.” It is very possible that Ming T'ai-tsu's example served his purposes. But it could not have

inspired his decision to reform, nor dictated its details. The same search for a balance of power had made the first Le dynasty curb the dominance of the army in favor of the Buddhist hierarchy. The following Ly and Tran dynasties then had to confront an all-too powerful Buddhist clergy; their only escape was in the development of a mandarinal establishment. That was presumably what they did, following up a path conveniently forged by the Sung. In short, while I believe that countries can imitate one another's general institutional patterns, I doubt that they can copy minor, isolated operations.

Mr. Woodside has written a stimulating paper composed of two sections. The first attempts an anthropological-like presentation of the religions of Vietnam. The author shows how Confucianism and Buddhism have merged into one faith, how what he calls the "kinship system values" of the Confucian elite were also part of the Vietnamese people's religious background. I understand, of course, that it was not the author's intention to draw a full picture of Vietnamese religions. It is nevertheless regrettable that Mr. Woodside failed to discuss the role of Taoism. As is well-known, and as Mr. Woodside himself notes, Taoism formed, with Buddhism and Confucianism, the "legs of a tripod." A study of the relationship among religions in Vietnam cannot exclude Taoism, because the latter is, in Vietnam, intimately bound up with, and sometimes indistinguishable from Buddhism. Taoism had a particularly strong hold on the Vietnamese people because some of its tenets lent themselves to magical interpretations which fitted nicely with Vietnamese cultural predispositions. It has been noticed that in Vietnam "the Taoist pantheon led by the Jade Emperor, Ngoc-hoang, doubtless had precedence over the Buddhist pantheon."<sup>12</sup>

The author raises an interesting point when he notes the absence, in Vietnam as opposed to China, of outstanding Buddhist thinkers from among the ranks of "eccentric" Confucian scholars. The reason may simply be that if Vietnam lacked a P'eng Shao-sheng, a Confucian doctor turned Buddhist devout, it also produced no Chu Hsi. What I mean is that Vietnam simply lacked outstanding thinkers, either Buddhist or Confucian. And if Confucian scholars did not happen to become spectacular Buddhist devouts, it was perhaps because such conversion was unnecessary. They could express Buddhist feelings in their works and yet remain Confucianists in good standing. The time of complete separation, or even hostility, between the two faiths attested to by the 15th century Vietnamese historian, Ngo-Si-Lien, seemed well over in the 19th century.<sup>13</sup> Nguyen-Du's *Chieu hon ca*, the work of a Confucian scholar, contains obvious references to Buddhist conceptions of life and the world. And the *Quan Am Thi Kinh* is most probably written by the purest of Confu-

cian scholars. The distinction between the two creeds hardly prevented anyone from keeping a foot in both. The lack of radical conversion from one faith to the other in Vietnam, it seems to me, resulted from the ill-defined demarcations between the various religious traditions.

The second section of Mr. Woodside's paper is, in my judgment, a more useful contribution. It examines why the Vietnamese authorities of the 19th century sought to control the Buddhist organization, how successful they were, and why two Buddhist positions developed concerning the relationship of the Buddhist hierarchy to the central government.

Of the four answers given by the author to the first question, I disagree somewhat with two, namely the Vietnamese government's concern at Buddhism's loss of "Sino-Vietnamese cultural characteristics" and at its "subversive possibilities" in that Buddhism could conceivably weaken the moral fiber of Confucian scholars.

I do not know to what extent Vietnamese Buddhism became "Indianized" as Vietnam extended her territory to the south. I find it improbable, however, that the Vietnamese central authorities should have worried over the possible de-Sinicization of the Buddhist faith. Such concern would imply that the Vietnamese Court had an intellectual interest in Buddhism as a religious doctrine over and above its interest in Buddhism as a social institution. Indeed, I doubt that the Vietnamese rulers cared either to promote or to safeguard Buddhism, Sino-Vietnamese or not. If they had, they would have opposed Buddhism to the ever-growing expansion of Christianity, which had become a real threat to Vietnamese society by the time of Minh-mang's reign (1820-1840). On the contrary, the edicts against the Christians proclaimed by Minh-mang and his successors emphasized only the traditional values of Confucianism, which they extol as the very basis of the formal structure of Vietnamese society. The edicts mention neither Buddhism nor Buddhist virtues.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, I feel that we cannot justifiably conclude that the Vietnamese court wanted to preserve uncontaminated the Chinese tradition of Buddhism. In any case, the evidence advanced by Mr. Woodside does not seem to support such a conclusion. The fact that Vietnamese Buddhist monks "draped clothing over two Cham-made stone idols" must surely, if anything, be interpreted as the Sinicization of Hinduism and not Hinduization or Indianization of Sino-Vietnamese Buddhism.

On the other hand, Minh-mang was alarmed, and justifiably so, over reports from the south that "wooden religious idols had driven Confucian-style tablets [. . .] out of the official Saigon city-temple." This aberration did not involve Buddhism at all, of course; but it constituted an attack on Confucianism as established by the administration in an official sanctuary, and as such, alarmed the government.

Buddhist thought certainly attracted many Vietnamese intellectuals and politicians. I have, however, seldom heard of “religious sermons” written by intellectuals and “transformed” into “social commentaries which did not flatter either the court or its political order.” The evidence cited at length by Mr. Woodside is the *Chieu hon ca*, “one of the great tragic masterpieces of Vietnamese literature.” I think that that is exactly what the *Chieu hon ca* is—a great literary masterpiece. Many attacks on the social and political order doubtless circulated among the Vietnamese people who, like others, have throughout their history found their governments wanting and said so.

The *Chieu hon ca*, its Buddhistic references notwithstanding, is not a Buddhist text, and I doubt that Buddhist monks still chant verses from it today. That mediums—who have no connections with Buddhism<sup>15</sup>—hum some of its lines, or that peasants recite them is no “proof of their religious tradition’s remarkable continuity,” but merely a tribute to the literary merits of the poem. Mediums, fortune-tellers, workers, peasants, in short, Vietnamese from all ranks also hum today, in the very same fashion, verses from another of Nguyen-Du’s works, the *Kim Van Kieu*. The *Chieu hon ca* was primarily a funeral oration—as its subtitle indicates: *Van te thap loai chung sinh* (Funeral oration to the ten kinds of beings)—and the fact that it contained elements of the Buddhist creed does not turn it automatically into a “religious sermon.” It was meant to be read during “te,” a memorial ceremony of un-Buddhistic inspiration.<sup>16</sup> Finally, if the authorities took no action against Nguyen Du, an official of the court, for composing a piece openly critical of the government, then I do not see why they would anxiously watch over the Buddhist community which, according to Mr. Woodside, was rather submissive to the establishment, at least in the 19th century.

One more little detail. Mr. Woodside sees in the “rigorous virilocal marital residence of Vietnamese society” a reason for minor rural disorders, for he interprets such residence to be inhibitive of the development of multiple loyalties. But “virilocal” residence does not necessarily mean that men will settle in their natal villages. The rule simply indicates that a new couple will reside with the man’s kin, wherever these may be. It is a well known fact, of course, that Vietnamese are not prone to leave their villages; but to my knowledge, only the eldest son is morally bound to stay in his father’s village so as to perpetuate the cult of the family’s ancestors and to cultivate that part of the family land called “the part of incense and fire.” As was noted earlier, clan structures did not develop in Vietnamese villages; all other sons were free to branch out. And in history, there were indeed some examples of large scale resettlements: Nguyen-Hoang in the 16th and Nguyen-Cong-Tru in the 19th century.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, there exists another residence practice which is known as "*gui re*" (to entrust the son-in-law). In it, the husband goes to live with his wife's family. The custom does, of course, constitute an exception, yet not too exceptional an exception.

The close relationship tying Vietnam to China, even after the former's independence, was conducted within the framework of the tributary relationship. The content of that relationship as manifested in the late 19th century, when important changes overtook both China and Vietnam, is studied by Mrs. Laffey in the third paper. The author describes several positive responses from China to calls from Vietnamese authorities between 1865 and 1880 to cope with internal disorders, particularly in border regions. She then concludes that (1) these Chinese interventions were well in line with traditional practices, although the French threat to Vietnam's independence might have given them an added stimulus, and (2) the tributary relationship meant more to China and Vietnam than what the French wanted it to be, that is "nominal" and "fictive."

I couldn't agree more with Mrs. Laffey's second conclusion. The tributary system, as has been said many times before,<sup>18</sup> functioned as treaties of alliance—though unequal—between the dynasties of China and those who ruled the neighboring countries. Contracting parties to this sort of treaty have always well understood their rights and duties, and these were very real, although never spelled out in so many articles or clauses. The tributary system alliance, indeed, resembled a gentlemen's agreement.

Mrs. Laffey's first conclusion seems to me less warranted. One should not forget that one of the purposes of the tributary system was to serve in defense of the Middle Kingdom. The tributary states that bordered China functioned as outposts for the defense of China proper, whether against barbarian raids, as in the west and northwest, or as guarantees for the central government in areas where its authority was weakest, as in the south and southwest. In the 19th century, the defense role of tributary states took on new dimensions as European powers and Japan made their influences felt, not only in most of the states tributary to China, but in Chinese territory itself. Quite clearly, China did not then worry over the defense of a tributary state, as tributary. I would rather subscribe to the interpretation that when foreign threats to a tributary state became threats to the security of China, China would intervene in behalf of the tributary. Between 1865 and 1880, France annexed all of Cochinchina and, although the Dupuis and Riviere adventures of 1873-4 ended in a withdrawal of French troops from northern Vietnam, the menace of a French occupation of that region certainly worried Chinese officials. They consequently went out of their way to maintain tranquillity in their



border regions lest the French exploit any disturbances there to intrude into Chinese territory. It is for this reason, then, that I believe the Chinese authorities responded promptly to the Vietnamese call. Chinese collaboration with Vietnamese forces to suppress frontier unrest was not undertaken in "defense of a [tributary] system which was already an anachronism." On the contrary, it should be seen as a practical attempt to circumscribe the ever-growing expansion of France.

Mrs. Laffey writes: "Had the threat from France not existed, the Chinese would have taken part in the campaigns against Huang Ch'ung-ying and Li Yang-t'sai anyway. Previous expeditions had been sent to Vietnam in the absence of external threats, and China also had an obvious interest in the tranquillity of the border areas." It is true enough, and I have noted above, that China wanted quiet borders. But the keeping of the peace had traditionally been Vietnam's role. Chinese troops were not involved in pacification operations. At the end of the 18th century and in the beginning of the 19th—to recall only the most recent events—pirates roamed along the southeastern coasts of China, venturing forth from hide-outs in Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> Chinese authorities satisfied themselves with mere admonitions and warnings to the Vietnamese rulers. Not one Chinese soldier crossed the border in pursuit of the law-breakers.

As for the previous Chinese expeditions sent to Vietnam mentioned by Mrs. Laffey, I know of only two instances where the Chinese were called in by Vietnamese rulers: in the 15th and 18th centuries, respectively. The first expedition, sent to Vietnam for the avowed purpose of establishing the Tran pretender to the Vietnamese throne, resulted in twenty years of Chinese administration. The second expedition's aim remains unclear to this day, because the Chinese were driven out of Vietnam before they could manifest their motives.\* These two cases are really too equivocal to allow us to set them up as precedents for Chinese involvement in Vietnam in the second half of the 19th century. In brief, I rather think that the Chinese, like any other people, acted for a practical end, not for an "anachronism."

I must confess that I have been harsh to the authors of these valuable papers, which I have been privileged to receive and read. I have gone out of my way to locate their weaknesses and although I appreciate their strengths, I have neglected to praise these in my comments. My position is that a commentator should help to consolidate a paper by pointing to its weaknesses, however minor these may be. The beauty of a thing will, in any case, stand on its own.

Sino-Vietnamese relations are, without doubt, a very rich topic to in-

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\* Compiler's note: Mr. Lam has discussed this expedition in his essay on pages 165-179 of Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order*.

investigate, because they amount to the sum total of Vietnamese history. There is no period in which China was not in some way enmeshed in Vietnamese events; there are no Vietnamese political, social or cultural institutions which do not bear, to a greater or lesser degree, a Chinese mark.

Two questions come to mind here. The first is why Vietnam remained so Sinicized even after gaining her political independence from China? The second is the reverse of the same question: how Vietnam, being so Sinicized, maintained her political independence from China?

The first question is perhaps simply answered by recalling China's millennial domination over Vietnam, from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D. When one considers the influence that France has exerted on the Vietnamese people—let alone on their elite—after less than eighty years of colonization, one begins to appreciate the tremendous impact of Chinese civilization on Vietnam. When France arrived in Vietnam, the Vietnamese people already had behind them approximately two thousand years of social organization at the state level, with all the cultural and political implications of such an organization. Before China first came to Vietnam, there was little to speak of in these respects. It is true that there were as many Frenchmen administering Indochina as there were Englishmen in India; the number of Frenchmen in Vietnam was nothing, however, compared to the Chinese who immigrated to Vietnam whenever there was unrest in their own land. After all, China is next door, and she ruled Vietnam as but another province of the Empire.

Under the French, it was fashionable for Vietnamese of certain circles to take out French citizenship, and to behave like Frenchmen. The same situation obtained under Chinese domination. Vietnamese who collaborated with Chinese rulers moved closer and closer to China, culturally and politically, and formed with them a "local aristocracy."

Under the circumstances, Chinese immigrants must have been easily assimilated to the indigenous population. These immigrants brought and spread about them all sorts of things Chinese: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and administrative know-how, for a majority of them were "political exiles" who had occupied government posts in China before coming to Vietnam. Unable to enter the high administrative positions in Vietnam reserved to metropolitan Chinese, they simply joined native ranks to swell the lower levels of government. The Vietnamese people apparently accepted and assimilated them with ease as evidenced in the circumstances surrounding the founding of the first Ly dynasty.

In 541 A.D. Chinese administrators were expelled from Vietnam. The rebellion was led by Ly-Bi or Ly-Bon. According to a Vietnamese historian: "Ly-Bi's ancestors were Chinese who had immigrated to the

southern country [Vietnam] toward the end of the Han dynasty. Seven generations later [meaning that of Ly-Bi], they have become completely natives of the southern country.”<sup>20</sup> This quotation demonstrates that, over the generations, immigrants and natives merged into a single society. Ly-Bi, a descendant of immigrants, staged a revolt against the Chinese authorities in the name of the native population, and then had himself proclaimed king, inaugurating what, to this day, Vietnamese historians call the First Ly dynasty. The result of all this is that when Vietnam acquired her political independence, the only change brought about in her government consisted in the replacement of officials, not structures: Vietnamese now sat where Chinese had ruled.

The governmental structures could not have been modified, because the men in power knew of no alternatives to what had been practiced for centuries and found satisfactory. The Buddhists perhaps might have made things a little more revolutionary, for they were close to the genuinely Vietnamese segment of the population, that is, the non-elites. But how could they? They were as Sinicized as the officials, for Vietnamese Buddhism was but an outgrowth of Chinese Buddhism.

In any event, independence from China never even meant a political break with her. On the contrary, as soon as Vietnam emerged from the years of civil war into which she was plunged after independence, the Vietnamese ruler sent, in 972, an embassy to the Sung to ask for investiture. Interestingly enough, the Sung emperor appointed him to the office of *chieh-tu shih: tiet do su*, an office held by the Chinese envoy in Vietnam before independence. The Vietnamese ruler's title was *chun wang*, or prince of an administrative unit corresponding roughly to a province or a prefecture. The Chinese authorities thus continued to regard Vietnam as an administrative subdivision of their Empire. For them too, the change was principally one of personnel. The Vietnamese ruler, however, was no longer appointed by the Chinese court; he was instead only recognized and invested in his function and title by China. It is of some note that the title of *kuo-wang*, prince or king of an independent country, was attributed by the Chinese emperor to a Vietnamese ruler only in 1146.<sup>21</sup>

At home, Vietnamese rulers still relied heavily, at times, on Chinese advisers, even after independence. King Le-Dai-Hanh, for example, had a trusted Chinese counsellor.<sup>22</sup>

When the mandarin examinations were introduced in the 11th century, the pattern had crystallized: Vietnam would tread the Chinese path. She had really little choice, for her exposure to other influences was limited on two counts. First, imbued with the Chinese sense of superiority over barbarians—and the Vietnamese considered themselves Han people as late as the 19th century—Vietnam saw no attraction whatsoever

in other peoples. In her contact with these, Vietnam always stressed the need for them to come to the Vietnamese court to be civilized, to "be transformed," exactly as the Chinese demanded of her tributaries, including Vietnam. Then too, the conquest of Champa by Vietnam was too piecemeal an achievement for the well known phenomenon of conquerors learning from conquered to take effect. Furthermore, when, after the 16th century, Vietnam finally found herself squarely in Cham territory and in close contact with the Khmers, these were already in their decline; their one-time glorious and brilliant civilizations had by then little to offer to an already well-assimilated Chinese pattern.

The second question assumes that cultural similarities between two countries may somehow undermine their political separateness. The assumption is clearly debatable and I shall not go into it in detail here. Since Vietnamese political institutions remained essentially Chinese, the temptation was great for China to recapture what she had lost. She could do this easily and slip back into a familiar administrative structure; the highly Sinicized Vietnamese elite, for their part, would not have found the jolt unsettling. And indeed history shows that China willingly crossed her southern border on several occasions and that the rulers of Vietnam banished the interests of the Vietnamese nation just as frequently, when these conflicted with their own dynasty's.

Another force in the country, however, seems to have opposed Chinese interventions. Thanks to it, largely, Vietnam retained her independence. The Vietnamese people, for reasons which need to be investigated, always kept at bay their northern neighbors. Needless to say, the Vietnamese could never have won any war over their neighbors had the latter chosen to deploy their full forces; but they had the better of both the Chinese and the Mongols in several battles.

Fortunately for all, China always understood in time that whatever she coveted in Vietnam, it did not merit the price the Vietnamese people would exact for it. Then too, Vietnam was always helpful in matters of disengagement. The Vietnamese people could not but realistically appreciate their position vis-a-vis China. They clearly understood China's awesome might. Realism dictated that they downgrade their victories and, simultaneously, whitewash Chinese retreats. Thus it was customary that, after a victory or during a protracted stalemate, the Vietnamese authorities send an embassy to the Chinese court to ask for peace (if the war had been undertaken by a legitimate ruler), or for investiture (if the war had been the work of a "rebel"). Missives from the Vietnamese authorities, at such times, in 1076, in 1288, in 1428 and in 1789, were always scrupulously "respectful and obedient," at least in the Chinese court's mind.<sup>23</sup>

In times of peace too, Vietnam expressed her "respect and obedience" to the Emperor of China by sending him a tribute. The latter was normally sent every one to three years, the interval varying with the state of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

In short, Vietnam held on to her political independence from China, first because she demonstrated, by armed means, that she meant to do so. Secondly, she accepted the acknowledgment of China's superiority through the device of the tributary system which did not, in any way, impinge upon her own internal sovereignty.

## Notes and Bibliography

1. H. Maspero, 18-19.
2. Le-Tac, 25 (Vietnamese translation), 17 (Chinese original),
3. Hoang-Xuan-Han, 420.
4. Le-Thanh-Khoi, 139.
5. L. Cadriere, 3.
6. Ngo-Thoi-Sy, 94-105.
7. Legend has it that Ly-Cong-Uan's mother, during a pilgrimage to a pagoda, dreamt that she had relations with a spirit. She gave birth to a son and when he reached the age of three, she entrusted him to the guardianship of a monk named Ly-Khanh-Van. See Tran-Trong-Kim, 96-97, and Ngo-Thoi-Sy, 106.
8. Phan-Huy-Chu, *Nhan vat chi*, 249-253.
9. Phan-Huy-Chu, *Khoa muc chi*, 6.
10. *Ibid.*, 7.
11. Phan-Huy-Chu, *Quan chuc chi*, 8.
12. Jean Herbert, 70.
13. "There is only one *tao*. Besides the *tao* of cultivating oneself, managing the household, administering the country and maintaining peace among mankind, there is nothing else that could be called *tao*. Buddhism and Taoism have different teachings, but if there was anything good, that could only be in Confucianism." Phan-Huy-Chu, *Khoa muc chi*, 7. This passage is attributed to Ngo-Si-Lien.
14. See Tran-Minh-Tiet, J. R. Shortland and M. Gaultier, *passim*.
15. See Maurice Durand.
16. L. Cadriere, 12-13.
17. See Le-Thuoc and P. Gourou, 171-223 and 269, note 2.
18. See John K. Fairbank and Ssu-yu Teng; and John K. Fairbank, ed.
19. John K. Fairbank, *et al.*, 119.
20. Ngo-thoi-Sy, 58.
21. Le-Tac, 25-26 (Vietnamese translation); 17 (Chinese original), and Tran-Tong-Kim, 89.
22. Ngo-Thoi-Sy, 97: "Although a Chinese, who was knowledgeable of the Classics, he [Counselor Hong-Du] accompanied the king in his campaigns as military adviser, giving him tactical counsels; he managed the state's affairs; the king used him and entrusted him with great confidence."
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